**Welded Bonds Won't Be Broken: Alum Turned First-Female-Welding-Instructor & The Legacy of the Program Episode 109**

Bella Jhin:

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Dan Garcia:

The program is bigger than any one of us. I feel like it's tradition. I still feel like my mentor, my original instructor, Mr. Isaac, he's retired. I feel like I'm always going to be walking in his shoes. And I hope that I leave that sense of tradition and that sense of history. I have photos in my office from the old shop and I feel like that sense of history permeates everything we do.

Christina Barsi:

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

Sun Ezzell:

And I'm Sun Ezzell, and you're listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast.

Christina Barsi:

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground so to speak, by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

Sun Ezzell:

We bring to you the voices of Mt. Sac. From the classroom to completion.

Speaker 5:

And I know I going to achieve my goals. And I know people here are going to help me to do it.

Speaker 6:

Sociology major and she's transferred to [inaudible 00:01:18]. Psychology major. English major.

Speaker 7:

I'm transforming part-time into full-time.

Speaker 8:

I really like the time that you spend with Julie about how to write a CV and a cover letter.

Speaker 9:

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

Speaker 10:

Think of the natural environment around us as a library.

Christina Barsi:

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC. But most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi, Mt. SAC alumni, and producer of this podcast.

Sun Ezzell:

And I'm Sun Ezzell. Learning assistance, faculty, and professional learning Academy coordinator.

Christina Barsi:

And this is the Magic Mountie Podcast.

Christina Barsi:

Hi, this is Christina. And in this episode, Sun Ezzell, explores the welding department with adjunct faculty and Mt. SAC alum, Bella Jhin, and her former welding instructor, Dan Garcia. They share the love they have for the program, and how they each got involved, and the legacy that the community, the Mt. SAC welding department has built over the many years of its existence. Plus, it's one of the few courses that was deemed essential and able to instruct with in person labs during the still ongoing pandemic. Here is Sun.

Sun Ezzell:

Bella and Dan from the welding program. Welcome to the Magic Mountie Podcast. Thank you so much for joining me today, to talk about the welding program, and your experience Bella, as a student and now a faculty member in the welding program. Welcome.

Bella Jhin:

Thank you.

Dan Garcia:

Thank you, Sun.

Sun Ezzell:

If we could start out, if you wouldn't mind just introducing yourselves, and telling us a little about yourself and what you do at Mt. SAC, that would be great.

Bella Jhin:

Well, I'm Bella Jhin. I graduated from Mt. SAC from the welding department and I am right now, a Journeymen Millwright for Local 1607 Union. I also was a delegate for the union, and then I'm also an L.A. certified welder. And then now I teach here at Mt. SAC.

Sun Ezzell:

Oh, welcome. Thank you. It's lovely to have you here as a faculty member.

Bella Jhin:

Thank you.

Dan Garcia:

My name is Dan Garcia. I'm a department chair for the welding program. I'm a full-time faculty member. I was trying to do the math on the way home today. I got hired full-time in 2007. So this will be like 14 years that I've been full-time. I've been department chair for 13 years. I've been teaching. Well, I taught full-time at Rio Hondo for three years, and I actually set foot in the Mt. SAC weld shop way back in fall of 1993. So, it's been 28 years I've been involved in welding in some way, shape or form.

Dan Garcia:

I came to Mt. SAC thinking that I was going to become an architect. And so actually was involved in architecture programs. I was taking computer drafting back in the 90s, and then I happened to walk into the weld shop and talk to somebody there because I had some parts for bicycle that I needed to get welded, and handed it to this guy and he tells me, "If you sign up for our welding class, you can weld your own stuff." And I tell my students that same story. Watch out because now here I am teaching and I'm department chair. So, I mean, that's been my story at Mt SAC.

Sun Ezzell:

Great. Thank you so much for sharing. And how about you, Bella? What brought you into the welding program? Did you start out as a welding major when you were at Mt. SAC as a student?

Bella Jhin:

No, actually it's quite weird. I had no construction or welding background whatsoever. When I went to Mt. SAC at first after high school, I actually was going to be assigned language interpreter. And I was probably about two semesters away from getting my degree in sign language interpreting, and I decided that I wanted to take an elective because I needed one. And I was like, "Oh, I'll try welding. I've never heard about it, but I'll try it." Thought I'd check it out. And so, I took my first welding class with actually Dan here, and I fell in love with it. I kept taking classes after that, and I changed my major and that was it. I just fell in love. So, it was really just out of nowhere.

Sun Ezzell:

And then you went on to work, right, in the welding field after you graduated?

Bella Jhin:

Yes. Yes I did. I started off non-union at a small little place that built ambulances and fire trucks. So I did fabrication and welding there. So that's how I started off. Actually I'm so glad I thankfully got laid off from there because they had a mass layoff, and I talked to Dan. I was like, "What can I do? Where can I find work?" And he told me about the unions.

Bella Jhin:

And so I checked it out and I found out that they were really, really looking for women to join the unions and stuff. So, I actually had to pick at which union I wanted to go to. And I decided to go with the Millwrights because there wasn't a lot of welders at the time that were certified. So it made me a little bit more valuable. I joined them and I never looked back because I make like double what nine-year people make right off the bat walking in the door. So it's fantastic. And they treat everybody equal and stuff. So it's really cool.

Sun Ezzell:

That's great. That's really good to hear. I was wondering if you would share a little bit more about what it was like to be a student in the welding program and what you loved about it, and obviously you liked it enough that you wanted to come back and teach it. But what was it that made you feel like the welding program was a good spot to be?

Bella Jhin:

Of course, Dan definitely made it more exciting. His passion for welding is very visible in how he teaches and how excited he gets in every subject of it. And what I really, really enjoyed about welding, is that you find the thing that makes you feel like zen when you're doing it. Nothing else in the world matters except for you and that weld puddle, that's it. Nothing else is going on, it's just you in that moment and it's calm, relaxing. And I love that the welding department at Mt. SAC actually opened my eyes still, it's so broad. Welding is such a broad, broad thing that you can do so many different things with it. Like I learned, five, six different types of welding and you can figure out what you like more about it. And it's just really opened so many doors.

Sun Ezzell:

That's so great to hear. And Dan, what was it like having Bella as a student in your class? Here she is. She's listening and not everything you're saying, but I'm just wondering if you can share a little bit about that. Is it common to have a lot of women in the welding program?

Dan Garcia:

That's a great question. At the time that Bella came through, I don't think there were very many female students. And so I was grateful. There's a funding program for career technical education programs, the Carl Perkins, Vocational Technical Education Act. So the welding program pursues funding for equipment purchases and to broaden our program on an annual basis. And one of the things, one of the core indicators that we have to track is participation of non-traditional students. So female for us, welding is a male dominated field and female student participation is a big deal. So, to see Bella come in and take a class, it was like, that's a win. And then to see her persist in the program and complete the program was great because I feel like the most valuable kind of advertisement or publicity we can get is word of mouth and visibility of students.

Dan Garcia:

So I think that the more female students we get the more come. Right? The more come to the program. And so, I would say that we were talking before the podcast began that when COVID came in spring, we were at the absolute, highest enrollment the welding program has ever been in the history of the program. And from the time that Bella came through, there was maybe four or five female students in the entire program, and in spring there were three or four female students in every one of our classes. So it has grown. And I think it's because young women like Bella and some of our other female alumni are out there making a name for themselves.

Dan Garcia:

As a generality, I would say that female students are a little bit more focused. They pay attention to what's going on. They pay attention to a lecture. They probably do better on written exams, midterms, finals. It's not uncommon for me to see that the female students do better on the book part of our classes.

Dan Garcia:

For any female student or any student at all to think about the program as a career. I felt like I had to be, I have to model what expectations are going to be like. As the supervisor or the manager or employer. And so, to see any students coming in, find their groove and find the flow of the program and continuing to persist was good for me.

Dan Garcia:

Another hurdle for the program is to see, you're not just to get the female students in the door and to get them to stay in the program and then finish the program and get a license, but then to really see them go on and get a career and do well in that career. That's really the best advertisement. All of our students do that, but it's even more satisfying that the non-traditional students are doing that for us in the program.

Sun Ezzell:

Well, and you obviously had a connection even after you left the program that when you were at a turning point in your career and you were thinking, okay, what's next that you reached out to Dan and asked for some thoughts about where you might go. So that's really neat. Is there anything else you want to share about your experience as a student? We know that part of what happens when students come to community colleges, they're looking around thinking like, "Is this a spot where I belong?" Right? So at the college and also in the program, was there anything else you wanted to share about your experience in the program? What made you feel like you were in the right spot or what helped you to still have a connection with your faculty members even after you had gone on to a welding career?

Bella Jhin:

I would definitely say when I first started, I was of course afraid because there's not that many other women inside the trades and I didn't have very many female role models to look up to, but I think that the faculty, all the teachers I've had when I was in school, they really made me feel comfortable. They made me feel like I really could do this. They never wavered in their support. And so it gave me the courage to keep trying and keep going and the drive to keep going.

Bella Jhin:

I think that's really important. Because something like welding is, it takes practice and it takes patience. Definitely takes patience. And so, it's something that as professors, I think that you have to really love what you do to be able to help these people grow. And I'm just glad that I was given this opportunity and that I had the professors I had. And so that I was able to actually pursue it. Because I mean, even for guys, it doesn't matter, girls, guys, I think that at first you're jumping into something you don't know, and so any little thing helps.

Sun Ezzell:

So what's it like coming back to the welding program as an instructor?

Bella Jhin:

I mean, I'm so happy. I'm so excited. It's been my goal actually was to come back and teach. It's was the ultimate thing I could possibly do. And so for Dan to give me this opportunity, I was ecstatic. Because I actually did teach a little bit for the union. When I was living in Utah for a bit. I was teaching like part-time for them, to help them with their welding students. And that's when I realized that I really do enjoy helping other people learn.

Bella Jhin:

The one thing I keep telling everybody is that the best feeling that I've gotten is when I noticed it click in their heads like they're starting to get it, and they get super excited and then they just can't stop welding. They're like, "Nope, I'm not quitting. I'm going to keep going." And they gets so driven and that's just, it's worth every minute.

Sun Ezzell:

That's great. That's such a good feeling and you know that your students are feeling really good when they have that moment and that discovery as well.

Bella Jhin:

Yeah.

Sun Ezzell:

And Dan, what's it been like to have Bella come back as an instructor and bring her experience?

Dan Garcia:

It's important. It's really important. And it's one of the things that Bella was talking about. The different instructors that we have in the welding program, all of our instructors are coming from industry. So even myself, before I came between the time that I was a student, then I came to teach, I went out and I worked for 10 years in various aspects of the industry involved in manufacturing.

Dan Garcia:

And so, every one of our faculty members, full-time and adjunct brings with them, career experience and in a wide range of different fields. And I think that's one of the strong points of our program. It's not just that we have good instructors that are teaching fundamentals, but they're coloring. You take a class with one instructor who does general fabrication. I have another instructor who is an iron worker and is 60, 70, 80 hours a week working heavy iron.

Dan Garcia:

Each instructor brings that brings that experience with them to the class. Kind of helps. I feel like that's what helps light the fire in the students, right? So I've always known for the longest I've been department chair, that it was going to be important as a component of our growth as a program, to help really bolster the participation of the female students, is to find a qualified female instructor and that's something that's important for me about the integrity of our program is that, I didn't hire a Bella because Bella is a woman, I hired Bella because she's a damn good welder.

Dan Garcia:

Bella was a good student. She cared about her work. She was diligent. And I know that carries over into work experience. The cool thing about welding is, we're doing it behind a mask, right? So I mean, the metal doesn't know, the metal doesn't care as long as you are doing the right thing. And so Bella is a person that, I had confidence in her knowledge. I had confidence in her ability.

Dan Garcia:

And then I was waiting the minimum qualifications to come back and be an instructor. They need an associates degree. So Bella got her associates. So it was like, check that off on the list. Okay. So I'm going to keep an eye on anybody from our program who's got an associates degree. And at the time that she got back in touch with us and that she had her six years of experience, that's when I extended the operator, we had the opening and I have to say that probably the majority, myself, I'm an alumnus of Mt. SAC welding, my two probationary full-time faculty right now, they're both alumnus. They've taken classes with us. My full-time daytime equipment tech is an alumnus of the program. Our nighttime equipment tech is an alumnus of the program and maybe another three or four of our adjunct faculty are alumni of the program.

Dan Garcia:

So we really do keep an eye. I keep track of our own. It makes my job easier because I know that those students are coming back and they're building on our skill, they're building on our knowledge base with what they've added to it. I happen to have Bella's her take on what we taught her. So, even though she's rearranging it and she's going to give it her spin and her flavor of the same skills that we've always taught.

Sun Ezzell:

I think that speaks so highly of the welding program that so many folks who are working for the program now are alumni. What do you think it is that makes people want to stay or makes people want to come back and continue to be a part of the program?

Dan Garcia:

So in my probationary faculty, my adjunct faculty, the program is bigger than any one of us, right? It's not the Dan Garcia show. It's not the professor, whoever show. I feel like it's tradition. I still feel like my mentor, my original instructor, Mr. Isaac, he's retired and he's moved out of the area. He's moved into Santa Barbara. But for me, I feel like I'm always going to be walking in his shoes. And I hope that I leave that sense of tradition and that sense of history.

Dan Garcia:

I have photos in my office from the old shop and I have enough of, from my experience from the 90s. I have a real sense of the history of the program. And I feel like that sense of history permeates everything we do. And I'm so very grateful that the students, Bella case in point, all of our students who come out of our program, get into the Millwright Union, they get into the Iron Workers Union, they get into the Elevator Union. They represent us. They perform, and when I run into people, I've run into random people and strike up a conversation. They asked me, what do I do? Like, "Well, I teach welding at Mt. SAC." "You're the guy?" Like I said, it's not the band Garcia show, but I feel really strongly, there's this sense of history and tradition and, it's self-sustaining. I'm trying to do my part to make sure that that continues. Even after the point that I retire.

Sun Ezzell:

And Bella, how do you think having been a Mt. SAC student in the welding program impacts your teaching now as a new faculty member?

Bella Jhin:

It definitely helps. It brings nostalgia to everything. Because since right now I've been teaching a lot of the beginning classes, whereby just learning about all the different processes and stuff. And so, it's funny because since I've been doing this for a while now, about nine years or so, it's like, I don't realize how much steps that I've already passed.

Bella Jhin:

So one of these guys are asking me questions that are more simpler questions. I'm just like, "No, I haven't thought about that in a minute." And it's eyeopening and I'm really enjoying it. I'm really enjoying reliving those moments. It's like when you have a kid, then you take him to Disneyland for the first time, and all of a sudden it's exciting again, to go back to Disneyland because you get to see it through their eyes. And so it makes it feel like I'm reliving, relearning all this together. And there's a couple of times where I've gotten excited because there's a couple of tricks that I've learned that it helps me teach them how to get the idea of it a little bit quicker.

Sun Ezzell:

And sometimes we learn new things when we're teaching something that we thought we knew too. Right?

Bella Jhin:

Yes.

Sun Ezzell:

[crosstalk 00:20:40] along the way, which is pretty cool.

Bella Jhin:

Yes, definitely.

Sun Ezzell:

Is there anything I forgot to ask there? Anything else you'd like to share?

Dan Garcia:

Well, I'll jump in and just say that the welding program is, we were deemed an essential job training program. So we are back on campus. We got shut down and in spring semester, like everybody else, but we were able to come back in fall. So we taught all semester hybrid format, lectures online, and our lab hours are back in person. We're operating unfortunately, at like half capacity. Our enrollment is half of what our normal class size is. We're in the middle of winter right now. And so, we're about halfway point [inaudible 00:21:26].

Dan Garcia:

The enrollment has opened and, Bella I don't know if you check it, I think we maybe have like six or eight seats total of all 18 or 19 sections. So everything was pretty much filled up. So check your portal account. If you're interested in signing up for a class, email me, email Bella. You can email professor Raul Tapia or professor John Kucha. They are my two probationary faculty.

Dan Garcia:

We're a team we're here to guide people through the program. So we are back at [inaudible 00:21:55]. Now, I just want to get it out there that we are back on campus, and we are doing our best to accommodate as many students as we possibly can. I'm hoping that once our numbers return, that the numbers of female students will come back as well.

Bella Jhin:

I think they will.

Sun Ezzell:

It sounds like they will. And it sounds like students who join the welding program really are joining a family. Right? And making connections with folks that will last beyond their experience at Mt. SAC which is a pretty cool thing.

Dan Garcia:

Yeah. I'll jump in and expand on that. Yeah. I mean, when I was a student, if I needed work, I was looking for work. We do participate with the Mountie Career line at the career center, but a lot of times it's word of mouth. Professor Tapia has done a good job of revamping our work experience program, so we have the ability to students to take one unit of work experience in a semester, they get exposed to a couple of different career opportunities. But frequently, it's not uncommon that students come back and ask us, "Hey, do yo know who's hiring?" And sometimes it's just sort of magic, like hey, I'll get a phone call or email, a company is looking for two MIG welders, or they're looking for three TIG welders, or they need somebody who can weld stainless.

Dan Garcia:

Or they need somebody who's LEC certified and they hit me at the right moment. Then, if I don't know if somebody off the top of my head, I'll check with three or four of my instructors. "Who do you know?" It's family, but it's very much a network, an unofficial network. So Bella enjoys watching the light turn on for students. I always enjoy the first two weeks when nobody talks to each other, and then by about fourth or fifth week, the people I would least expect are buddy, buddy. Because again, I feel like it's a really very egalitarian process. I mean, you put a helmet on and you're working, so long as you're paying attention and following safety procedures.

Dan Garcia:

So I'm watching people that maybe ordinarily wouldn't sit down and have a conversation, they're helping each other and guiding each other. And I watch them take classes like buddy, buddy for the whole program. That's another aspect of the program that's very, very satisfying for me.

Bella Jhin:

I have to agree with that because I do have a few friends that I've made from when I was in the welding program too. I still talk to them and stuff.

Sun Ezzell:

I think that's part of the fun of being a college student, right? Is getting to know folks from different walks of life, with different experience than you have and developing those friendships. So that's really neat. That is happening in the program as well. Well, I want to thank you both so much for sharing your stories with all of us at the Magic Mountie Podcast.

Dan Garcia:

Well thank you for thinking of us. Thank you for the invite. Anytime you have questions about the welding program, I'm happy to come back and bend your ear some more and burn some podcast minutes with you.

Sun Ezzell:

That would be fantastic.

Dan Garcia:

Excellent. Thank you so much.

Sun Ezzell:

Great.

Bella Jhin:

Thank you so much.

Sun Ezzell:

Thank you both so much and take care, and have fun in the welding shop and thank you for your fantastic work for all the Mt. SAC students in your program.

Dan Garcia:

Great. Thank you.

Bella Jhin:

Thank you.

Sun Ezzell:

Take care. Thank you.

Christina Barsi:

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