

WOLDINGHAM

HEADLINERS

Jo Lawrence

Class of 1990

Jo Lawrence, 38, runs her own plumbing company, Pink Plumbers. Divorced, she has two children, Zak, 16, and Hazel, 13, and lives in Chorleywood, Hertfordshire.

When I say I'm a plumber, you can almost guarantee it will lead to a long conversation. People seem genuinely interested to know why I chose it for a career.

I attended Woldingham from the age of 11-18, where my independent, entrepreneurial streak was discovered, nurtured and encouraged.

I left in 1990 at 18 to begin training as an Occupational Therapist at Oxford Polytechnic, where I learnt woodwork. I soon realised it wasn't for me after getting too attached to an elderly gentleman who wasn't getting any better and discovered I wanted to be a healer.

So I took a year off to go travelling and think about my next career move. During that year I developed my healing techniques and started the colorful journey along my spiritual path. That year I also met my (now - ex) husband and started a family, and spent the next few years as a full time mum, bringing up my two children Zak (now 16 and a maths genius!) and Hazel (now 13 - who started out life with major kidney problems which lasted for 10 years, and who is really bright and very creative!).

In 1999 I bought a plot of land with a derelict house on it and a commercial yard so we could renovate the house and Nick could start a steel fabrication business in the yard. It took us five years to get planning permission to rebuild the house, meanwhile living in an old bus (very similar to the old Oxted coaches!). During this time I was doing a lot of woodwork and thought it would be a good idea to learn something practical for the house build; I was also getting very frustrated with builders not answering their phones and not returning my calls! Around this time I also got into psychic healing.

When the children started school full-time, I began thinking about a career. I wanted to do something practical. Then one day I ended up fixing my psychic friend's toilet!! She suggested I become a plumber and it was as though a light bulb lit up! I knew what I had to do, and where my



future lay. It felt like divine intervention! I could see how it was an expression of the healing, keeping people safe in their homes, shining my light on the people I come into contact with and physically making a difference to people's everyday life experiences.

I was very lucky as I got in before the rush of women joining the profession. Aylesbury College almost paid me to go on the course!

Just before I qualified in July 2003 I split up with Nick. So, after working for another plumber for three weeks and getting ripped off, and faced with the need to go out there and earn a living so that I could provide for my children, I decided to bite the bullet and went self-employed in August 2003, launching my business – Pink Plumbers.

Just after I started Pink Plumbers I came across a company called Ecoflow, who sell magnets for health (Bioflow – applied to the blood by means of a bracelet), fuel savers (for the boiler and the car), and to get rid of limescale (applied to the pipes in the home). It combined both my plumbing and healing worlds, so I became a distributor and ran that business alongside Pink Plumbers for five years, recommending the products as I went and building a team of distributors. I built a team of 47 in total, and spent time supporting and helping them to build their teams. I spoke at various conferences and meetings in the UK and Ireland, inspiring people and training them. I still sell the magnets, but the company no longer pays commission on team building.

This year I have achieved the NVQ2 qualification in Plumbing, and over the years have expanded my skills by doing further courses in unvented systems, power flushing, and underfloor heating (which I am currently installing in my own house extension).

Over the years, I've built up my confidence and skills to the point that it's now rare that I can't cope with a job (although I don't do boilers). I've had fantastic support and mentoring from the men at the plumbing merchants, and

also fellow plumbers. People often ask me if I have found it difficult working among other workmen, being a woman in the trade, when in fact it hasn't; if anything it has been the occasional customer who is the problem, though fortunately I've only had three nasty customers in seven years of plumbing. I think some people expect me to be cheaper, but actually plumbing is an expensive business to run. I do a great job and expect to get paid for it.

More often, people feel they can trust me because I'm a woman. A lot of my work is for the elderly and single women; I also had a guy who didn't hire a male plumber because he was embarrassed to show another bloke he couldn't do the job!

A lot of the time I'm called in to fix a problem with the plumbing, where maybe three other plumbers have looked at it and not wanted to, or perhaps not known how to fix it, or they just haven't bothered to turn up. I love this kind of job and get a great deal of satisfaction because I really don't give up easily and like to get things done as economically as possible for the customer.

My next move, once my house is complete, will be to license the brand, so anyone wanting to run their own plumbing business as the 'Pink Plumber' in their local area, can use my brand for a fee, and get the kind of support I had when I started out.

Eventually, as well as running my Licence business and plumbing part time, I'd like to build Eco houses. Construction is a great passion of mine.

Well it wasn't the path that my parents or I had expected I'd take, and I think it's very difficult at the age of 18 and less to know what you want to do, or where you want to end up. Sometimes God, or the Universe, has other things in mind for you; things that you can't necessarily see from the confinements of the school classroom. All one can do is to take the next step and let the journey unfold!

Woldingham taught me that I could do or be anything I want if I wanted it badly enough and was willing to put in the hard work to achieve it! For that I am eternally grateful.

