

Faces

In mining

It's not all drilling and mucking,

but it's still a blast

JULIE DOMVILE



Photo courtesy: BHP Diamonds Mines Inc./Jan Hermans

Camilla Zoe-Chocolate loves her job at Diavik.

Four young workers at Diavik tell how they got there

Camilla Zoe-Chocolate was born and raised in Rae-Edzo, a Dogrib community 100 kilometres north Yellowknife, but spent most of the first twelve years of her life out on the land with her family. When Zoe-Chocolate was 12, her father insisted she stay with her sisters during the school term in Rae-Edzo to get a formal education. He often told his children that the key to happiness was independence, and further, the key to independence was education. Zoe-Chocolate had developed a deep respect and love for the land, which she wanted to incorporate into a career. After graduating from high school, she was hired by BHP Diamonds Inc. and worked for the next four summers as an Environmental/Wildlife Technician

Assistant. “After my first summer job, I was hooked on the tundra,” she says.

She completed the first year of the Natural Resource Technology diploma program at Aurora College in Fort Smith, took time off to have her second child and then returned to complete the course. “I have a very large family and their support made it possible for me to take the course and raise my children. It wasn't hard to find the motivation to return for the final year, because I knew you couldn't get anywhere without a post-secondary education.”

Besides her diploma and her experience working for BHP, Zoe-Chocolate's resume sparkles with many other qualifications. She was offered a full-time position with Diavik

within two weeks of completing her diploma. "I was offered the job at Diavik because I had so much traditional knowledge from when I was a little girl, my experience on the barren lands from my years with BHP and my education," Zoe-Chocolate says. But she's also a Northerner, an aboriginal, a woman and she's bilingual, speaking Dogrib and English. And to top it off, she really enjoys her job. "There is so much going on," she says. "Everyday I learn something new and meet new people. I just love it." So much so, Zoe Chocolate says, that she plans to return to school eventually to get her undergraduate degree in Environmental Studies, which she hopes will lead her to a master's degree studying tundra plants.



Cheryl Wray



Shayne Paul

"... you just have to find your own groove and stick to it."

For **Cheryl Wray**, a series of summer jobs with the territorial government's Department of Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development stimulated her desire to earn a degree and build a career she loves. She was raised in Baker Lake, Nunavut, but moved to Yellowknife when she was fifteen. She was very homesick after she moved from her small barrenlands town to the substantially larger centre of Yellowknife. "It was difficult to leave my extended family and move to the city, going from the treeless to the trees," Wray remembers. She graduated from high school and earned a diploma from the University of Lethbridge in general sciences. The diploma prepared her for the four-year Bachelor of Science program at the University of Saskatchewan where she majored in wildlife biology. "It was an extremely tough course because of the workload," Wray remembers. "But I was never tempted to quit. I knew that if I had a degree I would not be limited in my options."

Her perseverance paid off, and she is now one of three Environmental Coordinators at Diavik Diamond Mines, coordinating the wildlife-monitoring program. As a Northerner,

she is fully aware that the North is being pulled in two competing and sometimes mutually exclusive directions. There is a real need she says, for economic development in the communities, but there is also a need for conservation of wildlife and habitat. This awareness makes her job that much more interesting. "In my job I get to do a bit of everything," Wray says. "I am learning something new everyday. In the North, if you have any formal training, the world is open to you."

Yellowknifer **Shayne Paul** is only 28 but he has already completed two intensive education programs, earning a diploma and an undergraduate degree in the process. Now a field engineer working for Lac de Gras Excavation Ltd. at the Diavik Diamond Mines site, Paul graduated from the University of Calgary with his degree in civil engineering in April 1999. Immediately upon his return to Yellowknife, he was hired by the engineering firm Peter Kiewit Sons' Inc., a joint venture partner with Nuna Logistics in Lac de Gras Excavation, to work on earthwork construction such as roads, quarries, the airstrip and dykes at Diavik. Paul's busy three weeks on-site and one week off-site work rotation is filled providing technical support to the construction superintendents, keeping track of production quantities, and assisting with supervision of the overall construction project.

But civil engineering is Paul's second career. Fresh out of high school, he went to the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology in Calgary to get an aircraft maintenance engineering diploma, which he finished in 1992. He found a job at Air Tindi, a Yellowknife-based regional charter and scheduled air company, and eventually got his M2/N4 aircraft maintenance license in 1996. He liked the work, but in the back of his mind he knew he had something else he wanted to do. He decided to return to school to get his degree in civil engineering. "Being from the North I had the opportunity to get the funds to carry on in school," Paul says of the government-funding plan available to Northern aboriginal post-secondary students. "This is where I want to be. (Civil engineering) ... offers me a lot of variety and the possibilities of all die different jobs available appealed to me."

When the work with Lac de Gras Excavation ends with the completion of the Diavik project, Paul hopes to continue with Peter Kiewit to work on other company projects throughout North America. Because he grew up in Yellowknife, Paul says he will always keep a home in the city, even if he has to travel for work.

Paul advises anyone looking at a career in Northern mining to jump in with both work-boots and go to school. "Go for it," says Paul. "It's a bright outlook for mining in the North. Anyone coming out of the North has got great opportunities, especially with the diamond mines."



April Desjarlais

April Desjarlais has overcome some tough times in her young life. Born in a very small town in northern Saskatchewan, she moved to Yellowknife at the age of eight when her mother passed away. She'd had no formal schooling and could neither read nor write. Today, Desjarlais is an Environmental Technician with Diavik Diamond Mines and has a Bachelor of Science degree in biology from the University of Saskatchewan. "When I graduated from high school I was given the opportunity to take a field course at Daring Lake," she recalls. "I learned about arctic ecology and just fell in love with it. Then I knew that I wanted to get my degree in the biology field."

Desjarlais remembers how tough it was to be away from home when she first attended university. "I was alone in a university that was bigger than my home town," she says "I wanted to quit every day. I talk to a lot of kids now and let them know that it is tough, but you just have to find your groove and stick to it." Desjarlais says

her love for the tundra was what kept her at school. "The only way I was ever going to be able to do something that I loved was through university so I stayed," she says. "It got easier. Too many people quit before they give it a chance."

Desjarlais now has the job of her dreams. She's gaining experience in many different areas, doing work she loves at the ground level of an exciting, evolving industry. And she's planning to go back to school at some time in the future to get a master's in environmental studies. She advises young people who haven't yet made a career decision to take some time to consider what it is they wish to do. "Don't go to university until you know what you want to do" she cautions. "Take the time to look around to find out what is best for you and that will give you the motivation to get there and to get through."

Taken from pages 15-17 of **Mining North 2000**. *The official Publication of the NWT Chamber of Mines.* www.miningnorth.com