

Scholarship Success Stories

Chelsea Ridgway's Story

2017 recipient of the AAUW Healdsburg Branch SRJC Scholarship



My name is Chelsea Ridgway, and I was the lucky recipient of the AAUW scholarship four years ago. I cannot believe that so much time has gone by, but I have not forgotten the generosity of the incredible women who make up the Healdsburg branch of AAUW.

Looking back on the past four years is exhilarating. When I was interviewed for the AAUW scholarship, I was working multiple jobs to put myself through nursing school. Later that term, I graduated from Santa Rosa Junior College's Registered Nursing program with a 4.0 GPA and had four job offers lined up before taking the national licensing boards. I took a night shift position at Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital on their cardiac/stroke telemetry unit. The scholarship allowed me to complete Sonoma State University's "bridge" program to earn my BSN. I was working full time, 12-hour night shifts and attending classes during the day while also completing clinical hours through Saint Joseph Hospice to earn my Public Health Certificate. Working full time while simultaneously going to school full time was a huge challenge, but I was determined to maintain my 4.0 GPA, so I worked hard and ended up graduating top of my class with straight As.

Within 10 months of my nursing career, I was nominated by previous patients and received a "Daisy Award", which

is something I had always dreamt of receiving someday. Shortly after that, I was hired into the Cardiac Catheterization Lab at Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital. I work amongst some of the most amazing techs, nurses and doctors who routinely save the lives of people having acute heart attacks. I cannot believe how lucky I am to work with such incredible people who have taken me under their wing and taught me so much.

During the Sonoma County fires and the Covid-19 pandemic, I have witnessed true heroism as I worked alongside my coworkers who lost homes hours before performing emergency procedures or with limited PPE while working to save a life. I am so proud to be where I am. In the past few months, I purchased my first home completely on my own and I continue to advance my career with continuing education. I cannot believe there was a time when I had to consider dropping out of my Bachelors program because of finances. I was doing everything I could to stay afloat but was struggling to pay tuition at SSU. The scholarship I received from the women at AAUW Healdsburg helped me to get back on my feet before starting my first nursing job and allowed me to pay for the required classes and books in order to stay enrolled in the program. I think about the generosity of AAUW often and feel beyond blessed that I had the opportunity to meet and interview with such incredible women. I strive to be an inspiration and support system to other women the way AAUW was, and still is, to me.

(Editor's Note - I take great pride in having the honor to publish Nurse Ridgway's story - one which truly highlights the success of our scholarship efforts. Congratulations Nurse Ridgway!!! You are a rock star!) -**Donna Riley**