

Postgrad check-up

In late 2013,* Caroline Kyi and Michael Leeming were in the throes of postgraduate study at the University of Melbourne. We've asked them what they're up to now.

Caroline

I finally submitted my thesis on 5 December 2014. Others had informed me that this would be an anticlimax after the whole chaotic experience of candidature. Personally, I found the actual submission of the thesis a welcome experience. Evidence of the celebratory tone of the event was provided by the congratulatory balloon, offered by the staff at Examinations Office – pink of course, chosen by my four-year old daughter. The rest of the day was spent mentally unwinding, feeling calm and walking around with a big smile on my face.

The last 18 months have been very busy. In October–November 2013, I was given the opportunity to present posters at two international conferences – the Conference for Cultural Heritage Conservation Science and Sustainable Development (Paris) and Monitoring Conservation Management: Built Heritage (Milan) – and work with colleagues from the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, and the Department of Food, Environmental and Nutritional Sciences, University of Milan. Financial support for these endeavours was kindly provided by the ARC Centre of Excellence for Free Radical Chemistry and Biotechnology as well as through the Bio21 Student Travel Award Scheme. This time spent overseas provided the opportunity to exchange research ideas and gain a sense of how my research was placed within an art conservation context.

In March 2014, I was fortunate enough to be invited to work in a conservation project at the Nagaur Fort, Rajasthan, India. More recently, through funding provided by a Staff Engagement Grant (University of Melbourne), I have been working with community members and students from the Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation (CCMC), at the University of Melbourne, on the conservation of painted mercantile signs in the City of Port Phillip. These experiences have enabled me to maintain practical conservation skills while studying a highly specific aspect of conservation through my thesis research.

The experiences in 2014 and over the period of my candidature have been innumerable and varied. They have reaffirmed my belief in the benefits of working in collaborative and community laboratory environments. They have exposed me to the pros and cons of cross-disciplinary research as well as identifying the opportunities available to me as a working mother and those opportunities that will remain just beyond my reach. I have been required to write like a scientist and think like an art conservator.

Overall, undertaking a PhD has been an immensely rewarding pursuit and I wish to thank the ARC Centre of Excellence for Free Radical Chemistry and Biotechnology and the School of Chemistry, University of Melbourne, for providing me with the opportunity to undertake this research, as well as those



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individuals who have supported me in this rather long endeavour.

At present I am working on identifying aspects of my research that can be published. The aim is to finalise a few publications while still effectively in writing mode. Beyond this, seeking roles/opportunities that will continue to enable me to be active in both conservation and the scientific research fields is a broader aim. For the moment I am content to enjoy the sunshine.

Michael

Can I just say that research would be, without a doubt, the greatest job in the world if everything just worked first shot. Actually, I'd even settle for third shot: three tries then you get the result. Easy.

People always talked about the 'second-year blues' for PhD students. I always thought it was a myth ... Nope. For me, it's definitely not motivation that's lacking though. It's more that you're one year in and the novelty has evaporated away but the end is still a long way off. You also have no idea if or how all those disparate results will eventually come together with any semblance of coherence to form your thesis. But your supervisors help and, to be fair, you do think about it virtually every waking moment of the day so a plan slowly develops and eventually it starts to seem achievable.

Fortunately though, I've managed to fit in a lot of things this year that take my mind off it. First, I had the opportunity to go to a conference (and have a holiday) in Switzerland. That was fun. There's definitely nothing like seeing some big name prof covered in sweat on the dance floor at the conference dinner to cast all of their papers in a completely different light. You get back to the office



thinking 'I know you're the editor of that journal we just submitted to, but, man, do I have some photos of you in my Dropbox folder!' Ha! What second-year blues?

I also enrolled in a course called Graduate Certificate in Advanced Learning and Leadership. The title seems a little gaudy but, to describe it in one sentence (which is a criminal undersell), it's a leadership course crossed with an ethics course crossed with a philosophy course. We spent a week at Mt Eliza Business School debating Machiavelli and Plato and Thomas Hobbes as *The Prince* and *The Republic* and *Leviathan* applies to politics as it applies to privacy and identity – which brought us up to lunch on day one.

There's no way I can possibly do it justice here but suffice to say that it was the single most challenging and yet inspiring week of my university career so far. It had me considering concepts that I never thought would see the light of day in my PhD studying drug metabolism.

Back in the lab, I'm nearing the end of my second year and I have a reasonably good idea of what my thesis will look like and what I have to do to get there. Now it's just a matter of reeling off the experiments. If only everything worked first shot.

*Caroline's and Michael's original career profiles were published in the September (p. 30) and October (p. 34) 2013 issues of *Chemistry in Australia*.

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