

Many Paths to Gemmology. What would yours look like?

My path into Gemmology started around 1991, as it was going to be a change of direction for my husband and myself as he was dealing in antique furniture and I had decided to try my hand at the jewellery side and wanted to have as much knowledge and be as professional in the new business as possible, plus I have always had a passion for the study of stones from childhood.

I had heard of the Gemmological Association from a friend who had studied first year for two years though did not proceed into second year. With this information I thought it was going to be a bit daunting, I had decided to at least try.

I was a mature age student and luckily so was most of my class mates at that time. Out of the group of twelve there was only myself and one other who were not already in the jewellery trade.

Although having a science base from high school, I had not been in the education system for around 20 years as I had travelled quite extensively and then a young family to take care of.

I must admit it was quite overwhelming in the first year, though I really did enjoy the challenge. My fellow students were very helpful and our lecturers/demonstrators very patient, the practical portion was far more enjoyable for me than the theory as I had to learn how to study again.

After passing first year, I really started to enjoy the second year. The foundations being taught the previous year all started to make sense. What I can remember the mid-year mock exams went reasonably well and was expecting to pass. Much to my dismay, with nerves getting the better of me I didn't achieve a high enough mark in the theory to attain my diploma. So after talking with my lecturers I decided to go back and try again and boy what a great decision that was. I learnt 10 times more in the following year that projected me to receiving a distinction in my final exam.

Whilst in that final leg at Gemmology I was offered a job in a valuation laboratory which I jumped at as the antique business did not eventuate due to unforeseen circumstances.

I spent five years really learning about Gemmology in my new career, as I was basically prepping jewellery for valuing, it became a very grounding experience. In 1997 I became a Registered Valuer and in 1999 achieved my Dip.D.T with a credit. With all these awards under my belt I almost became freelance with many opportunities in the jewellery trade to work in different situations.

In 1994 to 1995 and then again in 2002 I was a council member of the GAA WA. 1997 & 1998 I was fortunate enough to be an assisting 2nd year practical demonstrator which was invaluable to reconnect with the passion of Gemmology. 2002 & 2003 assisted in the Diamond grading course. In 2003 I became assistant demonstrator for 1st year students. 2011 came back again as a 2nd year assisting practical demonstrator and since 2012 I am now demonstrating in 2nd year practical gemmology.

From 2006 to December 2012 I started a new jewellery business with a partner and with the background of Gemmology and valuing, became reasonably proficient with helping clients in all aspects of jewellery, making them feel confident in my ability to understand and guide them to their

ultimate purchase. I ran events at our shop to help educate our clients (plus drinking lots of bubbly), on diamonds, Tanzanite's, pearls, we also featured local jewellery artists etc.

Whilst I owned the shop I also employed a young girl starting out from school that wanted a career in the jewellery trade and was lucky to help shape her into a very confident young woman who is now working at one of the top jewellery stores in Perth as a designer.

I have been very privileged in my career when I became a Gemmologist, even at the mature stages. It completely changed my life, from working in a factory to owning my own business.

I am even more fortunate to now have a home based business which allows me to be more pro-active at the GAA WA and being able to be with likeminded people with the passion for not only gemstones also the ongoing privilege to learn much more on a regular basis.

Helen Brown

FGAA DipDT

Registered Valuer WA0059