

TRADES

Carpentry Educator About my work



My husband Will and I own and run the Heartwood School in Washington, MA, where we teach our students the skills to build an energy-efficient house. People come here from all over the world. I find it very satisfying to teach carpentry to them and to help them learn homebuilding, woodworking, and timber framing.

Special qualifications for carpentry include being good at working with your hands and developing good problem-solving skills, patience, and the ability to follow through.

As a carpenter, you can learn by doing. I encourage a woman who wants to be a carpenter to take a class at our school, talk to carpenters and salespeople at the lumberyard, read books about carpentry, and try your hand at simple projects under someone's supervision. Try to find a carpenter to work with or volunteer with Habitat for Humanity. You can also join the union and serve an apprenticeship—train under an experienced tradesman.

You'll learn to work from blueprints and architectural drawings. As you get more advanced projects, good math skills are important. I love carpentry work because, at the end of the day, you can see what you're creating—what grows from the building process.

Carpentry will always be an important career. Everyone needs a home to live in, and carpenters also renovate and repair buildings. I know I'm doing a good job when I approach a project thoughtfully and feel satisfied when I've completed the work.

I like to remind women that none of us was born knowing what we know now. As you expose yourself to new learning experiences, your skillfulness will increase. Nothing is magic. It takes time and patience to learn a skill like carpentry. In the end, you will be rewarded by having a satisfying, creative, and useful career.

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Carpentry Educator My background



Michele B. Washington, MA

American cities were growing rapidly when I was young. My home was one of the first built in a new suburb of Indianapolis, Indiana.

Watching other people's houses being built and playing in them made a big impression on me. I knew that I wanted to work with my hands, and my father helped me learn the correct way to do things. My parents were always encouraging me to succeed.

In high school, I did well in history, geography, and physical education. I also liked biology and zoology. Each semester in the afterschool club, some kids rebuilt a lawn mower, which was a lot of fun. I found that taking things apart and putting them back together gave me a feeling of accomplishment.

After high school, I didn't feel ready to go to college; instead I went on to the "University of Life." I worked at a number of different jobs, and I traveled to various places. I was one of the first woman letter carriers. I earned a good wage and got a lot of exercise.

In 1980 my husband Will, who was a builder, and I spent a season on a work exchange program at the Heartwood School in western MA, where students learn homebuilding and carpentry techniques. Will worked as an instructor there, and I apprenticed under him. I took all the carpentry classes the school offered. In 1985 we took over ownership of the school after the founders went off to pursue other things. I wear a number of different hats at the school—instructor, office manager, and lunch cook.

Will and I enjoy working together at the school and at home. In 1987 we built our 2,400 sq. ft. Contemporary home. As part of their homebuilding course that summer, students helped us do the framing, but we finished the house ourselves. Our house has a partial wraparound porch and a greenhouse. I love working in my flower gardens and raising vegetables for canning and freezing. I also spin yarn and knit or weave the beautiful soft hair from our white, brown, peach, and black Angora rabbits.