Hannah Tait Neufeld

Assistant professor at University of Guelph

Faculty of Family Relations and Applied Human Nutrition

Professor Neufeld is an empowering women and role model for many students. I had the wonderful opportunity of speaking to Professor Neufeld and asking her about all that she has done and gone through to become the person she is today.

**What does a typical day in your position look like?**

It has been two years since I began my position at the University as a professor. Being a professor is broken into three main areas: research, teaching, and service. I teach about four courses a year, some which are undergraduate courses and others being graduate courses. This semester I teach a third year nutrition- food security course as well as a graduate qualitative research methods course. Most of the research that I conduct is supported by my graduate students and sometimes, with the help of research assistants.

**How did you get to where you are today?**

I completed my undergraduate studies in the applied nutrition program at Guelph. At the time there was a lot of pressure to follow the norm and complete an internship in order to become a dietitian. Being more interested in public health and being involved with international studies I deviated from the norm. After my four years at Guelph I moved onto completing my Masters and Ph.D. at the University of Manitoba under the faculty of Community Health and Epidemiology. At that time a main interest of mine was researching Indigenous women’s health. After completing my PhD, I spent a few years in Geneva working with the World Health Organization in the Department of Nutrition for Health and Development. As an employee of the UN my job position was assisting with the development of an electronic library of nutrition interventions, and assisting with global guideline development.

**Did you have to overcome any challenges or obstacles?**

As a woman I find that it is often difficult to carve a path for yourself. It was difficult to make the decision whether to have children before of after schooling. I believe that it is important to live a life filled with enriching experiences. It is also important to challenge yourself but also take time to care for yourself. Moderation is key.

**What advice would you give to women who are dealing with such barriers?**

I would caution women not to put things off and to stay away from the idea that there is a perfect time for things, because there never is. There are always going to be stressors in life, but if you live cautiously at all moments, you lose the opportunity to learn new things from each experience.

**What and who inspired you to pursue this position?**

At a young age I was interested in international development and extracurriculars that would help make the world a better place. My mother was also a role model and taught me to work hard and pursue my goals. Another role model of mine was Dr. Jean Steckle who shared a mutual interest about Indigenous health and nutrition. She passed away several years ago now, but her family farm has become a non-profit organization where I have worked and am currently a member of the Board of Directors.

**What makes you feel empowered and joyful?**

As a professor of nutrition and health and an avid vegetarian I enjoy giving back to the earth. I do this by getting my hands dirty and gardening when I get the chance. I appreciate the art form of music and as a young child played the piano, tuba, clarinet, and guitar. At the moment I really enjoy listening to electric pow wow music.

**What advice would you give young girls in today’s society?**

Compared to when I was growing up, todays youth are constantly exposed to social pressures, and everyone seems to be focused on success and reaching academic greatness. I believe that we should encourage one another to get out and escape from the pressures of social media and technology to find our true form.