

My Story: Realizing a Childhood Dream

Children all over the world are often asked the question, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” As a child, I too, was not spared from this question. My answers tended to vary each year. Towards the end of my upper primary education, they narrowed down to only three career options- teacher, doctor or singer. One may wonder how I ended up in engineering, more so, electrical engineering.

By the time I had to choose a major for my first degree, I tried to weigh all my options. I enjoyed mathematics and physics subjects in class and I was considering majoring in electrical engineering. Electricity amazes me because it is something one cannot see, but yet it is so essential to human kind in our everyday lives. The other option was accounting because I thought that with accounting degree I could find a job anytime, anywhere.

My defining moment arrived during a conversation I had with my father. One day, while talking about my future, my father encouraged me to go into accounting. He said that an accountant’s work would be physically less demanding, it would usually be in an office environment which will be more comfortable for a woman. According to him, as an electrical engineer, I may be required to go out into the ‘field’ frequently for commissioning, inspection and maintenance of the power stations, transmission towers or substations which would be more suitable for a man. His opinions made me think and I treated them as challenges as I didn’t want to believe that engineering would only be suitable for men. I decided to study electrical engineering.

The career path I have embarked on thus far is 10% chance and 90% plan. Upon completing the Bachelor’s in Electrical Engineering at the University of Sheffield, I worked for a national electrical corporation in Malaysia and was later assigned to the University of Tenaga Nasional to teach. That was where I have found that research and teaching in engineering are both challenging and fulfilling and I am determined to chart my career along this path. In order to succeed in the academia I pursued a Master’s in Electrical Engineering at the University of Tenaga Nasional. I then applied for the Japanese Government Scholarship (Monbukagakusho) to pursue my PhD in Power Electronics at Tokyo Institute of Technology.

It is important to have dreams from young age even though they will change as time goes by. When I was young I wanted to be a teacher. Today, I am working towards teaching in engineering. As a woman in engineering, I do realize that we are under represented. Being a minority helps me to stand out but I am not free from pressure to perform excellently. Therefore, constant support from peers and self motivation are needed. In addition, being a graduate member of a professional body such as the IEEE opens up many paths for networking and exchanges with people of the same interest. There are many ways to achieve ones career. In any path one chooses, I always believe that one must do one’s best.