

Cai Brown

by Stu Rhodes

Some kids don't know what they want to be when they grow up because, quite frankly, they truly have no idea. Not so with Cai Brown. His dilemma about what to be when he grows up spawns from having so many interests, so many talents, and so many offers. Just ask one of his many employers, or ask one of his different trade training program instructors.

Cai is currently in his grade 12 year as a Stelly's Secondary student and when he graduates at the end of this school year he will have amassed almost double the credits normally required to graduate! Even though Cai hails from Stelly's, he has spent the past 12 months engaged in technical training at Camosun College or learning on the job. Last February Cai started the Welding Foundation program at Camosun, but not before he completed all his grade 11 and 12 academic requirements for graduation! He also worked part time for Slegg Lumber. He fast tracked his way through the self-paced welding program in four and a half months instead of the usual seven, and then landed himself two very different welding jobs with local employers who kept him busy through the summer.

Telell Waldhaus of Freeze Right Marine is thrilled to have Cai on his staff. Welding is a very specialized skill and Cai, "... has the touch. It isn't very often you see a young welder who can lay down consistent welds the way Cai does." Freeze Right Marine does all sorts of metal fabricating and caters to the marine sector. Cai loves the work, especially the challenges given to him. "One day a refrigeration truck came in for repairs and Telell just gave me a few details and let me go for it. I had to fabricate and install new hinges for the back doors, patch a bunch of holes in the side panels and shelving units, design and install running light mounting brackets, wire a bunch of auxiliary lighting, and complete some critical repairs to the refrigeration system. These were one-pass welds in schedule 80 pipe that had to be pressure tested. I loved the problem solving the most," said Cai.

"I wish Cai would stay here in our shop. He would probably be a project manager in very short order. It's hard to find bright young people with ambition and talent." Waldhaus went on to say, "I think we might lose Cai to the mechanics trade though."

Currently, Cai is back at Camosun College again completing the 10-month technical training program for Heavy Duty / Commercial Transport Technician. As one of only two high school students in the program, he finds himself near the top of the class. As early as the tail end of grade 9 Cai started to set his sights on the heavy-duty program and worked diligently at his academics to get them completed early so he could head to Camosun for grade 12. His mom Louise said, "We were starting to worry that school might not be able to hold Cai's attention as he was heading toward grade ten. But once he set his sights on the heavy-

duty program and he had a clear pathway defined he developed an unwavering focus. He could see the route and stuck to it. The more he learns now, the more he wants to learn."

His other employer is a local artisan, Nathan Scott, who builds those amazing bronze sculptures you may have seen

in Sidney, or the one at Mile Zero, of Terry Fox. Cai helps Nathan by welding segments of the bronze castings together, which is very finicky work. "What I really like about Cai is his ability to anticipate the next move. I'd hire anybody with his same sense of anticipation. You never catch Cai with his hands in his pockets. I am so happy to see a bright young man like Cai entering into the trades instead of going to university. Youth are way better off entering the trades these days if they are looking for a good job. The coffee shops are full of baristas with degrees."

Principal, Peter Westhaver congratulates Cai on his amazing accomplishments to date, "Saanich students like Cai are able to engage in the creation of their own personalized learning plan as a result of our post secondary partnerships. Because he was so focused, Cai was able to create a unique schedule that afforded him the ability to participate in life at Stelly's, complete two comprehensive trade training programs, and sample the workforce to get essential work based training hours and develop his skills."

Cai is fascinated by the work he undertakes and motivated by the opportunity to use his head, his hands, and his heart taking on tasks that require much more from him than simply following directions. He is grateful for the opportunities afforded him by the trade programs offered through the Saanich School District and advises other youth to consider a similar pathway. "Get creative and design a career / education pathway that works for you, it doesn't really seem much like school when you're learning about something you love to do!"

Contact Stu Rhodes for more information on how to get involved as a student apprentice, or as an employer sponsor in this, or any other career program in Saanich School District. 250 415-9211

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