

## B.C. woman takes winding path To Red Seal crane operator ticket

After trying carpentry, plumbing and ironwork,  
Megan Edwards turned to heavy lifting

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SPECIAL TO CRANE & HOIST CANADA

**M**egan Edwards has never been afraid to get her hands a little dirty.

"As a matter of fact, if my hands are dirty, I'd say it's been a pretty good day," says the 28-year-old from Prince George, B.C.

Before embarking on a career as a crane operator in 2012, Edwards did carpentry work, had a stint as plumber, and did ironwork. So she is definitely no stranger to the trades world.

"There's a lot of trades in my background," says Edwards, who was born in Pembroke, Ont., and moved to Prince George when she was about three years old. "I was raised on a farm and I've never been good at just sitting still doing nothing."

Edwards enjoyed the joinery field, building cabinets and tables, but she soon realized it was a difficult career path. After switching to plumbing for a few years, she ended up doing ironwork at her family's business. Her grandfather had founded the business and passed it along to Edwards's

mother after he had suffered a stroke.

"We were building beehive burners," she says. "A lot of the work in the field there we needed a crane to put everything together."

After the provincial government put in place legislation to phase-out beehive burners because of the pollution they cause, the ironwork business slowed down. Edwards had to start on a new career path. Fortunately, her mother's shop happened to be right next to a Prince George crane shop.

"The boss says, 'Well, do you want to be a rigger up at Mt. Milligan for a bit?' So I did that for a while. Then a year later he offered to sponsor me for an apprenticeship to actually operate cranes. I couldn't say no to that. So now here I am," she laughs.

Edwards sat in the seat of a crane for the first time in May 2012. She has not looked back. By October, she had joined the International Union of Operating Engineers. She completed her B.C. Certificate of Qualification, and after finishing her last year of schooling of 2014, she earned her Red Seal ticket. In July of

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2014 she began a job with Sterling Cranes, where she gained some training in the taxi end of crane operations.

"I obviously can't speak for everyone, but I've never felt uncomfortable being basically in a male-dominated industry," Edwards says.

She knows she's a hard worker and can do anything her male co-workers can do — despite her five-foot-three stature. While she has never let gender stereotypes stop her from achieving success, she admits that "there were some rough patches" during her early years in carpentry when she encountered prejudice.

"I had a couple of months where I wasn't working," she says. "I would hand out resumes and had a couple companies just say, 'No, we don't hire girls.' I mean, it is tough at first, but I think for the most part we're getting out there more and being more accepted."

Accepted or not, Edwards always gets a laugh at seeing the faces of the men when she steps onto the site the first day of a job.

"You pull up on site with your big crane and all the guys are always looking at you like, 'Oh! That's a girl driving that thing.' It's just being able to surprise everyone, keep them on their toes ... prove that we can do what they can do," Edwards laughs as she recalls a few times when despite being half the size of her co-workers she has whipped twice as much dunnage over her shoulder.

While getting Red Seal-certified in a male-dominated profession is an achievement in its own, Edwards has another recent milestone to celebrate.

She gave birth to her first child, a baby boy, on Jan. 6, 2015. Russell Wayne weighed seven pounds, 10 ounces. Edwards and her boyfriend, Bob, named him after his father and her grandfather.

Edwards is both excited and nervous about bringing new life into this world, but the "squirmy little acrobat" has made for an uncomfortable and tiring past couple of months. It hasn't slowed her down, though, as she keeps active with walking and cross-country skiing as much as her compressed lungs will allow.

She brings the same energetic attitude to her work as a crane operator. Her advice to other women considering entering the trade is to have no fear: "I mean, if you have confidence in yourself, you know what you can do," she says. "Just get out there and do it and don't take crap from anybody else."

*The B.C. Association for Crane Safety submitted this article. It has been condensed and edited.*

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