

# Past Student Spotlight

## Diane Gaston Year 11 (1991)



What a journey to date! My name is Diane Skene (nee Gaston) and I am proof that if you believe, anything is possible in life with hard work and heart.

I lived and went to school in St George for all my Primary and Secondary schooling. At the end of Year 11 the decision was made that I go out and get a job as university was not an option as we all know money doesn't grow on trees.

I always dreamt of going to university and becoming a Lawyer. Throughout my life I had always doubted myself as my school marks were average and getting a job was probably my best option. I kept telling myself to move on and find a new dream. So, that is what I did.

I went to St George State High School from 1988 to 1991. I had an accident the year before starting High School so I spent some of my schooling life studying externally from a hospital bed from Year 7 and then Year 8 to Year 10 with St George State High School. I finished Year 11 and within a week started working at Dependable Motors with Doug and Lionel Jones as an office junior with Tammy Jones. I have had a few jobs from there but found myself in Dalby studying a traineeship in Office Administration with South West Power (now Ergon Energy). I then moved on and was very fortunate to start a position as an Office Clerk with an Accountant and became a Justice of the Peace (Qualified) which I have been now for over 20 years.

When my youngest child was born I enrolled with TAFE to study a Diploma of Justice and after one year of study I wanted more in life so I enrolled at QUT Brisbane as a mature age student to study a Bachelor of Laws. I soon learnt after two years of study that I had a passion for Mediation and Family Dispute Resolution. I wanted to help others come to a peaceful resolution and assist families resolve their issues. Whilst I was studying my Bachelor's degree I decided to also study and become a Mediator and Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner with less sleep and a desire to succeed, I did it! I worked for the Dispute Resolution Branch out of Brisbane and the Land Court of Brisbane resolving disputes in many areas from family, neighbourhood, debt and land to name a few.

When I graduated from QUT with a Bachelor of Laws I had already received my qualifications in Mediation (NMAS) and Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner (FDRP).

During my studies and building my career was really around setting myself up for Landholder Law which is dear to my heart. My husband and I are Primary Producers (farmer) on the Darling Downs right in the centre of prime agricultural land that will be impacted from coal seam gas. I wanted to be able to give back with my legal knowledge and negotiation skills to help my fellow farmers make the best decisions for them. Whether that was telling the Companies my clients were not willing to negotiate or negotiating an agreement that my clients could live with and also representing them in mediation.

I was able to secure a position with Shine Lawyers in Dalby as a Junior Solicitor in Landholder Law and worked my way up to Practice Leader – Landholder Law. I have had the pleasure of working with more knowledgeable co-workers and was mentored by the amazing Peter Shannon.

There comes a time when everyone has to be content with their decisions. I was working huge hours at the firm, running the local hotel which we purchased in 2022 and maintaining our farming enterprise whilst having three children at boarding school. I can hear you all say “what were you thinking?”.

In April 2023 I decided to do what all school leavers seem to do and that is take a gap year from Law to pursue my own personal interests. So far everything is amazing and I even attend school functions which my children are very thankful for.

Many people ask if I will go back to Law and at this stage I'm content with what I'm doing but I will always have my qualifications and can go back anytime. My door will always be open for new adventures and challenges. Only time will tell!

I have a couple of sayings “if you learn something new everyday (regardless of how small) then you are a step closer to your dream” and “different is what makes the world go around (never judge another)”.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to tell my story. I wish you all well in your studies, finding your dream and pursuing it with heart.

Diane Skene.