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Vikkie Gorman Louks

April 24, 1962-Present

Nationality: American

Involved in racing since 2004

Origins: Originally from Vancouver, WA, Vikkie Gorman Louks grew up sandwiched between a younger and older brother. Neither of the boys showed much interest in cars, but Gorman's father shared his love of racing with his daughter. Before Vikkie was born, her father traveled up and down the West Coast working with a drag racing team, but his involvement in the sport didn't end there. Drivers would stop by the house asking for her father's help with dragsters on weekends as the Gorman children were growing up. Vikkie even remembers going to the track to watch drag races when she was younger. Instead of using earplugs to drown out the engines, Vikkie's dad would cover her ears with his hands to combat the noise. In the late 1960s Vikkie's father was offered a position in France and the family relocated to Europe for a short time. While living there, Vikkie attended her first Formula One race, the 1969 Monaco Grand Prix. The experience stuck with her throughout childhood, eventually becoming one of her reasons for pursuing a job in the racing world.

Early Influences: Although she grew up around dragsters, it wasn't until after she turned 40 that Louks officially joined the world of racing. After almost ten years of working in the software industry, Louks lost her job when the technology bubble busted in the early 2000s. Her generous severance package allowed Louks to dabble in different things before deciding what to do next. At her twenty-year high school reunion, Vikkie was reunited with one of her friends who was involved with an Indy Racing League team and decided she wanted to try her hand at racing, figuring her previous experience with software would help her earn a spot on a team. It took a few years of pestering before her friend finally realized Louks was serious about racing and introduced her to a few engineers within the sport including a contact at Access Motorsports that would help Louks break into the field of racing technology.

Education: After graduating high school Louks wasn't quite sure what career she wanted to pursue so she decided to pursue a general studies program in college. She did not finish her degree, choosing instead to take a job after a few years of schooling. Louks taught herself most of the skills needed for her software jobs, taking advantage of classes, books, and anything else she could get her hands on relating to programs and computers. When she decided to pursue data acquisition positions, she learned on the job about racing, although many of the same software and data programs she used during her tech jobs were used in racing.

Career Path: During the computer technology boom of the 1990s, Louks worked with high tech software, even though she didn't have a background in computers or technology. Since there was such a demand for software technicians at that time, she secured the job and then went about learning all she could about the programs and systems used. Through evening classes and a lot of self-teaching, Louks ended up being promoted to Project Manager and did well for herself. After reconnecting with a high school friend who worked for an Indy Racing League (IRL) team, Vikkie dedicated her efforts towards getting a job within the racing world. She used her connection to secure an apprentice position with Access Motorsports in 2004 for that year's Indy 500. The position, which was basically an internship, was unpaid so Vikkie flew herself out to join the team and worked temporary jobs while learning all she could about the industry and data acquisition. When HVM Racing lost one of its engineers in the middle of the 2004 ChampCar season, Louks stepped up and took charge of the team's radios and wiring for the remainder of the season, and continued for the 2005 season as well. HVM worked with her, allowing her to pick up a job for Playa Del Racing during the 2005 Indy 500 for while still working HVM's races in the ChampCar Series. She worked two seasons with Team Australia (now known as Walker Racing), analyzing data for the team's cars including Champ Car Series 2006 Rookie of the Year Will Power, during the 2006 and 2007 seasons. deFerran Motorsports hired Louks to create and install a new parts database system for its American LeMans cars in 2008. Throughout 2009 she continued to work with deFerran and accept contract work for Luczo Dragon Racing's IRL team. Louks acted as Data Acquisition Engineer on KV Racing's #8 car, driven by E.J. Viso for part of the 2010 season. What started out as a quick three-month job turned into a five-month commitment, as Louks filled in as one of the team's members recovered from bypass surgery.

Major Responsibilities: Data Acquisition Engineers, usually called "DAGs" (Data Acquisition Guys) like Vikkie have numerous responsibilities both on and away from the track. When she's at the shop, Louks checks the car's sensor, making sure they are recording correctly and they are the specific ones the team's engineers are going to use during the next race. She also checks the car's wiring, making any necessary repairs or replacements and creating new wiring for vehicles. Louks is responsible for sensors and wiring on race day as well, but is also in charge of the team's radios and timing stand. She must make sure all of the team's computers are functioning, connected to the track's electronic systems, and are also receiving data and video feeds. The most important part of any DAG's job is analyzing the data the car's sensors record. After each run, Louks compares the driver's trace against previous runs to track changes in how the driver is managing the race car and to make sure the car is handling properly. She then checks the sensors against the recorded data to make sure they are reading properly and then hands all the gathered information to the team's other engineers to improve the car's efficiency and speed.

Advice to Others: Louks suggests that anyone interested in joining the sport of racing get as much education as possible. Although she was able to carve a niche for herself as a data acquisition engineer, she admits that many doors were closed since she did not have a college degree. Vikkie also touts the importance of getting into an industry that isn't afraid to take chances on someone and where they are willing to teach those who are interested. Since she was mainly self-taught, Louks wouldn't be where she is today if her supervisors and other team members didn't have faith in her abilities. The simplest piece of advice Louks has for anyone interested in the technical side of racing is to never give up. Although it may seem cliché, many people say they want to participate in the sport and never make the first step towards reaching their goals and actually entering the field of racing.

Life off the Track: Vikkie is married to Daniel Louks who shares her love and interest in racing technology. (He is Assistant Engineer for Dreyer & Reinbold Racing.) The couple lives just outside Indianapolis in Lebanon, IN with their little dog Jepp.

Interesting Fact: Vikkie and her husband Daniel are avid fans of curling, the winter sport where teams of players slide 42 pound stones across an ice rink with the hopes of landing the stone within a targeted area by sweeping the ice with brooms. In fact, the Louks have become quite active in Indianapolis's Circle City Curling Club after being introduced to the sport four years ago, with Daniel acting as the club's President. Vikkie and Daniel even traveled to the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver to watch some of the early curling matches!