



# FINDING MY WAY IN FREIGHT

By Mia Thomas

Sometimes, the best decisions come from trying to get out of something – like English class. My name is Mia, and interestingly, the start of my journey into the freight industry began right outside my English classroom at Long Bay College. You might be wondering how someone goes from English class to freight? The answer is simple, I was looking for a way to get out of class!

At the time, my school offered a Gateway programme, an initiative that allows students to complete 10 days of work experience, one day per week. I wasn't officially enrolled in Gateway, but I

was motivated. I approached our Careers Advisor and Dean with a proposal: could I do my own unofficial version of Gateway? Their answer was yes, provided I made a clear and detailed plan.

So that's exactly what I did.

I organised work experience at DSV, a freight company, under the guidance of Grant Buckingham, the Operations Manager, who also happens to be my uncle. Yes, there was a little bit of nepotism involved, but I brought the hustle. That's where it all started and it's where my passion for freight was born.



Before we go any further, here's a bit about me. I am 23 years old and someone who thrives on staying active - whether that's playing competitive football (or soccer depending on who you ask) or taking part in triathlons. During the summer time you will often find me out on the water wakeboarding or riding the jet ski with my friends and family. Now the things I don't like telling the world: I'm allergic to gluten, I have dyslexia and I also have epilepsy. But more about some of that later. What else should you know? I am driven, hardworking, always up for a challenge, keen to have fun, and passionate about all things logistics. I bring energy, empathy and a can-do attitude to everything I take on. I'm not happy *all* the time but I come pretty close.

I remember my first day of work experience at DSV so clearly. I arrived with Grant thinking "Well it can't be any worse than school." I was shocked by the number of desks, I said, "Grant, do you have this many staff?". He replied "Yep and there are more desks downstairs". That's when I realised that logistics was not a small industry. It was an empire. Grant quickly introduced me to Nicole, the Transport Manager, and then disappeared. I thought I would be shadowing Grant for the day but instead I was dropped in the deep end. And I'm so glad he did because that's where the learning started. I loved it. During my work experience I learned what LCL and FCL stood for, and the documents used within the industry, along with the different jobs you can do within freight. I quickly decided that I didn't want to be a broker - too many rules! I wasn't super interested



My first day at DSV.

in invoicing or exports. I was however very interested in Transport, Key Accounts, Sales and the Warehousing.

After finishing school, I officially started working at DSV in the Transport team in early September 2020. I was excited and determined to make a good impression. On my first day, I left home early as under no circumstance did I want to be late. I *hate* being late! In my mind if you're not 5 minutes early you're already late. As it turns out, freight has its own version of timekeeping. Grant rang me a full 30 minutes before I was due to start, asking why I wasn't in the office—he'd seen my car parked outside. That's when I learned: in freight, *early* means *on time*, *on time* is *late*, and *late*... just don't be.

Within three months, I was confidently completing my current workload and Nicole passed the distribution customers over to me. These clients required me to spend time in the warehouse, something that quickly became a favourite part of my job. There was a weekly transport booking report that turned into friendly competition between Ryan, Molly and me. They had more clients than I did, but I was determined to out book them. Whenever someone was on leave, I would cover to gain experience and learn all our clients' specific requirements but it also



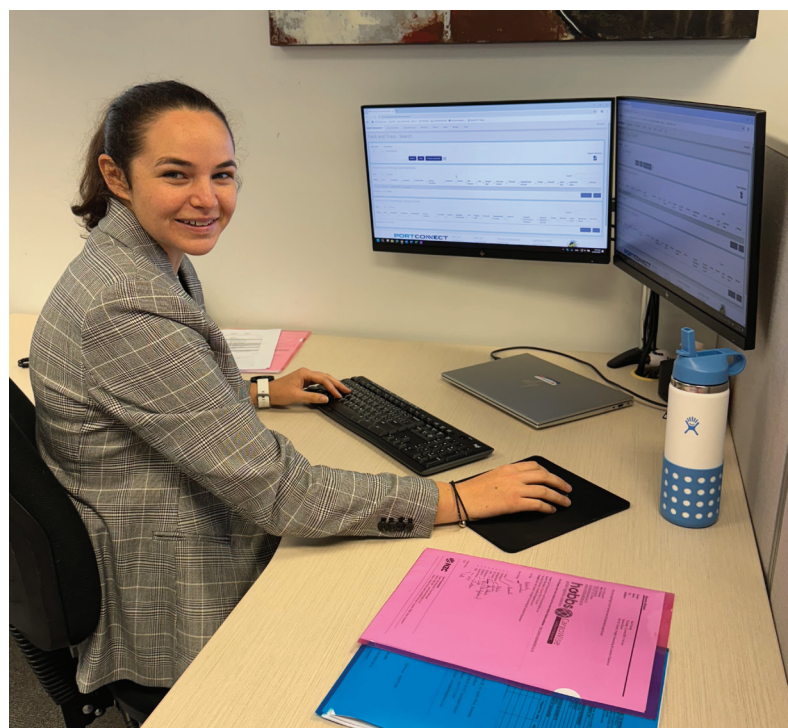
meant I would win the report for a week – bonus! One of the most important lessons I learned early on is that triple checking is key. I once booked an FCL with the incorrect container number in the subject, this resulted in demurrage and detention charges. An expensive but unforgettable learning moment. I became a ‘go-to’ in the team and even had the chance to train a junior. During her training I learnt quickly she wasn’t going to learn by watching. She needed to do the work herself. I let her make the occasional mistake, so she learnt to identify her mistakes and fix them on her own.

Things were going great at DSV until I had my first seizure in 2021, while driving home from work, just before the Harbour Bridge. At the time, I had no idea that this would mean losing my driver’s licence for a year. But I didn’t let that stop me. Instead, I started biking to work from Torbay to the Airport, 45km each way including a ferry ride, 3 days a week. On the other days I worked from home or carpooled with colleagues. Logistics doesn’t stop for your personal issues, so you find a workaround and just keep on going. Around this time, I was chosen to handle coastal shipments for one of our larger clients. This involved rail, booking empty and full container movements,

container Prealerts and consistent document chasing, to ensure things ran smoothly and most importantly, on time.

Grant left DSV after working there for longer than I had been alive. I followed soon after. I left DSV with confidence, experience, and most importantly, relationships. In the logistics industry sometimes it’s who you know not what you know.

In 2022, I joined Hobbs Global Logistics. My first impression? Wow, I’m officially the office junior. But that was great as it meant I was surrounded by a wealth of industry knowledge. It also gave me an unexpected opportunity.







Hobbs were underutilising some of their systems, like CargoWise, so it gave me the chance to teach others how to utilise the system to their advantage. After spending some time solely imports focused, I started splitting my time between imports and warehousing. I absolutely loved the hands-on action. Suddenly the sense of competition was back, who was the fastest picker or packer or devanner. Many muffins were won and lost in those challenges!

One of the memorable projects I worked on was with Kiwi Flush, organising delivery of a shipment of flat rack containers carrying fancy festival toilets. This was a completely new thing to me and introduced me to the world of over-height containers. I needed to find and arrange skelly trucks, investigate if pilot vehicles were required, coordinate cranes and other speciality vehicles. It was chaos, it was complex, but it was fun. It was freight at its best.

In 2023, Hobbs acquired a second warehouse and we were tasked with moving over 700 pallets. At the start, picking was challenging. While stock was still being put away it was like a huge game of hide and seek. But slowly and surely pallets got racked and located. Picking became far easier. Then came the decision to move all those pallets

back once the first warehouse extension was complete. The second move was much smoother - what we called 'well organised chaos'. That's a win in logistics!

Over a long weekend, Hobbs was broken into. Only a select few people were informed immediately and they went to the warehouse to handle getting a security guard in place along with making the facility secure until everything could be resolved after the weekend. With senior staff away I found myself handling Customs and police and many other urgent jobs. It was weirdly thrilling and hopefully a once in a life time experience. As thrilling as it was, it's definitely not something you want to be repeated.

So, through my journey, I found logistics. Along the way I've faced epilepsy, dyslexia, tight deadlines, outrageous customer questions and a whole lot of freight that didn't move itself. But through it all I have learnt resilience, adaptability and the value of a well-timed joke.

I'm 23, I still can't eat gluten. I still misplace the occasional container. And I still get the same thrill every time a tricky shipment comes together.

Freight is wild, unpredictable and not for everyone. But it's where I belong and I'm just getting started!