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**Alison’s story**

Alison never really had an interest in continuing on to university as she did not particularly enjoy high school, and recalls having the attitude of just “finish high school, stay in her rural home town and get a retail job”. Alison’s future plans however changed when she met her current partner, who was brought up in a family in which going to university and getting an education was important. With her partners encouragement and assistance from her Year 12 design teacher, Alison submitted her university preferences two days before they were due to close. Reflecting on her decision to go to university, Alison expresses that she doesn’t regret her choice to attend university because of “the people I’ve met, what I’ve learnt and even just moving out of home and growing up”.

Alison’s comment of “growing up” relates to not only commencing university but predominantly the process of relocating from her rural home town and living independently, an experience that she describes as “scary”:

**especially coming from the country and having to move out, it might be uncomfortable at first but it’s going to help you in the long run as you learn so many life skills such as budgeting, and cooking for yourself. The little things that you take for granted at home are suddenly huge once you move out.**

Alison recalls the transition to university as being a confusing and difficult process. Academically she felt prepared, and considered her creative skills and knowledge provided her with the basic principles for her course. However the social aspect of university was not as easy, particularly due to the absence of Alison’s boyfriend, high school friends and support network. Alison reports that she began to feel really comfortable and part of the university community half way through her first year, and despite briefly considering leaving university at that time, her experience improved and she began to increase her university social networks during second year.

Despite her feelings of social isolation Alison wasn’t involved in any of the extra-curricular activities offered by the university, citing that she wished she had but didn’t feel that she had the time in the first couple of years as she attempted to balance study and part time work. With working part time a necessity in order to meet her costs of living.

**Financially it was quite difficult. I did get a bit of money from Centrelink for moving out of home which helped a lot, that covered my rent for a bit and each fortnight I received a certain amount. My parents then started paying my rent and the money that Centrelink gave me went into food and bills.**

In addition to general living costs, Alison struggled with her course costs in graphic design which she describes as “huge” due to the significant amount of printing and sourcing materials required. She estimated that her last assignment alone cost approximately $200 in printing costs, an additional expense that she was required to draw on a scholarship fund that her parents had invested on her behalf.

Due to the lack of friends located within Adelaide, Alison travelled back to her home town most weekends during her first year, an added expense not accounted for. Although Alison now describes her social network in Adelaide to be good, she still ventures back to her home town regularly and continues to play weekend tennis there. Unlike many students, Alison continued to engage in physical activity whilst at university, however admits that she didn’t eat very well for most of her first year.

Her ties to her home town continue to be strong and are evident in her future ambitions:

**One day I want to own my own business just so I’m freelance because eventually I’ll move back to my home town when I start to settle down and I want to do that full time if I can. I think I will eventually move back. Especially if I’m still with my partner at that stage he’s got a family farm down there so he’ll be there eventually, and my parents have got a business so I think I’ll eventually move back.**

For now though university has broadened Alison’s ambitions, wanting to finish university and then travel and work overseas. Explaining that she now wants to do so much more than she had ever wanted to prior to coming to university.

**Probably it's just my ambition for life I think. Before when I was in high school I kind of had the mentality that finish high school, stay in my home town, get a retail job and just kind of be there forever and now I couldn’t think of anything worse to be honest. Now I want to finish uni and I want to travel and I want to live overseas and work overseas and I just want to do so much more than I ever wanted to do.**

Alison compares her future directions to those of her friends who remained in the country town where they grew up and she remarks that these friends are trapped by the choices they made when leaving school.

**I feel like a lot of my friends who went straight out of high school into jobs in my home town are a bit stuck there almost and they don’t love it but they can't afford or have the time to study or do anything else now. It’s like I'm lucky that I've done what I've done.**

For Alison, university has resulted in a significant transformation in herself, not only in the knowledge learnt through her course but also the life skills that she has acquired through the process of becoming independent and leaving home.

Although looking forward to completing her studies, it is a bitter sweet prospect:

**I’m just so glad that I’ve done it and I’m relieved to be finishing but at the same time I don’t want to finish just because I won’t get to see these people everyday and won’t get to be in the same environment as we are everyday.**

In considering her future options Alison hasn’t ruled out more study, but for now she is looking forward to completing her degree and is focused now on working in her chosen field.