

MECHANICAL

Carpentry Instructor

My background

Michele B.

Washington, MA

American cities were growing rapidly when I was young. My home was one of the first built in a new suburb of Indianapolis, IN. Watching other people's houses being built and playing in them made a big impression on me. I knew that I wanted to work with my hands, and my father helped me learn the correct way to do things. My parents were always encouraging me to succeed.

In high school, I did well in history, geography, and phys ed, and I also liked biology and zoology. Each semester in the after-school club, some kids rebuilt a lawnmower, which was a lot of fun. I found that taking things apart and putting them back together gave me a feeling of accomplishment.

After high school I didn't feel ready to go to college; instead I went on to the "University of Life." I worked at a number of different jobs and I traveled to various places. I was one of the first women letter carriers. I earned a good wage and got a lot of exercise.

In 1980 my husband Will, who was a builder, and I spent a season on a work exchange program at the Heartwood School in western MA, where students learn homebuilding and carpentry techniques. Will worked as an instructor there, and I apprenticed under him. I took all the carpentry classes the school offered. In 1985 we took over ownership of the school after the founders went off to pursue other things. I wear a number of different hats at the school—instructor, office manager, and lunch cook.

Will and I enjoy working together at the school and at home. In 1987 we built our 2,400 sq. ft. contemporary home. As part of their homebuilding course that summer, students helped us do the framing, but we finished the house ourselves. Our house has a partial wraparound porch and a greenhouse. I love working in my flower gardens and raising vegetables for canning and freezing. I also spin yarn and knit or weave the beautiful soft hair from our white, brown, peach, and black Angora rabbits.

