

The Power of Immersion



**stories told by students
at the University of Surrey**

Story teller insights

It would be entirely fair to say that I am still “immersed” in the situation, and probably will be for the rest of my working life. It may even be that the training is the way to get you used to the fact that it is relentless and unforgiving in the wider world, and the only way to get you used to it, is by chucking you in at the deep end. However, the gap taught me that there is a difference between being immersed in a situation and being totally overwhelmed by it and I feel I needed to learn that first hand.

Ian Barkataki

In its most literal sense, immersion is a very accurate metaphor for my experience. Like jumping off a high rock into a tropical ocean for the first time, it's exciting, risky. You take a deep breath and plunge in, letting the water invigorate you as it washes over every pore. The coral is strikingly intricate, the sea life diverse and colourful. But once you start needing to come up for air, none of that matters much. So I'll be forever indebted to the two girls who handed me a snorkel.

Freddie Sumption

I believe in any situation, you learn if there is some sort of love involved. If you love the subject you are studying, or the area in which you are writing an essay, or even the environment you are learning in, then you will succeed in learning. Saturated, tangled, absorbed, engrossed; you don't have a choice, the tide takes over you and pulls you in until you are truly immersed.

Eve Malam

To me, being immersed means getting lost in something that you value, to the point where you lose all other focus. The emotions are endless. You go through stress, a feeling of being uncomfortable and not in control when things get difficult. At the same time, any positive success or accomplishment brings pride, self belief and a feeling of empowerment. It affects you emotionally, physically (draining and tiring) and intellectually.

Manmit Rahis

**Illustrations have been drawn by Patrick Saunders, a
freelance illustrator and SCEPTRe Artist in Residence**

See Patrick's at work

<http://immersivexperience.pbwiki.com/Patricks+Page>

Foreword

Helping students to prepare for a lifetime of living, working and learning in uncertain and unpredictable worlds that have yet to be revealed is one of the greatest responsibilities and challenges confronting universities. The Surrey Centre for Excellence in Professional Training and Education (SCEPTRe) has coined the term 'learning for a complex world' as a shorthand for representing this lifelong journey. But the learning experiences we encourage in higher education are predominantly formed around routines and timetables that portray the world as a stable, knowable and predictable place. Furthermore, they tend to ignore the emotional dimensions of learning that occur when people find themselves in new and challenging situations. This booklet contains stories told by students that involve them in extraordinary learning experiences. Experiences that engage them as whole person –with who they are and who they might become.

All learning is based on some sort of experience but some experiential contexts are more challenging and are richer in their potential to engage people in ways that really do change them.

Immersion is a metaphorical term derived from the physical and emotional experience of being submerged in water. The expression, '*being immersed in*', is often used to describe situations that have both negative and positive connotations – they engender feelings of being overwhelmed, engulfed, submerged or stretched, but also sensations of being deeply absorbed or engaged in a situation or problem that ultimately results in the growth of the individual. Often the positive attributes of such situations only emerge after negative feelings have dominated and this is one of the reasons why people believe that the experience has transformed them. People believe that through immersive experiences they become different. And while an immersive experience might be very uncomfortable, coping with it helps develop the insights, confidence and capabilities for dealing with similar complex and uncomfortable situations in the future.

Because of these intriguing and educationally important dimensions to the idea of immersive experience, the University of Surrey believes that the idea is worth exploring with a view to creating more opportunity for such experiences within the higher education experience of students. In late 2007 and early 2008 SCEPTRe sponsored a story telling competition aimed at gaining students' views on experiences that they thought were immersive. The prize winning entries are compiled in this booklet.

The deeply personal stories reveal that immersive experience can be created by individuals when they chose to engage in a challenge or problem in an immersive way or life circumstances can create an immersive situation where an individual is compelled to engage in an immersive way: situations that they would not have chosen to have participated in.

Whatever the context and reasons, these situations and challenges are extraordinary in the demands they make for attention and intellectual, physical and emotional effort. They require individuals to engage with the situations in ways that are significantly more intense and consuming than the everyday routines of life. It is because such situations demand whole person (head, heart and hands) involvement and require people to grapple with their own emotions and recognize that they are not equipped to deal with a situation that such experiences are so rich in the potential for transforming a person and building an identity that will affect who they are in the world.

Through these stories we can begin to see the potential of immersive experiences for changing the way people see, believe and behave. We have taken the first step towards enhancing our understanding about the power of immersive experience and we will continue to facilitate discussion about their significance with a view to encouraging the spread of educational practices that encourage and support students through immersive experiences.

*Professor Norman Jackson
Director, Surrey Centre for Excellence
in Professional Training and Education*

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The doors of reality- industrial placement in Japan

Donovan Anani

"The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom;
The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction;
One law for the lion and ox is oppression" **William Blake** 1757-1827

The illustrious lure of an advanced nation, the serene landscapes, the kitty-cute novelty items are all ostensible motives for living in this peculiar Catfish Island known as Japan, or commonly referred to more traditional names such as Nippon or the land of the rising sun. I experienced a reverential feeling for the wonders of the Far East- the mere antiquity of their elaborate religions, their monumental achievements and the formidable complexities led my curiosity to forego a whole year at a placement in Japan.

My interest in the sciences has been an inexplicable and innate desire since childhood. The ability to rationalize, measure and convey taught in the pure sciences yields intangible skills in immense areas of life. Meticulous analytical skills in Chemistry has allowed me to measure any real-world situation, biology has provided me inspiration to study living organisms and physics has taught me to observe the phenomena of nature. All the sciences go hand in hand; it was my decision to pursue one field in the professional world – Chemistry. Personally, chemical discoveries always seemed to be the most profound and most credible advances in science. I wouldn't want to take away the merits of the great Physicists such as Heisenberg or Einstein, or the controversial theories of Darwin. However, just the simple deductive techniques employed by the eccentric fictional character Sherlock Holmes and vast chemical knowledge used to cause revolutions in science and medicine has always been somewhat appealing.

I am an advocate of all disciplines, both science and art. One without the other is tasteless. My recent knowledge of Bushido (Samurai) ethics has shed light on the lifestyles on the samurai warrior, which heavily incorporates the arts into their routine. This has proved to me the significance of encompassing other disciplines and experiences and demonstrates how each can complement and harmonize one another. Therefore, with a rich sense of the arts provided by my Japanese violin teacher as a child, and my accomplished ballroom dancing skills readily gave rise to a furtive interest in a new realm of arts and lifestyles.

Thus with this vague lurking attraction of mine, I undertook the challenge of a placement at one of the leading chemical companies in Japan. I am indebted to my tutors for arranging and facilitating this unique opportunity at Hitachi Chemicals. It took a while buttering my application up, with a tarnished reputation from repeated belated and brazen swaggering into the lecture theatre- Professor xxxxx was justly quite the skeptic towards my ambitions. With more to prove than merely a qualification, I was determined to show others that I was capable of such a feat.

Past experience of traveling could not prepare one for a wholly different lifestyle. Despite having lived in the Middle East and being born in London, which allowed me to explore the diverse countenances of other creeds and races in depth. I landed in Japan struck with awe and fascination- marveling at the staggering uniqueness. Comparing, absorbing plundering the streets while using the rudiments of Japanese I picked up beforehand. I was promptly chaperoned around the company on my arrival, having to deal with endless formalities while intoxicated in a jet-lagged, home-sick stupor.

I was speedily, drilled with agreements, dressed, orientated as well as 'orientalized', disciplined, taught and made to produce results at my fingertips. The towering scale of the chemical plant made me seem like an insignificant and diminutive figure among the working machines. They work differently, the work is taken very seriously and the professionalism is concrete set centuries ago. Adaptation was imperative, and my giddy feelings had to be suppressed to make a positive impression. The work is based in the research and development building, although the lab is situated at quite a distance, which means a lot of shoe removing and fork lift dodging everyday.

The work seemed challenging but the surroundings seemed dreary in rural Japan, and I tried my utmost to keep my mind occupied. The time away from western civilization and the silence provided plentiful opportunities for reflection and wishful thinking. Spare time was eagerly consumed by Japanese-learning and quests for some refreshing past-times including swimming which was incredibly therapeutic in the intolerable sticky-summer heat. As the only foreigner in the company, it was important to keep my mind and body ticking like clockwork, to avoid a distressing despondency I became accustomed to quite frequently. The food I learned to really enjoy, although dormitory food was an obligation, I soon felt slight infringements on my civil liberties among other things as I felt increasingly institutionalized.

As my tutors are fully aware, I made a number of pleas for a transfer to another placement, due to despair and alienation I experienced over the months. In retrospect, having completed almost half the placement, despite being embattled with the masters distance learning coursework, I am pleased I was so adamant about continuing the same placement in Japan. Having overcome the work so far, and making unprecedented progress in the fuel cell team, it was becoming ever more rewarding working in the forefront of fuel cell technology. With the overwhelming concern for climate change recently in the press, making significant progress in the field of producing clean energy had become an honour as well as being quite a socially redeemable achievement to present to Mr. Al Gore – if I ever meet him.

Placement in industry offers life-long skills and experiences, which is enhanced with the ongoing interaction with the academic staff. As an intern, the experience is quite intense when living abroad since the cultural as well as professional customs must be acquired in a short period of time. Interns receive continual feedback from both industrial and academic supervisors, and therefore, I find myself in a disposition to learning more effectively and independently- with the forces of motivation bombarding my every front. With no obligation to stay more than a year, the company continually expends their resources to teach and train, this ultimately makes the trainee the primary beneficiary in this arrangement. The industrial skills I've acquired have been invaluable and diverse, from handling large quantities of data, to giving presentations and merely the everyday contact with strangers was enough to spark up the innovation everyday.

Fortunately, I quickly realized that the atmosphere was not as sinister as it seemed, and my team was extremely friendly. I still cannot succumb to the sheer devotion of my colleagues, their long hours, their cooperation, their loyalty, with two of my team having been in the same position for over 40 years – I was still a budding new-born among the Veterans of the Chemical Industry. They witnessed and they produced from the sweat of their brow the foundations of the company. Since it was established in 1962 the only product was electrical

varnish, until then Hitachi Chemicals has become a hugely diverse chemical company making things from heated toilet seats to motor engines for Nissan.

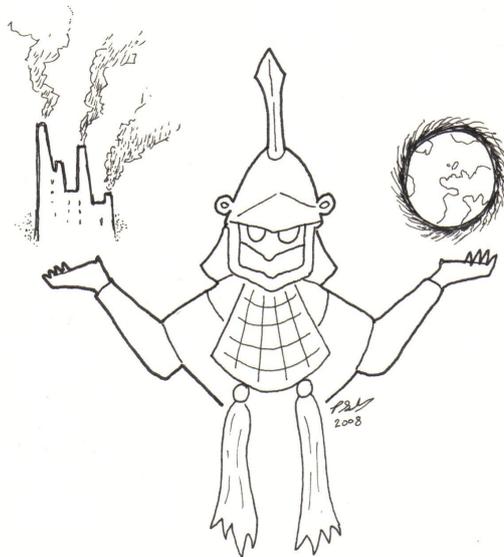
Aware of the history of the prestigious company in this distant land made conforming to all their expectations quite daunting. I soon started to fit into the career like an oversized cloak, but some formalities and the work ethic remained rather irksome for a legal alien like me. The combination of a bell in the mornings and in the afternoons with the company canteen was akin to my boarding school days; the rules were inflexible and rigid, which was unusual for a company based on innovation. But the company and employees are prosperous; therefore, there is something admirable in the contradicting compound known as a Japanese company. I just can't put my finger on it. Perhaps it's the deep-seated reverence for samurai culture which stresses obedience at all costs, or some sense of alienation after the World Wars or their ornate creed, which has its deities in nature. Whatever the social fuel, it must be bottled and exported to every nation- I'm still trying to unravel the magic in Japan.

Despite the grueling bureaucracy, learning to work here can be far more rewarding than any other company. I am working on a fuel cell project, where the prospective prototypes are becoming imminent in our lives. Some of the first fuel cells were used to power appliances on the Apollo and Gemini shuttles to space in the 1960's owing to their lower emissions and longer life. The ideas are not obsolete and are absolutely worth exploring back on Earth. The area has become increasingly competitive, with many major companies having already developed a commercially feasible direct methanol fuel cell. The role I'm employed in is to research the technical difficulties and performance of our own direct methanol fuel cells at Hitachi. This has allowed me to acquire an encyclopedic amount of knowledge concerning this technology and has enabled me to improve my dexterity to the level of a clumsy dentist- since I have botched up the stack structure a couple of times- I'm only human.

Depending on a multitude of factors, the market penetration of Direct Methanol Fuel Cells (DMFC's), which utilize methanol, as fuel is highly variable. It's likely that they may become ubiquitous in all our portable devices and it's equally likely that they may not be successful. But our concern in the R&D department is just to produce the technology and not to market it, which allows us to concentrate on the science rather than the other `science` known as business. The focus of the research is on the production of the polymer membrane within the cell, which separates the two electrodes within the cell, namely the cathode and the anode. The oxidation of methanol occurs at the anode producing protons, electrons and water, and therefore the subsequent products must travel to the other electrode. The cathode contains Platinum which catalyses a reaction between these protons forming our harmless product – water. This simplified system is obviously a lot more challenging when conducting the experiment with real-life cells. Vast arrays of difficulties are faced when constructing the cell, and even when you reach success, optimization is mandatory to remain receptive to competitors and the latest science breakthroughs. The pressing problems in this cell are the loss of fuel, since membranes are permeable to methanol. Other barriers to commercialization include the catalysis, proton conductivity of the membranes, durability, arrangement of the stack structure, gas diffusion, temperature and waste products are just some of the concerns with this newfound technology. The results are just another awaited cue to get our hands dirty again and handle huge amounts of data, which are perpetually spat out by the machines for us scientists to digest.

Living in solitude is the ultimate contrast to twenty-four-seven-hustle-bustle of University life. There were times when I thought I was mad, chewing over my life in quiet trains, labs and

offices, at times swallowed by gloom and melancholy. Well, Man is artificer of his own happiness a noble man once said- although I can't remember which one. I had to lift my spirits independently- well not entirely; my girlfriend in Florida did give me immense emotional support over the phone. But anyhow, I soon found solace in this little retreat. And from time to time, I'd embark on an adventure as quick as spontaneous combustion. My travels led me to the Golden Temple in Kyoto where I experienced its splendour and its ancient glow warming my face. I ducked and dived through the torii gates dotted around the mountainous country. I climbed the hills of Nikko and breathed the arctic air which awakened my senses; saw the sunrise like an apparition from the mist as spectrum of hope. I envisioned feudal Japan; the clang of swords and the ever-present valour of the Samurai resonated through the hills. I scaled Mount Fuji ill prepared for the foreboding tempest and had to scuttle down the volcanic ash like a demented goat accursed for his foolishness. I try to relish in the good memories and they came intermittently like buckets of ecstasy from a storm. But one must sacrifice to experience anything worthwhile these days.



Christmas story

Ian Barkataki

“You one of the staff or are you a patient here?”

Typical jokey question that almost everyone has been asked here. However, I realised as I glanced in my reflection in the window (shatter-proofed, they were always shatter-proofed) that I looked tired, dishevelled, and apart from the small white badge that distinguished me as a trainee clinical psychologist, there was almost nothing to distinguish between myself and many of the residents on Aurora ward. I have always noticed that they always give psychiatric wards names like *Aurora*, *Elysium* or *Honeysuckle*. Optimistically picturesque names given in the hope that they would elicit some comfort or succour for their troubled residence. Unfortunately, the tranquillity of the names usually failed to reflect the turbulence that lay within the ward. Staff shortages, a suspected outbreak of MRSA on the adjacent building and the chronic shortage of beds combined with the insatiable demand of those outside seeking sanctuary within gave the impression of a fortress under siege rather than a place of rehabilitation and recovery.

It was Friday morning. The last Friday before Christmas and it was at that point I realised I was “in it”, immersed, subsumed. Five days before Christmas, and my thoughts were not of smiling families exchanging gifts or carol singers, red cheeked from the cold December air. My only thought was *“How could I leave, when there was still so much to do?”*

I had been assigned to the ward about two weeks after I had arrived at the hospital. Ostensibly I was there to run a support group, provide a little one-on-one therapy for those that could make use of it, and to work with the staff in helping them. It was all good. Surrey had a proud tradition of sending its best and brightest into place where angels feared to tread. We had all arrived at the start of the year all eager and willing to get stuck in; we had been trained together for six weeks, seeing one another for almost every day. However, on arrival we had been flung to the far corners of the hospital, to work in various departments and wards where we barely saw one another apart from brief glimpses in the corridors. We had gone from the security of a cohort who knew each other, to the alienation of knowing almost nobody.

It had been okay on the ward at the start. In my exuberance to be doing hands on work, I was able to overlook the fading pale green paint, the lingering bodily smells masked with industrial detergent and the Victorian-era dormitories where eight slept to a room, sectioned off in thin white curtains. I was able to justify the lukewarm meals that were prepared off site, dispatched across London and arrived congealed. I didn't take fright at the admissions that required four burly male nurses to frogmarch someone in. You learn to accept a lot. Because you know that no matter how bad it may feel like in here, it was infinitely worse on the harsh outside. Everyday you would hear stories. Tales of squalid flats, uncaring families, grinding unyielding poverty, and those that wound up grounded on the rocks of heavy addiction. Most had the common thread of brutal isolation in an unknowing, apathetic, world.

At first I didn't realise it was getting to me. I started off as confident, resilient, the summer spent with friends and loved ones still lingering in my mind and things didn't seem so bad. It was punishing to start off with getting used to waking up at 6am, commuting with the rush, getting to work, commuting back to your room in halls and falling asleep. Rinse and repeat. At times I made the journey on autopilot, the hospital gate, the ward door, the noise of your boots on the cracked linoleum floor. The place where your bag goes, the noise of the cleaner emptying the bins outside. The only way you can tell it's a different day is by the changing date on the top left corner of your

diary. Its noble work, you tell yourself, you are doing some good. The pace of the work is relentless, and there is never enough time and there is always something more you could be doing. You don't need your boss telling you, you begin to start telling yourself. The meetings with the other trainees at university, who all seemed to be taking it in their stride. They too would talk of their amazing experiences, but in a universally positive light, which always left you with the uneasy nagging feeling that they were not going through what you were. As its late autumn/ early winter you arrive in darkness and leave in darkness. The sun is something you barely see out of the window while you are bolting down a sandwich, because your therapy group overran and you have to catch up on your process notes. I started feeling that I was almost living for the people in the ward, living around them, acting as an auxiliary to them, a supporting character in someone else's story. The endless cigarettes, the innumerable meetings and ward rounds, the names that keep cropping up repeatedly were the daily rhythm of life, making you feel that you were a part of a living soap opera. All of life was represented on the ward, sadness, joy, kindness, cruelty, and the entire raft of human experience played out in small scale under the harsh glow of white fluorescent lighting. So how could I leave for Christmas? Nothing could conceivably feel authentic or real anymore?

It was four days later. The morning of Christmas Eve. It was only after my train actually pulled away from Kings Cross I started to feel still enough to think again. I had been in a state of action and reaction for long enough, but with every mile further away from London the further I could step back and see what was happening. In many ways it was understandable that I had fallen into the traps that I had. One could read all the books in the world and spend years in the lecture hall, but the ultimate form of learning was only possible in the real world. As the countryside sped by me, I realised I had been focussing purely on what was left to do, rather than taking stock of what I had been able to accomplish. This had meant I had been constantly on the offensive, and unable to let up. Objectively, I knew that there was no way I could solve all the problems on the ward, let alone in someone's private life. It was just that it was easy to forget when you were living through the situation.

I had a fortnight off over Christmas. I was able to reconnect to my old friends, see my family and was able to do something other than practice of clinical psychology. It added further perspective and distance from the situation at work, but it also had the effect on changing the focus. For a change, I was the centre of attention, the prodigal son, who had returned after months of limited contact. I noticed I was not as tired, and had the energy to go out with friends. My social circle expanded dramatically, as people dropped by to catch up on news. Everyone I used to know was back in my hometown reunited with their respective families. As we talked, they would sometimes allude to their own "immersion", how their lives had been taken over in the post-graduation tornado of establishing themselves at work, finding places to live, and generally figuring out how to spend their life as well who to spend it with. Some had coped better than others but it was good to see it wasn't just me that was going through this on my own. Little by little, getting away from the situation also reminded me why I wanted to be doing the job that I was training to do. Despite the hardships, it was something that still interested me, and something I felt I could do well. I guess it was important to realise that in order for me to hold on.

It was with a lighter heart that I returned to work in the first week of January. When I got back to the ward things seemed different. Sure, there were still the same people, the same problems and the situation hadn't changed. However, I wasn't letting things get to me as much, and found I was able to be more patient. To be absolutely honest, I am not sure if there was anything in particular that got me through the New Year. The actual break from work was important, as was the physical distance and just being able to reconnect with my friends and family. It made me more aware of the part of me that wasn't a trainee and, while important to me, that there was more to my life than my work.

It would be entirely fair to say that I am still “immersed” in the situation, and probably will be for the rest of my working life. It may even be that the training is the way it is to get you used to the fact that it is relentless and unforgiving in the wider world, and the only way to get you used to it, is by chucking you in at the deep end. However, the gap taught me that there is a difference between being immersed in a situation and being totally overwhelmed by it and I feel I needed to learn that first hand. I guess it’s a good sign that people have stopped asking me whether I am “staff or patient” since.



Three months in Dirai

Faheem Chowdhury

When I was eighteen, in the months before my course at Surrey, I elected to spend some time back in Bangladesh volunteering in a village named Dirai. Dirai is a remote vastly under developed place with many areas only accessible via boat. I worked with an NGO named Grameen Jonokolyo Sangstad (GJKS) on projects such as the micro loan scheme (which was of added interest given my impending Economics course).

I can safely say that I was 'immersed' in this a country I had visited but never experienced in such a vein, and this a task that I had expectations of but no past familiarity. Though an excursion of only three months taken years ago, the experience amazed me and still effects me with its gift of effusive memories and wisdom.



<http://www.gjks.org>

Canto 1: The foreigner

The tainted hue of humid air
And all those eyes that resided
Under the formidably blazing sun
Had their own expectations

A foreigner no less
With foreign gestures
With foreign speak
With foreign skin

A foreigner perhaps
But of the same origin

A foreigner not a stranger
To quaint eccentricities
Of this land and its scarcity
Of its flood washed smiles
And its humble humble reality

So now here was this
A distant boy
From a far distant dawn
Stood eagerly upon the door
Awash with excitement and fear
And so much
And so much
Expectation

Canto 2: My origin

So this is where it is, this is where it begins, so here
I am
In this the place
For me to deal
Having been flown, having been driven
Having been carted along on rickshaw wheels

To find that now
Everywhere is a stranger
The beaten roads and
The sun tired buildings resemble
My familiar cities
But now I am certainly with all certainty
In contrast

My mobile has no friends in signal
The television spews incomprehensible speak
Mosquito nets, blocks of wood for curtains
Mud on floors and straw for ceiling
Water, water, water everywhere
But not on tap
Roads traversed by cars, motorbikes, cow
Electricity that has a name *lodd sheddding*¹
And is often sick or resting
Flatness, no hills
Fields like swamp across every plain
With regiments of green shoots and
The elegant laborious work
Of the farmer and his loin cloth

¹ Load Sharing. Due to a lack of power there are frequent power-cuts and low voltages of electricity in Bangladesh

And suddenly I am not
A short man but tall

I am not darker skinned
But pale

My accent isn't refined
It's awkward

In a village, in country land
In this country, another country
No less
My intellect and understanding
Is shaken
To timidity
With all this strangeness

But this is where it begins
This is where it is
So here I am
In my origin

Canto 3: The poor

With an ease and efficacy
Reality easily
Draws cosy curtains
To an ablaze light
Shining mercilessly
Into the blinded
Reflex of unknowing eyes

So Poverty
Of trauma of suffering
Poverty
Of longing of scarcity
Poverty
Of no gloss or beauty
Poverty
Of tired eyes despondent gazes
Poverty
Of birth and born again
Poverty
Of struggled homes meagre living
Poverty
Of desperation of starvation
Poverty
Of education opportunity in apparition
Poverty
Complicit of coveting crime

Poverty
Unmoved by world's of moving time
Poverty
Of insipid continuity
Poverty
Extant and in front of me

Poverty
Dearth poverty
Poverty
And I for a witness
To its reality

Canto 4: My apprehension

Now overwhelming
Distraught
Indecision
Discomfort
Disengaging
Disdain

All Overwhelming
My voice is a shaky
Shuddering
Of confidence
And control

Completely overwhelming
Undue disorientated
And astray
But what is the use
In complicit dismay
When

Overwhelmingly
I must continue
No flights from here
To take me far away
I must continue

To have been overwhelmed
And perhaps
Perhaps
To find that
Joy of hope
In what I see

To give that moment
Of kindness

To have someone overwhelmed
By me

Canto 5: The Noble King

A dangly creased loin cloth
And a wild untrimmed beard
A reluctant voice
And a retiring walk
Hardly the grace of a wise king
Teaching wisdom

Poorer, far poorer than me
And as poor as any
We had come that day to see
Hardly the state of a prosperous king
Abundant in wealth

And yet, when it was that we said
That this day, today, we could
Do nothing for him
Because there were others
Of no tube wells or roofs or food
When it was meekly explained

He replied
Of no hesitation
As if
Nothing was easier
That we must go
There were many much needier

For today he had eaten
And many days past
He had been happy
Under a passable roof
And full of heart
With one shirt and one cane
And instead he'd give
For us a prayer
For our kind care
And he lent against his stick
Content
Even though
Everything stood the same.

This graciousness and gratitude
Of no greed or grieving or frown
Was so far from anything I had ever known
From richer men or kings

Or even those
Whom I had actually relieved

So I stood aloof
In a delightful charm
And if I had the capacity
I do swear
I'd have given him
A kingdom and a crown

Canto 6: The business woman

Middle aged
Zestful
Single mother proudly
Sat intently
Listening to
Our advice

She knows
That men work and
Women feed
And yet she did not
Depend

She need not beg
Or ask
She need not have
Lending hands
Gift

For there sat Fol Begum
Amongst the horde
Of intent mothers
And modest sharees²
Proudly and not alone

All entrepreneurs
Selling little fans,
Or biscuits, or sweets
Or bric a brac
From tiny little loans

Withstanding
That sorry sentiment of
Dependency in a country
Where a woman
Barely have a voice

² Sharee: Indian sub continental dress

She works and sells
And lives of her own choice
And she runs her own home
She owes little loans³
That will be paid back
She is called a business woman after all

So she sits intently to our advice
At this business seminar
In a village mud room
Under thatch ceiling
Proudly
For ardour and independence
And capacity and courage
She doesn't lack



Canto 7: The island village

The rain and wind
Lash at the insolence
Of this little rogue ship
Negotiating water
Water and water

So that those lost
Ghosts of land
And their village dwellers
Are found by our attention
And our pretty educated hope

Though it is that living
These people manage

³ Micro Loans, loans granted (usually of less than £20) to village woman to start small business. Pioneered by the Grameen NGO

Un-needing of worlds of wealth
Or superfluous sophistication

But perhaps some seeds
Perhaps some wisdom
Perhaps some remedies
Perhaps a few kind deeds

For it is that these
Poor village dwellers
Quaint and uninstructed
Are rich
They have wealth, real wealth
Just no money

They grow their sustenance
From their land
And fish their delicacies
From the sea
They grow their children with courage
So they skinny but strong
They find their merriment
In my meagre

Remote and hardly found
Of civilisation
But it is clear to see
They are rich
In wanting but little
But a few kind deeds

As for myself
From all this I see
That I am
But a poor greed filled realisation

Canto 8: The orphans

Orphan
Perhaps no longer
Of loneliness
Or of despondent company

Orphan
Together
In this place of father
Less foundlings akin to loss

Orphan
Although

Content and surviving
Still courageously fighting

Orphan
But with chance
And fed of plain smiles
Till almost ordinary

Orphan
Of opportunity
In a place where
Tragedy appears easily

Orphan
And those unanswered for
With friends or means
Are rarely cared for

Orphan
But orphans here, perhaps no longer
Now blessed with sincere parents
Of Togetherness and Opportunity

Canto 9: The volunteer

Uncle Jamil
Who shared my surname
And let me accompany him
To share his passion

And to learn of his home village's
Plight, of its sicknesses, of its strife, of its
Drowning swim beneath oft flooded plains
Of its need of compassion

A man who knew families and dwellings
Of almost every woman
And man of Dirai that we met
A very strange sort of man

Not a politician or
A powerful merchant with an interest
But a volunteer like me
Volunteering his life

A leader leading
Little projects of great effect
With his other willing bodies
Of kind dedication

In this a small district
Where not enough is done
For people and their lives
To bequest satisfaction

Dr Jamil
Who shared his time
Consideration and considerable wisdom
With me an understated boy

He hardly knew
But was somehow impressed upon
And somehow duty bound to
As I reciprocated beholden

To his and new friends care
Having gone there a stranger
But now in an uncles village
With his shared duty

Canto 10: Able

So here I was now
Suddenly able
Having once been commanded
By inability

I had had to endeavour with a language
I that I thought I had known well enough
I had laboured with situations
I thought I had capacity to cope with

I had struggled with troubled emotion
For very long now
I got myself used to being away
From what I had known

It is hard to be sure why
Now I was able
Maybe from nothing more than
Overcoming and moving on from shock

Now each day was far easier
Maybe from learning how
To face disorientation
And to not retreat

Perhaps beholden
Maybe duty bound
Honouring commitment

And doing so

By feigning control till I believed it also
Or maybe feeling an impact
Of kindness
Upon kind needing faces

But definitely
From a genuine enchantment
With these simple but complicated
Situations which these
People lived in

Did somehow manage
To survive in
While our able smiles bought
Some succour from struggle

So here I was now
Suddenly able
Having once been commanded
By inability



Canto 11: My reflection

I had gone to add the world of
Valuable experience to my repertoire
Facetious to its challenges
Naïve to its potential on me
I had gone for use of vacant time
But with noble intention
With will and wish
To learn the trade of benefaction
And now I knew

That it was certainly a trade
An unfair trade indeed
Having gained more than given
And now I was content
In my new cliché
Of humble findings
Of appreciation
Of gratitude for my situation
For my opportunity
And for my parents
And their resolutions of me

Canto 12: Immersed

To be immersed
Is perhaps to be unable to flee
Or perhaps to be a seed planted
In harsh earth
Unakin to ease

And to need to grow from there
Withstanding tempestuous conditions
Withstanding worldly derisions
And from overwhelming challenge
Thirsting experience

And to spurt those
Novel shoots of promise
From newly gained wisdom
From newly gained appreciation
To become versed from

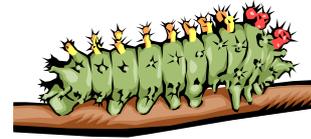
Overbearing engulfing situations
Is perhaps to be immersed



A Wall of Quantum Physics

Julia Cox

The immersion process through which a confusing or new situation is faced I feel is somewhat similar to the which a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. During development, the caterpillar is encased within a chrysalis off from the outside world. In a similar fashion the process takes a person and effectively seals them off from the rest of the world by engulfing them in a temporarily confused state. Just as the caterpillar matures into a lovely butterfly, so the person undergoing an immersion process re-emerges with a new awareness bringing an additional layer of colour to their world view. But the caterpillar only does this once in a life cycle, whereas people, if they choose to, can go through repeated immersion experiences in their life.

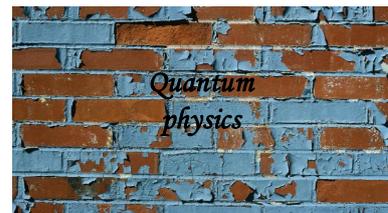


challenging process in and sealed immersion



Learning experiences in which I have found myself totally absorbed by a challenging situation have arisen not only in response to a difficult intellectual concept, but also due to new social, emotional and physical situations. A common feature of all immersive experience I have found is the **hitting of the wall**. University life has recently swamped and overwhelmed me in my largest intellectual learning experience ever, in part of which I am currently still embroiled. My wall was quantum physics.

As I see it the wall appears when a situation arises which my current level of expertise does not equip me to deal with. I walked into my wall last year, during the second year of my research PhD when I had my transfer viva. For two years I had been avoiding the complicated theoretical background to the nuclear magnetic resonance technique I was using but during my transfer viva the thin veneer of understanding I had pasted over an actual total lack of knowledge was embarrassingly peeled off. Much worse than a plaster off a hairy arm. The situation was clear to me: my level of expertise was insufficient to carry me through my thesis; I either had to tackle quantum physics head on, or walk away from the PhD.

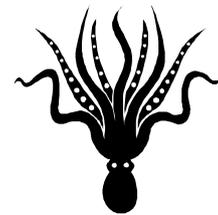


Like many other animals, I will avoid uncomfortable situations. There is a choice whether or not to tackle the wall and I guess the decision depends on how important it is to achieve the new level of expertise. I only decided to get to grips with quantum theory after it became clear it was my only option. I could have gone through life skirting this subject successfully but it would have meant abandoning my PhD. After thankfully passing my transfer viva I resolved to learn the theory so comprehensively that I would never suffer that humiliation again. I was going to tackle my wall.

So I started reading, and everything was written in this foreign language of mathematical symbols and complicated sentences. For every paragraph I read there were three or four other meanings that I then had to look up. So then I would go and look up these related topics only to find in order to understand them I needed to research several more related topics, the breadth of the problem was crushing. (How Wikipedia has come into its own during this past year). Despite the reading no actual progress seemed to be being made it was all just a jumble in my mind, literally all these nuggets of information floating around unconnected. And how was I to know I had understood any of it correctly anyway?

So I went to seek the advice of fellow students who were following a more theoretical path than I. How to feel really dumb in under 3 minutes: ask a theoretical physicist what all this wave function thingy means, or what a Hamiltonian is (still confused despite Wiki). It all seemed so obvious to him “...well you see...” followed was well meaning, but useless explanations. He was presuming more knowledge than I had and I didn’t have the heart to disappoint him. But he seemed to find it all very simple so there was hope for me; his cranium was not significantly enlarged in comparison to mine and he seemed to belong to the same species.

Back to the reading, total immersion in the topic. At all times reading, then thinking about what I had read. Taking notes...summarising. Taking a break from one area and moving to another. Comparing between different were they actually saying the same thing? A sea creature lived in with its mass of tentacles wrapped around my brain tissue. Most would lay there dormant but when I reached a difficult part it would my head would hurt. Perhaps the pain was due to a large reorganisation of the neurons in my brain. So much information gathered and all cross referenced with existing information and new incoming information.



particular authors – my brain of the time it squeeze and had to be with other

During this period of total absorption into the theory, other parts of my life went neglected. The phone rang and I felt irritated by the intrusion, email was not checked and sat and stared vacantly at the table in a restaurant with my family, there in body but my mind still with my books. Not wishing to let go of the ends of all the strings of thought that I knew meshed together somehow and scared if I started to concentrate on something else, and heaven forbid...relax...I may miss an important connection. Everywhere I looked the world was seen through a haze of theory so that I felt detached and distanced from things. But why carry on? Why keep bashing my head against the wall?

Well I had to give it a good shot before I gave up, make sure I really couldn’t do it before I walked away. In the beginning the fear of never being able to come to understand this theory or how long it would take if it was possible made me anxious. It was seeing people around me that understood these things who seemed much the same as me, that gave me hope. Very important was the support and understanding of family and friends. “Oh you can do it Julia!” Part of me felt angry as their confidence in me made me feel like I would be letting both myself and them down too if I failed – oh the pressure! But a larger part of me felt reassured; ah bless, they think I can do it. Maybe they are right?

Also there was the dim recollection of facing such difficult situations before where perseverance had paid off and I had reached an understanding in the end. For instance when I entered the new environment of the university I was out of my comfort zone and I had hit a social wall. I felt ill at ease in these social situations but knew I had to persevere to become more comfortable; it was either that or hide away. Difficult social situations can feel quite painful and I was out of my depth, quite unsure of how to behave. In order to learn I would see people who looked relaxed and try to learn from them. I would watch their way of interacting, try to put myself in their shoes and understand their perceptions. Each situation then became easier and I used them to test out my newly learnt skills to make connections and new friends and to find new better ways of doing things. I felt encouraged as things went right and no enormous social faux pas were made. Now I have little anxiety when faced with a new social environment as I know I have the tools to cope and adapt.



In the same fashion there came little moments of progress in tackling my quantum physics wall when I could understand something one day that I couldn't fathom the day before. Almost unnoticed these small advances started to be made: a paragraph read without confusion with each word of text written in a language I could understand. All those floating nuggets of information seemed to be finding homes. I visualise this as similar to the game of Tetris where the different shaped blocks have to be guided to the bottom to make layers. When a layer is made the row disappears and this is a little step forward in understanding. Of course if the layers are only part built and gaping holes are left underneath there will come a time when the structure will collapse and the holes will need to be filled before real progress can be made. The increments of progress gave me confidence, erasing enough self doubt to enable me to carry on and gradually I began to realise I may actually be able to do this. The large theoretical mallet that had been bashing my head for the past months was getting lighter and I was promising myself a holiday as soon as a chunk of progress was made.



Now lots of connections are being made daily and easily. I understand large tracts of theory and feel I am emerging from the darkness into the light of understanding! There is still much more work to do to write my thesis but my head is above water at least most of the time. I now know what it is I need to do and I don't falter when I come up against the small walls I meet. The uncertainty of ever getting through it has been replaced with determination and a trust in my ability. This process has been a rewarding one. I am much more confident in my ability to do anything, not just research and am no longer daunted by other challenges that I may face. Gone is my fear of physics and isn't mathematics a wonderful language? Like cycling to the top of a steep hill, on the way up it is painful and I look forward to the stop at the top, but when I get to the top I feel great – who needs to stop for a holiday now!

Country building in southern Sudan

Peter Curran

'Where's the city?' I asked Emmanuel, the tall Sudanese young man who met me at Juba International Airport.

'It's not really a city, more a town.' He smiled apologetically and pointed. 'You can see it over there. Those are the government buildings.'

I couldn't see much across the scrubby grassland, just a few low roofs. And the airport was not what you would call *international*, just a single building with a couple of soldiers making a big deal of stamping entry permits and passports without reading them. The bags arrived on trailer pulled by a tractor and there was a scrum of returning Sudanese, Kenyan businessmen, and sweating white development workers, all of whom had come to Juba, the capital, to help build the fledgling country of Southern Sudan.

We drove on the only stretch of tarmac in town, about half a mile, then onto dirt roads, bumping in and out of potholes, avoiding the larger ones, as people, goats, ducks, chickens, and dogs wandered across. Children played outside clusters of *tuculs* – the ubiquitous round mud-walled houses with thatched roofs – or collected water in plastic containers from standpipes. Women were selling foodstuffs, fruit and drinks from makeshift tables or open-fronted shacks. The few more established shops had Arab signs. Rubbish was strewn along the roadside spilling into river gulleys, or piled high where goats nibbled and the poor rummaged. I had worked other African countries but quickly realized this was less developed and more impoverished.

The government buildings, which were the most substantial I'd seen, were being renovated and those that had been completed looked quite smart. Not so the Ministry where I was to work: offices with warped doors, scuffed walls, bare floors, crudely hung curtains, dust everywhere, and the few pieces of furniture that existed dirty and broken. But the NGO office within the building wasn't too bad, and there I met the Programme Director, Eunice, a Kenyan committed to the project in Sudan. I had come to do some back-office work setting up a training database but, perched on the edge of one of the desks in the crowded room, I gulped as Eunice assigned me my first task; 'I need you to write a speech for the Minister.'

Daunted and desperate for a cup of coffee, I asked Musembe, another Kenyan and fellow consultant, who directed me to the Sudanese office assistant, Dorothy. Her smile was nice but her English limited and I ended up with hot milk that had been heated over a charcoal fire in a type of African *Starbucks* situated under a canvas awning outside the office. When I enquired about the toilets, Musembe said 'I'll show you,' and we went around the back of the building. There was a small bamboo structure and, on the floor inside, rocks and puddles of piss. 'If you want to do anything else,' he said, 'It's best wait until we're back at the camp.' Outside the government compound locals just dropped their trousers or lifted their skirts on the waste ground.

Before the afternoon had ended I had written the speech, which became easier once I'd found out the topic and second hand, the Minister's views. But before I could relax, I was given a further task; the Minister wanted a team building workshop with her managers the following week and I had been chosen to run it. I experienced a sinking feeling – having met some of the civil servants, I had noticed their extreme deference to authority and the way that work was passed vertically downwards, and wondered how teambuilding would be received. It was time to check the accommodation.

At the *Nile Beach Camp* I was shown my tent; at \$120 a night it was one of the best beds in town, although we were told some of the more expensive camps had upgraded to prefabricated chalets. It was of dark green canvas, securely erected and neatly aligned with a hundred or so others. I pulled my trolley-bag across the site, but its wheels, made to run smoothly over tiled airport foyers and shiny hotel floors, soon got clogged with mud so I carried it. The other residents, a mixture of Sudanese government officials for whom this was home, and Kenyan consultants who were part of the group I would be working with, nodded knowingly and invited me to join them for a *Blue Nile* beer, and to watch the satellite TV whilst the power was on. We dined in the mess tent around plastic tables; the goat that had been dragged bleating behind the staff tents was now a tasty stew and I was picking its stringy meat from my teeth. It was followed by fresh fruit imported from Kenya – people were still too scared to farm because during the war the boundaries of the town had been mined and no-one had dug them up. I debugged the tent with insecticide spray and snuggled under the mosquito net just as the generator elapsed and the single bulb faded, wishing I'd packed a torch.

It rained all night, and when I went to the toilet block at 3am, I lost one of my flip-flops in ankle deep mud as it flowed through the lines of tents down into the Nile, just twenty meters away. In the morning, as I trudged to the shower block for a cold shave, I met George, one of the Kenyan camp workers, who assured me that the rain was a blessing – I had to admit it had refreshed the air and damped down the dust.

Clambering into the back of the Toyota Land Cruiser with Musembe, who was smartly attired while I sweated in a t-shirt, I asked 'How do you keep your shoes so clean?' He told me a young boy, who probably should have been in school, came round the office and shined them for a Sudanese pound. Leaving the campsite through flooded wasteland we passed a few brick buildings, the remnants of a government training centre, now occupied by several families, the surrounding rock outcrops an impromptu toilet. The road led through a hamlet of *tuculs* and stalls by the old stadium with its disheveled white walls, and eventually to the main road. Nothing except four-wheel drives had much of a chance and we passed one stranded pick-up truck, the front wheels of which were buried with a dozen people like mud wrestlers struggling to release them.

There was a derelict cinema looking oddly out of place, and a school comprised of shabby one storey buildings without glazing, the children in simple, surprisingly clean white uniforms queuing by its Arabic sign. Churchill, the Kenyan Programme Manager who was driving, pointed out the governor's building, one of the few large buildings in Juba but in poor repair. When I asked Churchill if the *tuculs* had light, he informed me; 'No, the people only go inside to sleep and to make babies'. With the heat, a shady spot under a tree seemed to be the preferred place for conversation and family life.

Thrown around in the back as Churchill negotiated the ruts and avoided the biggest holes, I said 'Is there a Minister of Roads?'

'Yes,' he laughed, as we dipped down a bank at a muddy intersection of dirt thoroughfares, narrowly missing a goat. I added; 'I think he's got a big job'.

The Minister for whom I was working was addressed 'Your Excellency', and was a tall imposing woman whose mediation work with international agencies had prepared her well for the task of country building. She told me she needed her team to work together, get things done when she wasn't around, and collaborate with other ministries. It seemed simple enough, except for the

cultural conundrums of hierarchy I'd noticed. The workshop had grown to fifty people and we needed a decent venue.

With the Kenyans running the camps and the Northern (Arab) Sudanese the shops, I wondered about the Southern Sudanese sense of enterprise. Until I met Edwin. He wore a gold necklace and an expensive looking watch and talked, smiled and moved with the confidence. Only in his twenties, he was a Sudanese entrepreneur, from a well-connected family, bubbling with money-making ideas. We sat around a shiny metal table under a colourful umbrella sipping cold drinks on a beautifully paved patio next to his newly opened restaurant and conference facility. After what I had seen of Juba, this place, aptly named *Home and Away*, took me by surprise. Edwin told us his plans to start a bank had been momentarily set back because of a heist of his money being transported from the airport to the town, but at that point luckily still the responsibility of a Kenyan bank. Eunice and I quickly decided it would be an ideal place for the team building workshop. While we negotiated a reasonable price, Edwin had his new *Humvee* brought to a position in full view of the patio, where later that evening they would host the President of Southern Sudan.

On Sunday morning, as I walked to the Anglican Cathedral, children called out to me 'How are you?' and laughed when I took their photograph and showed them the image. The church was sturdy looking with its twin towers and had a nicely kept interior. It was full and I was warmly welcomed and invited, as a visitor, to introduce myself. After the service I met other Westerners and realized the plethora of development agencies that were here: Oxfam, Tearfund, Save the Children, various UN offices, War Child, and so on, and that they all owned Toyota Land Cruisers!

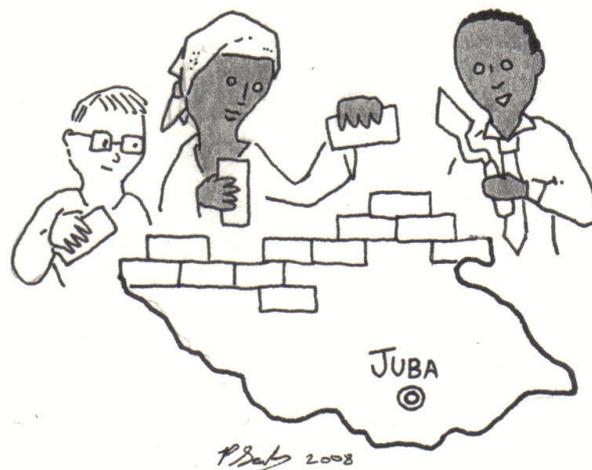
On the day of the workshop I waited nervously, wondering who would turn up since they had only been informed that morning. Everyone arrived, and they all stood when the Minister entered. They had occupied tables according to their rank and the Minister immediately asked that I mix them up. I didn't realize we should have started with prayer – Southern Sudan has a strong Christian heritage – and that corrected, the Minister invited one of the few Muslims to recite some verses from the Koran in the interests of harmony; a magnanimous gesture I thought given that they had fought the Muslim-Arab north to a stalemate over two decades. I set them a team task but they worked individually at their tables, ignoring one another. So, after deferring to the senior participants, I got them writing on post-its what they thought needed to change, which went better. Following lunch, a team game helped dispel the tension, and then a task where they *had* to work together which, after a tentative start, they actually seemed to enjoy. By the end of the afternoon I wouldn't have described them as a tight-knit team, but they had identified some actions to work on. I was a little unsure of the impact until they all came to thank me for such a fantastic day – it was the first time many of them had been asked for their views and now they knew they could work as a team.

As well as the differences of status, tribe and religion I had encountered in the workshop, I found out from talking with Sudanese at the camp of other divisions caused by the war. There were those who had stayed and fought with the SPLA (Sudan People's Liberation Army) or were part of its political wing, the SPLM, some of whom now held senior positions. Others had left to live in refugee camps in neighbouring countries such as Uganda and Kenya or, if they had money, settled in Europe or North America – the *diaspora* – resented by those who had remained, but now the most skilled. And some had collaborated with the northern Khartoum regime when Juba had been occupied as a garrison town. I met one civil service manager who had spent 22 years doing almost nothing when the town was effectively sealed off. So, with such a mix, I realized that the workshop, which could have failed spectacularly, had been more of a success than we could have hoped for. But also that I needed to tread carefully with such raw sensitivities, always involving the senior people first so as to treat their ordered hierarchy with respect.

Despite the basic facilities, I came to like the *Nile Beach Camp*, set idyllically in the shade of mango trees on a grassy bank of the Nile. The river, 200m wide at this point, was a calming influence, swiftly carrying its load of foliage and detritus from Uganda northwards through Sudan – I was told you could journey to Khartoum by steamer if you have a couple of weeks to spare – and eventually to Egypt and the Med. Next to the camp people came to bathe, some arriving noisily on motor bikes and four-wheel drives. It was quite a meeting place, despite the crocodiles and the worms that can get inside you then eat their way out. Each afternoon the long-horned cattle would take their turn, lowing as they enjoyed the cool water. Ignoring the stained concrete floor of the shower block, and the buzzy insects and fleet-footed lizards, I looked forward to my cold showers morning and evening. The staff washed and ironed our clothes, except socks and underwear that we rinsed out ourselves sitting on the septic tank. One night watching the *History Channel* describe Ancient Rome with its clean running water, hot baths and plumbed toilets, I wondered what had gone wrong in Africa two millennia later. But the comradeship of camp life, and the fact that we were doing something worthwhile made it bearable, in fact, fun.

I finished the training database and headed for the airport. It had been a challenging two weeks but I had learnt that some things, like building a country, are worth sacrificing home comforts for, as many returning Sudanese are bravely doing. A lot could have gone wrong but it didn't because of the goodwill of those I was working with, who accepted me and helped me gain an understanding of Southern Sudan's heavily layered but warm and varied culture.

Sitting in the crowded airport terminal I noticed a banner advertising the new *Sahara Hotel*: '5 stars; close to airport; close to attractions; close to perfection'. So perhaps things are looking up. Would I go back? The tickets for my next trip are already booked.



Piano lessons

Daisha Ferdinand

Piano lessons again. Oh dear. For that 5 minutes walk to Mrs Gray's house, I could think of nothing worse than sitting at the piano for half an hour. The thought of it alone made me uneasy. Especially as I'd had no practise this week. In fact, I never had any desire to practise, because it seemed that no amount of work would be enough to win Mrs Gray's praise. It's hard to believe that sitting in one place for 30 minutes could be such a traumatising experience, but I endured this frustration week after week, learning hardly anything and making little progress.

That was, until I started lessons with Mr Hawkes. I like to think of him as a saviour! Now, I know I shouldn't blame the teacher, but Mrs Gray, bless her soul, just couldn't keep my interest and enlighten me in the way that Mr Hawkes always did. He was a rather old jolly man, quite stereotypical of a piano teacher in my opinion. He was well spoken with a kind of swagger and clearly had a well-off upbringing. Coming from Edmonton, a "ghetto" area of North London, I'll admit that on first impressions he seemed a bit... stuck up. Little did I know that he'd change my perception on classical music forever.

"What do you want to play?" Mr Hawkes asked. I hesitated, slightly shocked at being asked this in our first ever lesson.

The truth was I'd never been asked this question before. Of course, I'd always known the answer, but Mrs Gray had never thought to ask. I'd asked her to teach me pieces before and she often said they were too technically demanding for the standard I was at. I'd never understood how I'd benefit from what she taught me. Besides, it was all scales and exercises with her – nothing fun.

Mr Hawkes' question was not a hard one and it may not seem significant, but it was these 6 simple words that triggered off a change in me. These words began a determination within me and filled me with burning enthusiasm. For once, learning wasn't being imposed upon me. I was given the choice of learning something that really interested and excited me. I'd always wanted to learn the piano but Mrs Gray had kept me stuck on exercises and scales for 5 years now, and I was sick of playing it safe. I wanted to be challenged.

I chose one of my favourite Mozart sonatas, one of which I'd often listened to on repeat, but only dreamed of playing myself. Mrs Gray would have never taught me something so technically intense. The mere fact that Mr Hawkes was willing to teach it to me was enough encouragement because it showed that he believed I was capable of learning the piece.

I learnt later on in life that it is of great importance to believe in yourself from the start, whether or not other people share that belief. If you believe that you can master something, you've adopted the correct mentality and you're already half way there. In the words of Manisha Ferdinand: "Begin bravely and believe, aspire greatly and achieve". My elder sister knew what she was talking about. So in the first few weeks that Mr Cooper coached me, I went from having no confidence and hardly any interest in classical piano, to someone with great passion and drive. After maybe the 2nd or 3rd lesson, I took a break for the Christmas holidays. Over that two week period, I lost myself in learning this sonata. Every day, I'd sit for hours on end, practising passages over and over again. I played until my fingers hurt and wouldn't let me continue. Through all of this practise, the piano began to make more sense to me. It suddenly became an extension of me, I saw it as a new expression and for the first time, practise was therapeutic.

There was the occasional point when I'd come to a particularly difficult passage and frustrate myself because I couldn't quite grasp the technique. Whenever this occurred, I'd take a break and come

back to it. Normally I'd master the passage when I revisited it. My explanation for this is that in order to absorb any kind of information, it's best to be relaxed. Alert and focused of course, but above all, relaxed and patient. It's easy to get frustrated when you're learning something difficult that won't come straight away.

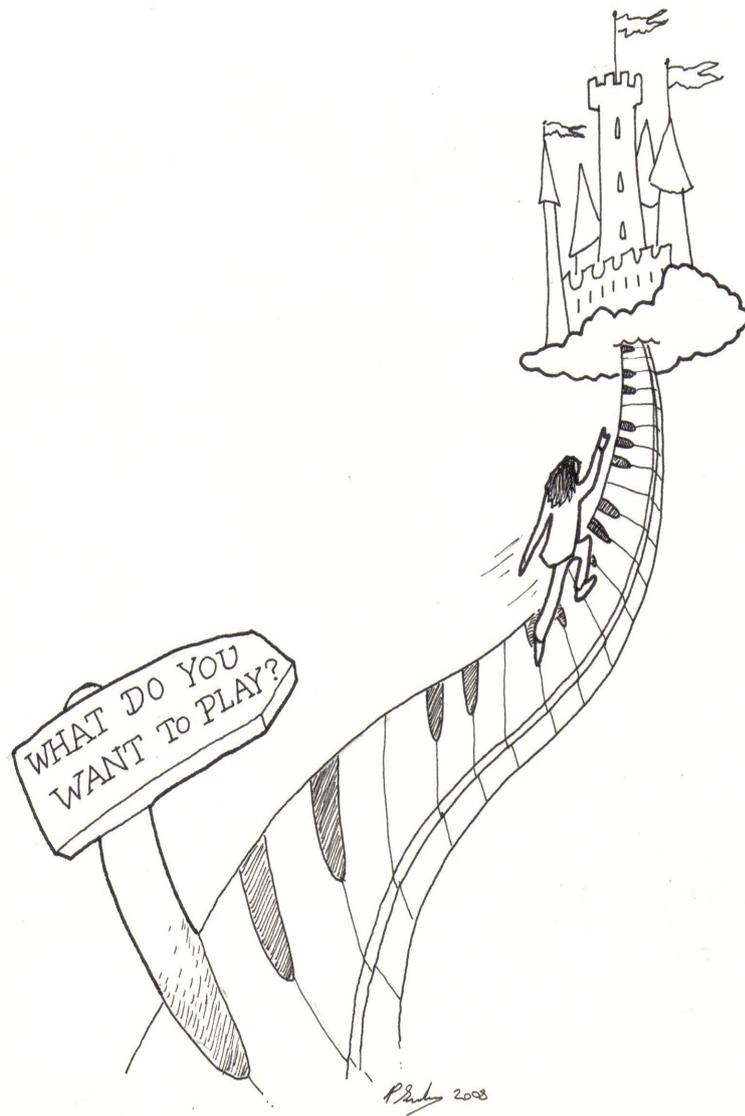
Predominantly, what kept me persevering in this situation was my passion for the music. Learning this piece had made me remember why I had initially wanted to learn the piano. The childish excitement and eagerness I'd had 5 years ago was coming back to me now. I loved this piece and mastering one bar gave me so much satisfaction. I was keen and patient in my practise sessions, always imagining the finishing result to block out the temptation of giving up when obstacles appeared. Although learning small chunks of the piece, bit by bit, I kept reminding myself of how rewarding it would be to play the full sonata. Each bar was a miniature step towards something I'd always dreamed of.

So after the Christmas holidays, my lessons with Mr Hawkes resumed. He was utterly shocked at how much progress I'd made with the little guidance he'd given me. "You did this all on your own?" he exclaimed. I've never felt so proud of myself. In the years which followed Mr Hawkes guided me through many different works for the piano, some of which I initially had little interest in learning but I kept in mind how they would benefit my technique and ability in the long run. Even when I was struggling with a demanding piece, I kept in mind the bigger picture and always remembered my love for the instrument. I think this mentality can be applied to many aspects of learning, even though I discovered it at the age of 16, participating in extracurricular activity. I have most certainly adapted it to many different aspects of life and it's responsible for the outbursts of total commitment and focus I have in particular learning situations.

I'm currently a first year music student and even though I am very passionate about it, occasionally I come across an area of study which seems extremely difficult and almost irrelevant to what I want to achieve in due course. However, I always keep in mind the many different elements needed to be a professional performer. Everything I learn is one step closer to my ambition, whether it seems relevant or not. The point I'm trying to make is that you should have the desire to learn and the belief that you can master it. It's also very important to understand why you are studying a certain subject and how it will help you with related topics. I never forget why I'm taking the course and what goals I eventually hope to reach – my ambitions are always in the back of my mind.

Since starting at the University of Surrey, I've been faced with many learning situations in which I've experienced a similar feeling of eagerness and enthusiasm. I've also become a lot more independent in my learning and I've learnt that you if your attitude is positive enough, you don't need encouragement from others. It's so very cliché but believe in yourself. It's the first step to success in any situation. That really is the best advice I could give anyone.

So I will now end this simple childhood tale by saying *thank you for reading*. Out of all the people that read this, if I've inspired YOU, just the one person to work that extra bit harder and have a little more confidence in yourself, I've achieved my goal – and there's nothing stopping you from doing the same.



Immersed in Thai culture

Ashley Gray

We had been away, my boyfriend I, for six months. We were entering a new country as we had done many times before, only this was different. A different religion, a different language, a different way of life. We organised a taxi to the hotel and were bundled into a luxurious Mercedes, which suggested to me that Bangkok was not as poverty stricken as I had believed.

I was nervous in the taxi, it was the early hours of the morning and the traffic was heavy and overwhelming. However, I had become used to the amount of traffic and plethora of mopeds on the roads in Kuala Lumpur, so luckily it didn't take me long to acclimatise to this new situation.

The first image I had of Thai culture and religion is still vivid in my head. Dotted regularly along the roadside were Buddhist shrines with gifts of food and drink left for the monks who rely solely on gifts for sustenance. Eventually, we pulled up outside a hotel on Ratchadapisek Road, which, as the week went by, we discovered to be a very warm and welcoming place.

Once we had arrived in the hotel, checking in was surprisingly easy. The staff were extremely friendly and we managed to get through the process in broken English and were shown to our room. While in the lift we exchanged greetings with the bell boy who broke our bewildered and culture-shocked silence with a traditional Thai greeting known as the wai and then reverting to a very traditional, but nonetheless hearty hand shake. We had been in Bangkok for about an hour, and were already learning the way that things should be done.

After a decent night's sleep we went to the hotel restaurant for breakfast. The hotel was clearly aimed at business men and we appeared to be the only Western tourists around, not that we minded this, it was felt liberating not to be surrounded by tourists. It was amusing when considering the lengths some Western travellers go to escape the "tourist trail" (Leonardo Di Caprio in the film "The Beach" sprang to mind) while we had managed to free ourselves of it in the middle of a corporate breakfast room! I remember feeling slightly out of place on that first morning, not because we were made to, just because we were.

Being too terrified and out of our element to leave our hotel on the first day, we spent that morning studying the Lonely Planet guidebook. It was our bible and we had bought it in Suria KLCC shopping centre situated beneath the Petronas Towers in Malaysia. We planned what we wanted to do in Bangkok for the next seven days, though once again we found ourselves rather apprehensive at the thought of leaving the comfort offered by the hotel. We did however find enough courage to go to the local shopping centres to buy some lunch and to have a look about. The surrounding area was interesting rather than beautiful. There was a large road surrounded by tall office towers, hotels and clubs. However we were pleased to discover that our hotel was very near to two metro stations which would make our excursions (when we finally found the courage) a little easier!

The next day we decided that we would jump into the metaphorical deep end and make our way across the city to see some of the famous temples. We walked down the large steps of our hotel and breathed in the air. I could feel a nervous excitement at the thought of our planned trek across the city. We would take the metro to the old part of the city and would

then walk a few miles to the temples that awaited us. After convincing my boyfriend not to stroke any of the nearby stray dogs we took our first real steps in Bangkok. We got to Huai Khwang station and spent a while working out how to get a ticket using the self service machines. We were not issued with tickets as we were expecting, but small black disks which we realized, after much observation, were to be swiped at the barriers to board the train. We took the train to the end of the line at Hualamphong station. This journey which took around 15 to 20 minutes cost us 28 Baht, which equates to a mere 48 pence sterling. The metro system was only a couple of years old then and looked fantastic and I just could not help but compare the quality and the cost to English public transport.

The direct walk to Wat Pho was around two miles, however we wanted to make a few detours, especially to Wat Traimit which houses a solid gold Buddha that weighs 5.5 tonnes. It felt awkward walking into a temple where people were praying, but tourists are a regular part of life at the temples and we were universally ignored! It was quiet and the size of the statue was overwhelming. It was strange that in a country with such poverty there was an object worth more than all I will ever earn; I realized at that moment just how important culture in general and Buddhism in particular is to the people of Bangkok.

When wandering through the serpentine streets of Bangkok, one cannot help but be surprised by what jewels may be perched around the corner. There is always something to take a photo of, or something that simply amazes you nearby. Upon turning one corner, we were greeted with an enormous Chinese gate on top of a roundabout which was completely unexpected!

Navigating our way around Bangkok was extremely confusing, though undeniably very fun. The walk was long, made longer and arduous by the high humidity; thankfully there were small shops everywhere selling drinks to keep us from drying out. We were both beginning to feel very hot and tired, and were walking along a very small path when suddenly and without warning a group of young Thai men and women threw a cold bucket of water over me and rubbed a peculiar cold, minty paste on to my face and neck. I was completely discombobulated and had no idea what to make of this strange turn of events when I realised they were all yelling 'happy new year!'. I turned around to see what was happening to my boyfriend, and was quite pleased to see that he was receiving the same treatment as me, and was half smiling and, understandably, half wondering what the hell was going on! I thought that the application of mint to my face was the end of the ritual when we were then drenched once again with water. Once around the next corner and out of the way of our festive attackers, we wiped some of the paste off and looked at our guidebook: It was Songkhran (Thai New Year). It all made sense; what a novel way of celebrating the next three hundred and sixty five days!

It felt like a blessing to have been soaked while feeling so hot and tired, but it did make our clothes quite heavy which tired us out a little more! Luckily our camera still worked though our trusty street map was partially destroyed, though as luck would have the parts covering our route had not suffered: No harm done! After our initial drenching, we noticed that there was a multitude of people wandering around with water pistols, also vans of children and adults with huge buckets of water making everyone wet. The festival, we discovered, lasted for three days, and we were certainly more prepared for it on our next few excursions!



Across a bridge we saw huge white wall running along the road: We had made it to our main destination, Wat Pho, home of the largest reclining Buddha in South East Asia. Our journey had been hard, and undeniably scary but we had prevailed by believing in ourselves and summoning up some of the courage that resides within us all. In hindsight the experience is similar to those found when beginning university: An alien environment; countless unknown faces and the necessity to be brave and get on with the task in hand. We learned at that time that if one leaves one's comfort zone, be it leaving to a new country or to a new city, with a little bravery the rewards are endless. Looking at the map we saw the miles we had walked; through slums, past stray animals and over open sewers. But when thought of in the light of the temple before us, these paled into insignificance. We could have turned back many times along the way, but we carried on, as one must when faced with challenges, and because of our persistence we had reached our goal.

The compound was huge and it took ages to find the tourists' entrance, but once inside, it was breathtaking. There were ornate little statues all over the place, large statues of guards at the gates, and of course, Buddha images everywhere. The temple was very busy with tourists gawping, locals praying, and souvenir stands selling whatever they could to whomever they could. It seemed a shame that such an amazing place had to make space for tourists but of course if it did not, we would have never even seen over the enormous surrounding wall.

We eventually found our way to the main building where the reclining Buddha was housed. I respectfully put on a long sleeved t-shirt and we went in. I was awestruck by the Buddha, it was unfathomably enormous. After I had time to take that in, I stopped and looked around me, everything was so ornate, the walls were coated with glorious pictures as were the ceilings high over head. There was so much to take in and to contemplate.

We took our time walking around the Buddha before finding ourselves at the exit of the building. We left and wondered what to do next. We found a quiet place to sit down and to watch people going about what they were doing and then noticed another section to the

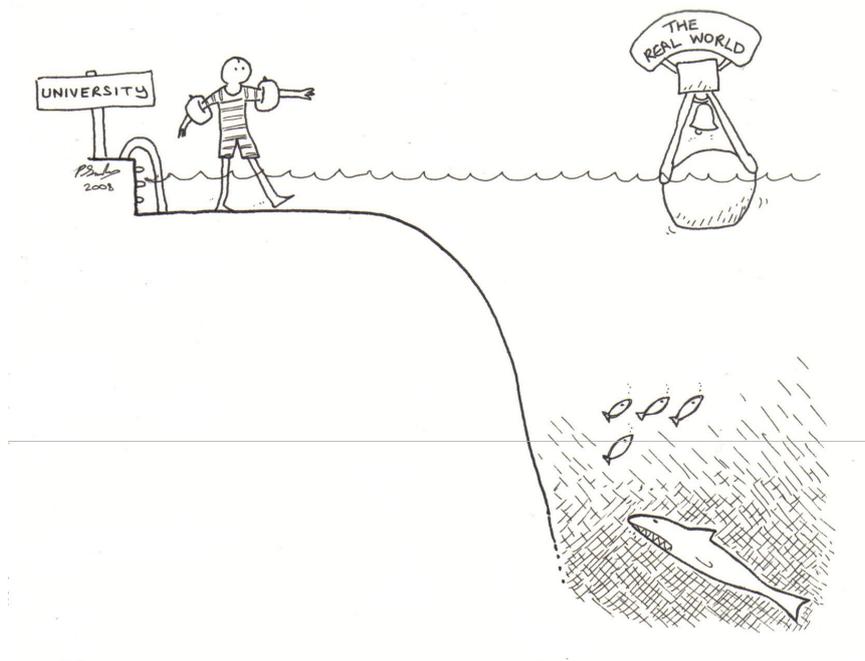
temple which we had not looked in. Walking over we found that there was no one else there and with a degree of trepidation started to explore. We soon came across hundreds of Buddha statues, some of which were gold or gold plated, others which looked extremely old and worn but all had an air of stoicism about them: They belonged there no matter what they looked like. After looking around for what seemed like a long time, more people appeared and we moved on. Although brief, that time in the quiet, away from the hustle and bustle of the main section of the temple, has stayed clearly in my memory ever since.

After that day of throwing ourselves into Thai culture (and having it thrown at us), we felt more at home and relaxed in Bangkok. I felt more at home with myself: I had taken on a challenge and succeeded with great memories to show for it. I learned that when necessary I, and all of us, have strength inside us which can carry us through. The immersion I had been through changed my perception of an immersive experience: It is not something to shy away from for fear of being overwhelmed; it is something to take step by step, as that way one can find one's way through anything, be it a crowded foreign city or a long winter semester at university.

A learning experience

Sam Gurney

I am one for which experiences in the world of work could previously never be said to engulf me or to leave me feeling submerged in an unfamiliar world. How lucky I considered myself to have never felt the pressure or stress such experiences can create. I liken the experience of further education to the experience of learning to swim. University seemed very much the shallow end of the pool, where I was pulled out of my comfort zone and required to learn some new skills to excel in a new environment. However the shallow end of the pool can never quite prepare you for the experience of leaving the shallow waters of certainty and entering a world where your feet don't quite touch the ground. I found no better preparation for moving out into the proverbial deep end of the pool than the professional placement year I completed as part of my University course, within a local infant school. I had worked in a number of part-time jobs before University as a shop assistant, kitchen assistant and care assistant over the years. These jobs I considered valuable for the monetary support they offered my decision to continue into further education. However looking back on such jobs I realise that the label of 'assistant' had followed me through my successive choices of vocation. Such a label was fine however, as long as I could continue to support my rather expensive journey through further education.



The choice of volunteering within the infant school came from a desire to help people. My previous work experience had left me behind tills, washing dishes or feeding the elderly. The latter began to show me just how wonderful it is to make a difference in people's lives. So to see the impact that education had on young children seemed like the next logical step to take. I never could have predicted how it would change my world forever.

I began as a teaching assistant (yes, there's that assistant word again) but soon began to realise how much of a difference can be made in a child's life by the adults who guide them. After just a few weeks I found I lacked the confidence to initially raise ideas within my working team. This I considered to be one of my greatest weaknesses. The need to present my ideas to eight other people in my team terrified me. In one instance after nervously presenting my ideas for a harvest assembly, the teacher I worked with inspired confidence in me just by saying what a good idea he thought it was. My creativity began to exert itself in the research for new stories for the children to enact during their assembly and creating props left me smeared in paint and with a smile on my face. I believe my initial nervousness came from feeling that I was just a student. I had never been in a circumstance where research and ideas I had written down could transform from words on a page to a wonderful show before me that the children could perform for their parents. From that point on I began to consciously contribute during meetings and was no longer held back by the thought that my lack of work experience in education would detract from my ability to make worthwhile contributions to the school.

The ability to form interpersonal relationships with all members of staff came easily to me. I enjoyed working with everyone and found myself being able to differentiate my communicative behaviour between my adult team members and the children within the class. I began to unravel the intricate workings of a child's mind and the fantastic perspectives they can bring to their own learning. This enabled me to teach concepts ever so more effectively, a skill that academic research could not have aided me in. Seeing the children grasp a mathematical concept I had taught them and then perform it independently, was magical. Observations I made of techniques to mediate difficult behaviour, enforcement of school rules, the reward systems available to children and the many ways in which different teachers taught their class left me with an extremely rich perspective. Not only was I learning the crucial skills that many students learn as part of a teaching degree but I was able to evaluate and integrate different teachers styles to form a style of my very own.

Despite volunteering I treated every job with the utmost importance and attempted to excel myself in what ever I was asked to do. I believe my willingness to do whatever was asked of me and the efficiency and enthusiasm I brought to my work was the reason the school offered me paid work in my forth month with them. From this I was given my own class for an hour and a half once a week in which I had the opportunity to help them develop their writing. Again, I had been shifted from my assistant position and handed down a great responsibility. The difficulties in managing a class independently, preparing much needed resources and planning techniques to engage the children were all experiences working as a classroom assistant would never have placed upon me. The submersion in yet another new environment began to further enrich my knowledge.

The days of reading academic materials to greater enhance my knowledge seemed far behind me. The richness of experience in the world of work began to replace the dusty books on the library shelves. My learning became through action, what worked and what did not, observations of my peers and the chance to experience many different aspects of working within the school.

I believed my short sabbatical from University would lead to the attrition of the brain cells I had been so dependent on during the two previous years. I began the final year of my undergraduate degree and to my delight was able to keep working two days a week at the school around my lecturing timetable. I found the submersion back into University akin to finding your feet in the shallow end of the pool and being able to take a breath. However the interaction between my practical learning and my theoretical knowledge of psychology began to occur. The modules I began to study reflected in my practical work. Lectures regarding special educational needs began to uncover the complexities of dyslexia and maths disabilities and led to adaptations in the way I would teach in the classroom. My new found knowledge of the development of children's drawings allowed me a window into the

children's emotions and alerted me to signs in drawings that conveyed how they were feeling. Revision left me creating real life examples in my head that eased the ability to remember key points I wanted to raise in my exam answers.

So to say that the submersion into the world of teaching wasn't a shock would not be true. However the same can be said for any new job. The integration of the academic world and the working world helps to nullify that shock. Facing your own weaknesses and pushing yourself to improve on them is a very difficult task but one of great importance. The impact that theory and practice have on learning is one of richness, where the rewards of your efforts are easily reaped. A new world need not be avoided and a new experience need not be approached with fear. Often we find ourselves better equipped than we could have imagined.

My future now seems clearer as I begin preparation for my graduate teaching programme to commence later this year. It's so important that such an overwhelming experience is not feared but approached with determination. As each new experience gradually becomes our familiar, shallow end of the pool, we must push forward towards the deep. For knowledge can never be finite and I believe submersion into new working experiences is the best way to learn. We can be safe in the knowledge that eventually we all find our feet in the deep end.

Second Life experience

Mark Holloway

I joined Second Life after seeing an article on it on the BBC news. The reasons I decided to enter the world of Second Life was first of all solely to make money (as Second Life has its own currency which makes this possible). However, after making the jump into the virtual world I discovered so much more potential, the majority of this based on communicating with others from all over the world. At first I did not find it a completely immersive experience. I was fascinated by it but it was quite complicated to use and so I found the progress of discovering things rather slow.



Once you understand how Second Life works this is when you are truly immersed in it, with so much to do you could spend the whole day exploring! The things that particularly interested me was the way that Second Life is so similar to Real life, with both good and bad sides, such as charity work and illegal activities respectively. Second Life is also the first online virtual world and trying something that has never be done before and being surprised at how well it worked with all the human functions such as communicating through speech and gestures.

Now that I am in Second Life I wanted some people I know in real life to join so that we can experience new things together. I found this a huge challenge as people were put off by the various barriers there are to become immersed in this experience. The first barrier is that Second Life looks very confusing once you first join and quite often people gave up as they could not get passed the barrier of understanding how things work. It is also quite daunting going into a new world where you are unsure what you are doing and have millions of people around you. The second barrier of being immersed in the Second Life experience is that it is hard to envisage what potential Second Life holds that actually has a constructive use.

The way I overcame these barriers first of all started with an online tutorial, taking you through the basics of Second Life. Once this was completed I was teleported into Second Life and found myself greeted by a mentor. They gave me a tour of various things you can do across Second Life including; good places to find free things for your avatar (your online character), areas with great scenery which I was amazed with how good it looked and finally they showed me various games you can play and suggestions on how to make money. Still in the frame of mind of making money, I taught myself how to buy and sell land which was relatively simple and this made a little profit but not much. I then took some free courses in Second Life to learn how to build things, which were invaluable to my immersive experience as now I am capable of building great looking objects which gives you a somewhat high level of satisfaction when it is completed, especially when others like your work and wish to purchase it.

It probably took about a week to learn all the basics of the above, and in fact one of the reasons I am still immersed in the experience is that I still learn new things every time I log in. I could have just given up in a couple of days thinking that I was wasting my time however every time I learnt something I had the desire to learn something else and so it kept going. I do sometimes worry however that it gets too addictive and that I could be spending too much of my day on there, as often I am exploring which often is not very productive as I don't always find what I am looking for which is the problem with such a large world.



Second Life has allowed me to experience new communication mediums, which I have found very useful. Once example was in fact a discussion about immersive experiences found within Second Life, which was led by members of Sheffield University and participants from around the world showing that communication within Second Life could be cheaper and more convenient with the only problem being people living in different time zones. I do believe that even communicating with virtual characters with someone at the other end has helped me improve my communication skills and it has helped me to share my opinions in a better fashion.



There were also two other occasions in my Second Life experience that increased the level of immersion felt on my part. The first one was around 3 months after I started Second Life where I ran a charity event over Christmas, aptly named "The Christmas Project". In early October 2006 I started planning the Charity Christmas event. First of all it started off with buying a huge plot of land costing £100 and a weekly charge of £10. I then started offering a service to designers where they can build things for free on my land as long as they are of a Christmas theme and that they are where I want them. Whilst this was going on I started designing

myself. I allow them to sell these designs on my land as long as they give 50% profits to the charity. A little later than I was hoping I finally found a charity that I wanted the project to be in aid of which was Children's Hospice Organisation (www.childrenshospice.org). The result of the month's events meant that I had around 1000 people visiting a day and earning around £1000 for charity which I was surprised, but very happy about. This spurred me on to do different events that were for my benefit rather than a charity.



A year on I joined the CoLab team (a Surrey University student run enterprise). After interest in Second Life from some of the SCEPTRe team I began to pioneer a project to encourage students and staff of Surrey University to join Second Life and to take part in collaborative events. As part of CoLab we needed some land to run all of our events off of. It was then my job to create CoLab Café, a suitable environment for various types of events. This was a fun build, where it allowed me to show off my skills, and gave me a full choice of how to design the café on behalf of CoLab, giving me a new level of responsibility. This responsibility motivated me to make the café as good as I can, with as

many features as I could squeeze in. I felt a high level of enjoyment showing people the café. Especially Norman Jackson who seemed very impressed with what it was like. He offered some good suggestions on how it can be improved in which I intend to implement soon. Seeing the progress of the build from day to day made me feel a real sense of achieving something, although at times it was frustrating when things didn't look quite right and I had to keep change it until I found something I was happy with.

Based on my various experiences in Second Life I have decided that the feeling of an immersive experience comes from having fun and having the need to explore further possibilities. Also there needs to be a sense of achievement otherwise you will just feel like you are wasting your time and give up. I also believe that becoming immersed in an experience also means that you have a certain level of irrational thinking which could lead to you becoming addicted to the experience. I also believe that at present I am not immersed by the Second Life experience and can control when I do things and if I want to do them. At certain points I do get immersed in the Second Life experience, usually when I discover a new location, or build something new, however this is more of a temporary feeling of immersion.



Gaining knowledge worth 250 USD/hour

Nadir Hossain

I completed my graduation in Computer Science & Engineering from Khulna University Bangladesh. I was interested to continue my postgraduate study in the same area related to my undergraduate study in a well ranked foreign University. So I started e-mail correspondence with the professors of foreign Universities. Since I was looking for a funded position, therefore I was not getting vary much positive response from the professors. One day, I received an e-mail reply from a lecturer of Multimedia University (MMU), Malaysia. He was interested to supervise me for M.Eng.Sc (by research) degree but his proposed area of research was optical amplifier, which was a completely new area for me. The Lecturer of MMU was very much interactive during his e-mail communication with me and he explained me nicely that the proposed area of research is very much prospective. Since the tuition fees for the M.Eng.Sc (by research) degree at MMU was very low and the lecturer was committed to find a fund for the proposed research project as well as proposed area of research was prospective, therefore I decided to enroll at MMU as a postgraduate student.

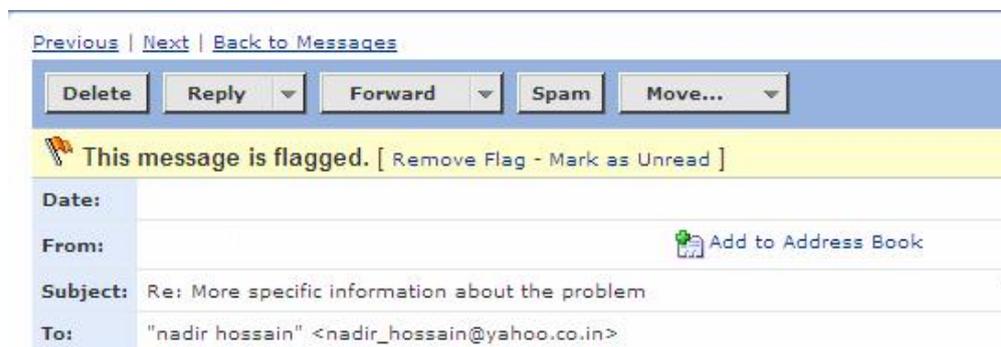
I arrived in Malaysia on the 25th July 2005 and reported to MMU. The faculty called me to sit for an interview on the 16th August 2005. The interview board asked me whether I am interested to change the proposed research topics since my previous academic background and proposed research area was different. But I was confident about my decision because my proposed supervisor motivated me early that I will be able to complete the proposed research project successfully and he will provide me full support. The interview board permitted me to register for the M.Eng.Sc (by research) program at MMU and I finished the official registration procedure on the 17th August 2005.

At the first meeting at MMU, my supervisor provided me some books and one of his recent research papers. I was trying to read his research paper but it was very difficult for me to understand. Most of the term in the research paper seems new. Therefore I stopped reading the research paper of my supervisor and started to read the basic books. At the same time I was trying to familiar with the device and equipments in the laboratories. After four months of study I found that I was able to understand the concepts related to my research area written in different research journals / papers. I collected the recent research papers related to my area and studied it. With the help of my supervisor I selected the modeling of Double pass hybrid Erbium doped fiber amplifier and distributed Raman amplifier (DP EDFA/DRA) as my research topics. After finishing the literature review on my research topics I faced the proposal defense and the board approved my research topic to continue research for M.Eng.Sc (by research) degree.

I started to face the main difficulties after my proposal defense. I was trying to model DP EDFA based on the existing single pass (SP) EDFA model. Initially I was doing the computer modeling of SP EDFA mathematical model. My supervisor provides me an existing thesis paper on SP EDFA from another University of Malaysia. The thesis paper described the computer modeling of SP EDFA and the results of the model. I was following the thesis as main guideline for the computer modeling of SP EDFA mathematical model. I found that the results obtained from the computer program in the thesis and results described in the thesis are not same. So I was little bit confused. I was trying to contact with the author of the thesis to get his help about the computer program mentioned in his thesis but he was out of Malaysia for his PhD study and I failed to trace him. Suddenly I found that the author of the thesis mentioned in his thesis that he did not write the computer program

by himself. He took the computer program from a famous professor of another popular University in Malaysia. Luckily that professor was PhD supervisor of my supervisor. So I was hopeful that my problem related to the computer modeling of SP EDFA will be solved soon. I was able to contact with the professor with the help of my supervisor. But the professor informed us that he don't know about the computer program in the thesis. I became little bit hopeless because I was following the thesis as main guideline according to the suggestions of my supervisor and the thesis became useless to me. At the same time I was also trying to solve the problem according to my own thinking but I was not getting success.

Since I already faced the proposal defense and my research topic was fixed, therefore I was bound to continue my research in the same direction. If I wanted to change the research direction then I had to start from the beginning. Therefore I was committed to solve the problem regarding the computer modeling of SP EDFA mathematical model. As a result, I started to find the alternative solution for the computer modeling of SP EDFA mathematical model. I read different new literature and communicated with the local experts in Malaysia. Everybody helped me according to their best. Though I was not getting direct help but I was inspired by their valuable suggestions. I was trying to solve the problem according to the suggestions of the experts, my supervisors as well as my own thinking but failed. Suddenly I found that a professor from one of the top ranked University of the world did the MATLAB SIMULINK program on SP EDFA mathematical model. I read the research paper of the professor and I found that he did exactly what I was looking for. I wrote an e-mail to the professor regarding my problem. The professor replied me and given me some generalized idea. Though his idea was known to me and that was not solution of my problem but I became too much hopeful after receiving his e-mail. Because I knew that the professor knows the solution of my problem and obviously I will get a guideline from him. In my second e-mail I wrote him the exact problem related to my work and I was waiting for his reply. After sending the second e-mail to the professor, the most expected things for me was the e-mail reply of that professor. Each hour I was checking the inbox of my e-mail account for his reply. Finally I got his reply and the reply was following (senders e-mail address is removed because I am not interested to disclose the name of the professor and name of the University):



After receiving the above e-mail reply from the

professor I was totally hopeless and in a dark situation. I decided to find out the reasons of

failing to solve the problem, list them and report it to my supervisor as well as to change the research direction. One of the problems related to my modeling work was to collect the intrinsic Erbium doped fiber (EDF) parameters. At the beginning of the modeling I collected the parameters from several published research papers but I failed to collect all the intrinsic parameters from a single source. In this case application engineers of a fiber manufacturer company (Fibercore Limited, UK) helped me by providing all the intrinsic EDF parameters. One day I was numerically calculating the results using the intrinsic fiber parameters by hand. Suddenly one idea came in my mind and I started to try again. This time I was successful. Finally I finished the successful modeling of hybrid DP EDFA / DRA and I finished the work completion seminar of my M.Eng.Sc (by research) degree on the 16th August 2007.

We published five journals and four conference papers on our modeling work. I presented one of my published papers in an international conference (M2USIC'06) at PJ Hilton, Malaysia on the 16th Nov, 2006. During my presentation a lecturer was present from that top ranked university as an author. He asked me questions during my presentation. After few days I received an email from the lecturer of that university regarding my work again and I sent him feedback according to my knowledge best.



P.J. 2008

The rain

Muzamil Hussain Halepota

In his richly sported dress, finely knotted tie, elegantly tied shoes and soberly worn eye-sight glasses, reclining in his chair, he was busy looking fixedly at his newly bought Rolex watch. The table was decorated with one multi-colored bouquet and some calendars and pictures; besides, there was a newspaper opened at the editorial page, some files piled over each other and some neatly set stationery. Moderately perfumed, the room brimmed with an aura of royal legacy. It was only two days earlier that he had been appointed as Assistant Commissioner at Mirpurkhas. It was his first posting after the completion of his training.

The Assistant of his office came running, "Sir, due to breach at the river bank abutting on our town jurisdiction near Digri water has engulfed the area."

"Oh, no! What do you think we can do now?" he asked the Assistant not knowing what to say. He did not expect such grim and unpleasant news though he had expected the possibility of some damage to crops due to the Monsoon rains that had just set in.

"Sir, I have asked all the relevant staff to be ready. Some of them can be sent right now, if you order; others are there to accompany us. I have also asked the Town Police Officer to send us some policemen in case we need support." The Assistant, who seemed quite seasoned in administration, tipped him off about the urgent things to be taken care of and in a way guided his boss to the actions that needed his immediate attention. Having put himself across well, the Assistant left the room.

Real, professional life experience had knocked at his door for the first time. In fact, he was a novice in the field of administration and had known only what he had been taught in the academy before joining this town, for instance the books of law, like Code of Criminal Procedure, the Evidence Act, Revenue laws, and books on Modern Management including subjects like leadership, motivation, etc. He started to guesstimate the possible losses ensuing from the flood. Since he was supposed to administer the whole town himself, he was worried about the urgent and necessary actions to be taken. His boss, the Deputy Commissioner, could not be contacted as the phone wires had been out of order. There was no mobile network coverage in the town. He felt himself cut off from the whole world. For the first time he realized how handicapped he had become. The only silver lining in these clouds of ambiguity was his Assistant. He came out of his room and ordered the driver to turn on the jeep. Followed by others, including his Assistant, he left for the area reported to have suffered the inundation.

Amidst continuous rain he reached the site in around twenty five minutes. The regional officials from other concerned departments like Irrigation, Agriculture etc. were already there. Some of the officials started apprising him of the technical problems that caused the breach and suggested some measures to tackle the prevailing situation. He was much anxious about the damming of water and besides, the peasants and agriculturists whose crops had been ravaged and the people who could be rendered homeless in the plight. He wished to volunteer some suggestions, but his suggestions were more of bookish nature, he thought. He felt that the proffers they came up with were more practical. But he did not balk at putting forth his own suggestions considering that whatever he studied should at least be drawn upon at this practical time. Initially he was quite uncomfortable with what he spoke

and what he could not, but having heard their practical suggestions he thought it was a ripe time for him to learn from their experiences.

The Deputy Commissioner, the head of the district, came after some time to be a beacon for him. The boss realized the dilemma he could undergo, so he bucked him up, but advised him to get fully engaged in the scene to give results. He convinced him it was the opportunity for him to learn. He realized that the boss was encouraging and this soothed him considerably. The boss left after quite some time. Till the river side was embanked with a dyke, he thought of entering the flooded area of the populace to interact with the affectees. He could feel the muddy water spoiling his shoes, socks, trousers, etc. up to his ankles and sometimes even coming above close to the knees. His staff was already there to organize people. There was the onward surge of an angry mob. The residents of the area were quite furious at how the river bank had a breach. They complained cantankerously. Of course it was not just a hair-trigger temper; they had suffered terribly. He had no option but to listen to their complaints without much arguing. But he had to settle his nerves, carry the ball and speak to them. "But what to speak?" he thought. The crisis communications skills he had learnt at the academy seemed unavailing especially when there was unwanted water in the fields, people's houses were filled with water, everyone standing outside the houses and he himself fully drenched in mud up to the knees. But he had to speak, so he started with whatever expressions came to him first.

All things done, he returned to his office late at night where he had to stay the coming days in his office to deal with any untoward situation. He realized he had done something, learnt something which could be difficult had he not drawn on his efforts practically. He cherished the idea of entering the muddy water, talking to the affectees, but realized he gave quite impractical suggestions to the Engineers. He also reckoned the mistakes he committed talking to the affectees especially when he exaggerated the support from the government to them. This mistake was intimated by his Assistant to him.

The next two days he passed visiting the area several times a day. He could not sleep sufficiently for these days. The food, medicines, clothes, water, tents, beds, milk, etc. used to be in one of the vehicles to be carried to those villages led by his vehicle. Now he knew the necessities of life that could be of utmost importance to human beings in such situations. He had not considered medicines to be that important but they turned out to be important and realized how epidemics or other common diseases could spread during a flood. He came to know how people felt when they were rendered homeless. He had witnessed humanity suffering at the hands of nature. The privacy of people was a tiny thing compared to the problems they were confronted with. And he felt the importance of effective communication and crisis management in such a panicky situation. He realized that though books appear useless in practical life experiences, but in fact help one at some stage which most of the times the doer himself does not comprehend. He now practically knew that theory and practice were two separate entities, but not detached from each other. Abstract knowledge is of use in the practical life, but without real life experience that theoretical framework is totally meaningless.

But these two days taxed his mind a lot. His staff did work on his specific directions, but there was need of more staff to be engaged. The police department, which had to provide policemen for emergency, was playing hide-and-seek with him. The Town Police Officer, for instance, sent some of the cops at one time and then called them back on the pretext of some emergency. His subordinate staff started advising him to strictly deal with the

policemen under his duty, so he did accordingly, but it counter-attacked. There came a time when he was left with no policemen at his service. He could realize it but remained silent though he knew everyone knew that. He felt embarrassed. In fact, it was his own mistake to have listened to his subordinate staff without perceiving that they had their own motives behind their suggestions, he thought. It was at least not an expression of leadership. Only then he realized that books helped him catch on his own weaknesses and take on the way the subordinates should be dealt with, especially the ones who did not directly come under his command. He convinced himself that whatever occurs, he has to depend on himself and do whatever his mind suggests, for dependence is a mere weakness; self-reliance is the only thing that supports man.

But before he could find some solution to this, he was informed of heavy rain that had shaken Jhuddo, an area within his jurisdiction. Having gathered his vehicles and staff he rushed towards the area immediately. When at home or with his friends he enjoyed rains and wished it rained a lot, but this time he perceived rains to be something afflictive, distressing and calamitous. The thing he considered a boon was approaching him as a doom, firstly causing the river to get overflowed, thereby causing a flood, and this time a heavy pouring that could have caused much damage to the area.

At last he reached Jhuddo after almost 40 minutes of drive. Their vehicle itself had suffered the blind and rough driving due to the darkness. Several hundred huts beside copious number of houses had been damaged causing three deaths. The residents of this area were in grave tension. Some of them criticized the district administration for not taking sufficient measures to prevent any mishap during the rainy season. Women were sitting outside their houses surrounded by children. He had already ordered his staff to set temporary camps for the victims of the rain. So he requested the residents to shift to those camps. The migration of people from their houses to these camps and the distribution of food, clothes, medicines etc. that he kept on managing were nerve taking. One moment he felt he did not know what to do in such a panicky environment, but the other moment things became clear as to what could be done. This experience taught him that there is no short cut to experience.



demands

engagement. All experiences are not alike and even similar experiences render dissimilar results. Leadership is not one thing in itself; it has shapes; it can sometimes be democratic, but can be situational as well. He visited the house where three members of a family had been killed. In the meantime a person came holding a baby who had got one of her legs

Experience
practical

amputated from below the knee. This was enough to break him down. Now the tears gushed forth in his eyes. The heavy rain, in which he stood, hid his tears from getting known to the people. He did not think of his elegant dress, costly shoes, and especially the brass ring of his career and got practically involved in the solution of problems the public suffered from. He was no more a novice in the field of administration, he felt.

Studying with love

Faith Jegede

Behind every successful man is a successful woman. Behind every successful woman, is an iron block replacing a heart – or so I was led to believe.

Love took me by surprise.

Innocently I strolled along the streets of life, carefree, yet under the strict instruction of my elders, who had so kindly mapped out the intricate details of my approaching years. Currently on First Degree Avenue, which led to Masters Lane, and onto the land of further firsts - first job, first car, first house. A path so clear cut and cemented in my thinking that no weapon, no arrow, no nuclear warhead could cause me to meander. Or so I had thought. Boldly I paced, headstrong and heart closed, subconsciously pitying the misguided mass, occasionally passing members of the unsure majority. Then it happened. As if one had sensed my inner loneliness, which I had buried so deep in my mind, along with my entire collection of romantic fantasies, stained with the stench of mistrust in the opposite sex.

Love raped me.

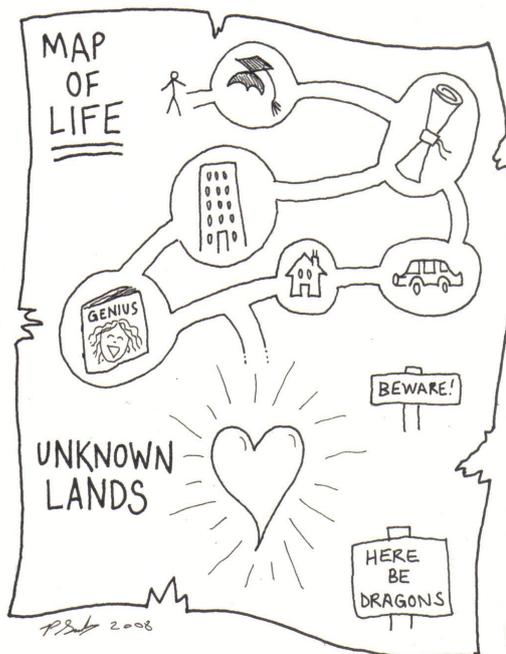
It came in the form of a five foot nine male. As a five foot ten female, my disappointment was apparent. I had always envisioned falling for a six foot something, athletically built, dark mysterious type. Yet he was as jolly as a round man, yet slender, far from mysterious, and his Colgate smile instantly illuminated his surroundings. I found myself drawn to him and his remarkable handsome face. He possessed an uncanny resemblance to a 1970s figurine with his distinctive afro and happy-go-lucky manner. Upon the possibility of meeting him my gut dropped. As he walked towards me my internal organs back flipped and somersaulted in my body. Drawing out his hand to greet me, he drooled, “Hi, my name is...”, and I was gone.

‘Love at first sight’ was one of those subjects, along with the tooth fairy and Santa Claus, that I never took seriously. How someone could instantaneously commit their heart to another person through vision alone baffled me, until now. As this afro-clad caramel male embraced my hand, I experienced a peace like no other. A conjoining of spirits, as if this moment was predestined before time, his touch leaving me curious. At this moment, my agenda was still platonic, however as he continued to introduce himself, I knew he was exceptional, and on the verge of dramatically impacting my life.

As with all times in need, I referred to the bible, an infectious habit that I had caught from my mother. In 1 Corinthians 13, it beautifully defined love. Love is patient, kind, does not envy, does not boast, is not proud, is not rude, is not self-seeking nor easily angered, keeps no record of wrongs and does not delight in evil but is truthful, hopeful, protective and never fails. With the rate of divorce ever increasing, multiple marriages being normality in today’s society, this definition of love seemed ever so impossible to achieve, and so based my satirical take on it.

From an early age, I began pondering over the idea of love, and mentally drafting out wedding plans, and how “perfect” my husband would be, and the amazing, never seen before love that we would have for each other that would endure till death do us part. I’m not alone; most children under the age of ten have imagined their future spouse. After a certain age, this imaginary figurine of the prospective man/woman in your life is replaced with either

a fictional character, or celebrity of some sort, and the fixation begins. I was somewhat convinced I was going to marry Shane from Westlife, at the age of eleven. Somehow, I was going to meet him and the age gap of eight years was not going to faze him or my parents, and he would instantly fall for me. For a while, I believed this. Then for a few years, Shane would be periodically replaced by numerous celebrity figures and older friends. Then during my early teens, the desperado years began, where I became certain that if I met anyone who vaguely resembled my model “true love” was made for me. I began to delve into the unknown, mimicking the art of romance, so skillfully acquired from the world of moviedom and literature. Nowadays the youth rely on internet articles and magazines, rather than extensive passionate novels, or even worse the lessons taught from the often exaggerated and inaccurate tales of a friend. After months of emotional entanglement, I found myself so caught up that I became sick of the repetitive “it must be love” syndrome, and at the age of seventeen decided that that chapter should be closed till way into my twenties, which my elders energetically encouraged.



Knowledge was my drug. I lived and breathed learning during my younger years, as I strived to surpass my peers and my elders’ achievements. The prospect of understanding and discovery alone excited me. On entering higher education, I had conditioned my mind to become focused and clear. I was the next best thing; my aspirations were set so high that world domination seemed like a by-product. With a troubleshoot system for every predicament, my pre-carved path of success seemed perfect and my slot on the Biography Channel was firm. However, I had not planned to fix love - in fact, I had not planned for love at all.

My friendship with the caramel beauty evolved swiftly. His perspective on life left me hungry, and I fed on every word he spooned me. Impressed with his good nature and hypnotized by his ambitions, I became addicted to his conversation. I did

not immediately assume I was falling in love, although I was. At first, I classified the experience as passing infatuation. Months went by, and I continued to nurture our ‘platonic’ relationship, although our mutual interest was evident, yet unspoken. My focus quite suddenly became divided. Spare time became ‘him’ time and I began weaving in and out of consciousness during other activities.

He had uncovered this new found femininity. Secretly I knew, I'd always been a flower, candy and dinner type. The kind that likes to receive random sticky notes, letters and all that jazz - the electronic era we live in has limited the creativity of the expressive mind to just email or text. I marvelled that I would be the one with the man standing outside my window with a boom box or a violin quartet expressing his undying love. He had exposed the classic romanticist in me. I began fantasizing about when he would sweep me off my feet and dreamed of my happily ever after. As I delved deep into my drawn out infatuation, I toyed with proclaiming my feelings, knowing that I was not ready for any form of relationship-like

experience whatsoever. I was frantically anxious to embark on this romantic endeavor that I had expected God had interlaced into my destiny somehow. I watched my friends slowly trickle into twos, publicly and proudly crossing boundaries never ventured before, I silently wondered to myself how high the pedestal of how he viewed me would reach, how low is was prepared to go to protect my honour and how much his love could truly extend.

I needed to vomit.

My thoughts had become so consumed with the possibilities and the probabilities of occurrences that had not occurred yet, that I failed to recall that I was still living in the present. My concentration had diverted severely, and upon the realization that I had become completely submerged in my sentiments I convinced myself to make a stand, and separate this zombie-like lifestyle.

My life, my career, my well-being was pending. The heavily important studying period of my life, was far from over. I had no time for this nonsensical situation, in which I had immersed myself so far in my love fool's paradise. Soon after the recognition of my seemingly delusional state, followed three words, that I had once snubbed.

'I love you,' he said.

I was silent for a while.

'I think I love you too,' I replied.

From that moment on, I found myself etching my path in a skewed manner, still heading in the same direction, yet at a different angle entirely. The driving force of the prospect of a happy life, with all my firsts, but with him, propelled me.

A successful woman in the making, immersed in love, yet willing to learn.

From where the moon got it's smile

Eve Malam



The one person I have to thank for making it financially possible for me to return to university to continue my learning was Laura; the young girl who I worked with as a nanny. But not only making it possible for me to afford to learn academically, Laura also taught me the most important things I will ever learn about life. Laura was 9 years old. She was one of twins, born 5 weeks premature. At four weeks old Laura was left with severe brain injury from a car crash that killed her twin. I began working as Laura's nanny in November of 2006, and to say I was immersed in her life is an understatement.

Laura had the most amazing blue eyes, which although they could not tell her brain what she was seeing, they were wide and alert, and could draw you in like the most beautiful and intriguing piece of art. You know the kind which each time you look, you spot something different, and it makes you love it more and more. Her smile was more contagious than the biggest yawn. Even when life seemed to be going in all of the wrong directions, this overwhelming feeling of pure hedonism engulfed you when you saw her cheeks pull and stretch out her lips to reveal her crooked teeth and raspberry pink gums. And when her dirty giggle accompanied this smile, something switched on inside you which made you forget your surroundings as you fall into her happiness. Her ability to warm you more than the woolliest, cosiest blanket was incredible. When Laura was happy, she would kick her legs. Especially when she was taken out of her wheelchair and laid on her bed on her return home from school, she would kick so hard she almost bounced herself off her air-filled mattress. Shower time would make even the end of the world seem insignificant to hear those cries of joy. And when she ate, well, to explain the pleasure you would feel when watching Laura enjoying her food is impossible. There are no words to describe the sensations inside your chest, but the fact that people in coffee shops would beg to buy her another muffin just to experience her delight all over again says it all.

Laura had an ability, like that of the moon, to pull in people like the tide, and keep them under her powerful spell, creating waves of emotion inside you that mirrored her own. She wasn't always happy. When Laura was down she would let you know. Her cry in the night would hurt you like physical pain as she could not tell you why she was so upset. All you could do was cuddle her for as long as it took to make her better. The total selflessness she provoked in me amazed me, I

never thought I would care more about someone else than myself. To love someone else's child to the extent I did- I do- makes me realise how special Laura was. I hate to use the word 'special'. It does my opinion of her no justice. Wonderful. Amazing. Extraordinary. These are all just words, waves of ink on a page in different formations which attempt to represent the qualities of a person. But these qualities cannot be expressed in words, not to the extent which Laura deserves. Only the feelings inside will truly do her justice. And as there are no words to describe them, and so frustratingly they can never be wholly communicated and shared.

On 8th June 2007, Laura was getting ready for school with one of her other nannies. She became unconscious, something switched out her light, purloined her sparkle, and she was rushed to hospital. It could have been a number of things, her epilepsy, the shunt in her brain, maybe her breakfast went down the wrong way, who knows? Standing in that hospital room, I wanted to run, get out of her life because it hurt too much. I didn't want to face it anymore. But I stayed. Like the water in the ocean; it can't choose its direction, it just gets pulled by the tide in the same direction as the other waves.

We couldn't believe she made it through the weekend, especially past the 10th which was the anniversary of Amy's death. But she had to. I wasn't ready to let her go, not yet, not have her stolen away from my life which she reigned over. Laura was a fighter. Seeing her the way she was, not always crying and even managing to crack a smile through those struggled breaths humbled me and gave me strength. She was diagnosed with pneumonia, and within a few days was retrieved to an intensive care unit miles away in London. None of us thought twice about the tiresome, endless journeys back and forth to see our precious girl. Nights there weren't easy. The worry through all of the brain surgeries, the endless waiting for her to wake up, the tears on our cheeks, were taking their toll on us all. 'All' being her loving father and nannies, the closest non-biological family there is. She was moved on to the normal ward eventually, then back to the local hospital. She was improving, but there were no kicks, her little legs had no energy in them. Her beautiful long brown hair had to be cut, and the speech and language therapist said it was no longer safe to feed her orally as she could not swallow properly. Her smiles temporarily healed our upset. It became our mask. It had a magical ability to unblock the lump in your throat, and sometimes the only way not to be upset was to be with her. Then her little feet began to move a little, and she was improving slightly, but each time we almost got her home, when the shore was in sight, the tide would pull her back, and she would relapse.

She was back in intensive care. At every opportunity we could steal, every precious moment was spent telling her how much we loved her, and how amazing she was. Always feeling though that the words just weren't enough, no matter how much they were repeated, no matter how many kisses and cuddles accompanied them, it just wasn't enough. Much like the swells of the ocean, everyone had up and down days. We helped each other keep sailing on, sometimes feeling there was no way we were going to stay afloat. But capsize we could not.

Finally the day came. I heard the dreaded word 'palliative'. There was nothing more we could do. She was going to die. As her protectors we felt we had let her down. Why when she needed us most were we helpless? Surely doctors should be able to fix her? How can this happen to a child, to Laura? Answers to these questions I will never know. Maybe one day things will become clearer. We decided she needed to be at home, with the people who loved her most and away from all the machinery and uniforms. For the first few days at home people would not believe she was so poorly, she was like her old self. She spoiled us with all of the pleasures we were so used to, all of those four long months ago.

On 7th October Laura Jane passed away. All of the people whose lives felt they could not function without her were there, holding her hands and reassuring her, as she took her final few breaths, and was reunited with her twin sister.

Laura did not ever experience the pleasure of conversation, of walking, running, reading a good book, looking at a beautiful view, choosing her own clothes, making her own food, yet her happiness was overwhelming. The feeling of the wind ruffling in her hair, the sun on her face, the sound of the rain on the conservatory roof, the cupboards slamming in the kitchen, having chocolate buttons on her tongue, or the feeling of being tickled on her neck was enough. The pure emotion displayed by this amazing young girl has taught me to appreciate everything in life and in the world. I drive along a country lane, appreciate the trees, the music on the radio, the ability to sing along, to be able to climb out of the car myself, everything; the small things which we don't often appreciate being blessed with. When things go wrong, like losing my mobile phone, having no money, putting on a few pounds, struggling with an essay, needing new brakes, tyres and exhaust all in one go... I take a step back and remember how lucky I am. These small hiccups are only a tiny part of the big world in which we live. Remembering to remember the important things is a skill Laura has taught me that I hope I will never lose. I realise the importance of appreciating those who you love, telling them so, and making the most of the time and memories you share. I try to pass on this perspective to others, and teach them some of the amazing lessons that Laura has taught me.

During the difficult times, and even now, I realised that sharing my emotions and upset help take away some of the pain, whereas before I used to bottle it up. Making sense of why Laura couldn't survive any longer also helped. Someone actually said to me that maybe because she had fought for so long, all her life pretty much, that she'd just had enough. That helped me accept her decision to leave us, as I don't want her to be struggling or fighting if she doesn't want to anymore. This then raised lots of questions about what happens after life. I have begun to explore what I believe. I used to be cynical and think that death was just a big sleep, but now I don't want to believe that, as I want to look forward to possibly seeing Laura again. And she can't simply be gone. That, I am sure of.



This is the most intense learning experience I have ever been involved in. Never have I been more immersed in any situation. I believe in any situation, you learn if there is some sort of love involved. If you love the subject you are studying, or the area in which you are writing an essay, or even the environment you are learning in, then you will succeed in learning. Saturated, tangled, absorbed, engrossed; you don't have a choice, the tide takes over you and pulls you in until you are truly immersed.

Laura Jane and her bunny

The rollercoaster you never want to get on

Stuart Muller

I knew I was taking on a lot of work when the semester began. I'm studying part-time for an MA and working part-time too. Instead of doing two modules, I decided to do three because they seemed really good and wasn't drawn to the ones the following semester. I also knew there would be substantially more paid work to do next semester. I'm really interested in being a journalist and decided to become the news editor of the student newspaper and radio station. I had a lot on my plate but I planned far in advance so things were manageable and I knew I'd have an intensive couple of months but things would ease off next semester. Once I handed in my first three essays I knew I was half way there. I booked a ten day holiday to France and Italy before I had to get on with the next three essays. However, no amount of planning could prepare me for what was to happen next.

My Dad told me he was having pains when he eats, which was putting him off his food – for my Dad this was serious – he loves his food. After going to the doctors and hospital, he was told he had a growth around his stomach area. He had to have an operation with two possible outcomes. One, they could remove the tumour. Second, if the tumour had spread, it couldn't be removed, which would be critical. I didn't even think about the second option. Dad wanted the operation as soon as possible. He was in pain, turning jaundice and losing his appetite. The not knowing was psychologically killing him.

I re-scheduled my holiday and spent my time looking after Dad and trying to get on with my essays. I was under a lot of pressure – there were the essays, work, the radio, and of course Dad. When term ended there was no radio work. I was largely positive because I felt everything would be fine. The day for Dad's operation came and I was at work because they said he will be in intensive care all day so I won't be able to see him. I was in a meeting when I received the phone call from my Uncle. I found a quiet space and he told me how the operation went. He said the cancer had spread. They couldn't remove the tumour. I managed to stay strong. I went back to my meeting, said my apologies and went to phone my sister. It was then that it hit me, I couldn't keep it in, I started crying, trying to tell my sister; she immediately burst into tears and started screaming. I said hopefully they can prolong his life for years and years, who knows. We need to take one step at a time. We needed to tell our younger sister too and she said she would tell her face-to-face. But as soon as that conversation ended my younger sister called. I didn't know what to do. I thought it better to wait so I didn't answer the call, she phoned again and I didn't answer it. I phoned my Uncle to ask him what to do and he said he told her. I was in a daze, in a state, in a spin. I was worried about my essays so I went to the library and got some books out to take them with me.

Just before I got to the hospital I was told not to tell my Dad how the operation went. I went to the intensive care unit and they allowed me in to see him. The nurse confirmed what my Uncle said – he has cancer of the pancreas. Dad looked asleep but the nurse said I should go over to him. As I got there his eyes opened. The first thing he said was how did it go? I didn't know what to say or do. I said I'm not sure how it went. He said but didn't your Uncle tell you. I said let me ask him - that was my get out clause. I left the intensive care unit and phoned my Uncle. He said tell him, if you can. I went back in and told him. He said that means I only have two or three years to live. I said you don't know that for sure, you need to speak to the cancer expert first. He said I know. I looked it up and the doctor said. He said don't worry, we'll fight it. My sister came into the intensive care unit. She was so strong. She

was positive and optimistic. I went outside to see my other sister and together we hugged each other and cried. My Uncle and Aunt were pillars of strength too. The strength, help and support I received from my family, my amazing family, was invaluable. I went back in to see my Dad, and somehow, as best as someone can after a five hour operation, he was reciting Churchill proclaiming he was going to fight it on the beaches, the sea and the air.

The next day the surgeon came in and confirmed to Dad that he hadn't been able to remove the tumour, it spread and he had two or three years to live. Once I heard that my heart dropped - it was confirmed. My Dad, who, until a few weeks ago was fit and healthy, running about, loving life, suddenly had only two-three years to live. My Dad's main concern was quality of life and the surgeon confirmed he should get his appetite back and be able to travel – for Dad this was good news. I was just blown back by his positive attitude. It gave me strength. The next couple of weeks Dad was in hospital recovering from the operation where he made a slow but steady recovery. Throughout this time everyone in the family all supported each other, staying positive and strong, as was Dad. They knew about my situation with the essays and told me to tell my boss and lecturers.

My boss was supportive and one of my lecturers got back to me straight away and told me not to worry about the essay and it was no problem to have an extension. It was really hard having to deal with what my Dad was going through plus the added pressure of the essays. I tried to get back to studying but it was hard to concentrate. I was trying to find out as much about my Dad's illness as possible and to see if there was a magic cure that hadn't been discovered. The trips to the hospital meant it was hard to sit down and concentrate on my essays but my Dad told me to get on with my studies. When Dad didn't want visitors because he was tired and in pain I managed to have my first full day of studying. The essay was actually a useful distraction at times. It meant I could focus my mind on other things.

When Dad came I went to his house to look after him. However, this wasn't easy. He didn't want to eat, which meant he wasn't sleeping or getting stronger to fight the cancer. When he did eat he ate too much, too quickly or the wrong food and felt sick, which put him off eating even more. Meanwhile, I went back to uni for a day to finish off one of the essays. What a relief it was, one down, two to go. My Uncle from Israel came over and we had a big family meal together. Dad ate more at that meal than in the last month. My Aunty was so happy she gave my Dad two week's supply of food. I left Dad again to go to uni to finish essay number two. He was in good spirits when I left him so I was relatively happy. As the deadline came I managed to hand in two essays - only one to go.

When I went home Dad was in an awful state. He wasn't eating or sleeping properly. He was getting weaker and weaker. I had to ask for another extension for my essay to look after him. I was really fortunate my lecturer was understanding and he said it wasn't a problem. That enabled me to worry a little less but it was still hanging over my head and was a stress I wanted to get rid of sooner rather than later. Dad was due to have the chemotherapy in a few days but he just didn't seem like he was in the shape to have it. He called for a doctor and she suggested he goes back into hospital. I went to see him the next day and after five minutes with me, he wanted me to go – he was too weak – he just wanted the chemotherapy, he thought it was his panacea. I went back to uni to try and get on with my final essay knowing I was only days away from getting this extra stress off me. I received updates from my Aunty and Uncle who told me he's weak but the doctors and nurses will get him out of the hospital in the next couple of days.

I was about to start writing my final essay, when my Aunty called. She said he's really unwell and I better come to hospital straight away. He was really weak when I saw him and shouting in Hebrew, his mother tongue, telling me to get out. He could no longer speak in English. The doctors said it was because he was in so much pain and confused. The nurse told us he was rapidly deteriorating. When my other sister arrived and heard the news she broke down saying "I can't live without him, I can't live without him." The doctor gave a slightly better prognosis but not much better. Dad stabilised and they did a scan on him. They said a perforation in his abdomen was causing the problem. They needed to put a needle into his lung and abdomen to drain all the shit out of him. There were complications because his blood was too thin to have the needle in his abdomen so they had to postpone it. It was a risky procedure but luckily it went well. The next day he was able to say a few words and the day after he was able to speak in English again. He's very weak but he's back from the dead. I asked my lecturer for another extension and he said I could have an extra three weeks. It was such a relief he was so understanding - but I just wanted to get it done.

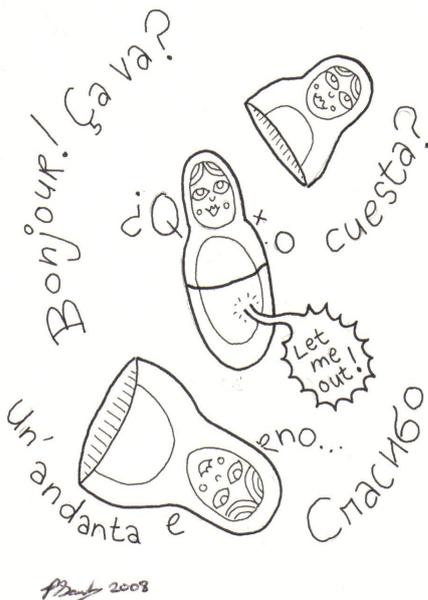
As I write this story, trying to finish off the essay, trying to write the news, worried about work, Dad's still in hospital. Things are better now - Dad will be out of hospital in the next few days and that will be one less stress. Writing this has been a brilliantly cathartic experience, enabling me to relive the last few weeks - it made me cry but I guess that helps. I've learnt I have an even more amazing family than I knew I had. And my friends have been invaluable support. I've learnt to cry, to feel pain, to juggle, to balance the important things, to get a better understanding of the more important things in life, and of course, though it's a cliché, it's still true - just how precious life is. This experience has made me realise that no matter what the pressures are it's essential to talk to people about them, that it's important to put things in perspective - I was stressed about the essay but all that really mattered was Dad and my family - that's what's really important.



The diving dell and the degree

Alexandra Ormerod

To be absorbed, engrossed, occupied, engaged, preoccupied, involved, engulfed, lost in: the Oxford thesaurus gives a gamut of synonyms for *immersion*. To be immersed is presented as a positive experience -which it is - but it avoids any of the 'drowning not waving' moments which are inevitably part of the process. As a mature student, returning to study after twenty years, my experience of the BA Combined Languages at Surrey was not so much a brief dip in a plunge pool, as a swimming the channel epic. Rekindling two languages and launching into another two ab initio required a degree of focus and some measure of cussed determination. For my experience to be worthwhile, I had to do far more than dip my toe in the water; it felt more like white water rafting where frequent capsizing and inexorable movement forwards were all part of the ride. Habituating the brain to so many different languages, second nature to many children, felt like new pathways were being constructed through a rather dusty medium! The task involved patterns of thought, of sound, of perspective and often led to a cacophony of sound bites from different languages emerging unexpectedly day and night. Rather than a gentle basting with language this was a full-on linguistic broiling. French, Spanish and Russian coupled with the 'languages for all' Italian programme made for a kaleidoscope of language with all the overlap and confusion this entailed: friends asked why I opted for such cursory study of so many languages when it might have made more sense to master one properly. The tackling of territory that was personally uncharted was all part of my experience of being immersed in learning; I could have kept within my comfort zone of knowledge or ability but in broadening the remit the engagement became greater. Learning languages provided direct access to other cultures where these suddenly appeared in glorious technicolour after an extended period of monochrome.



I have described the whole four years as being a period of immersion; there were inevitably periods within this, fitting within one another like successively smaller Russian dolls, where my level of involvement was particularly intense. One of the draw-backs of a modular system, with many modules limited to one semester, is that the opportunity to burrow deep into an area of study is stunted by time and exam pressures. In contrast, I found that researching and writing for my dissertation was a period of protracted immersion, painful at times, but fulfilling and worth the corneal 'screen burn' from hours glaring at a lap-top. My area of study genuinely fascinated me and developed out of one of the course's modular topics. Boring into dissertation research and mining for information that related to my area of interest was like throwing a net out to a vast shoal of fish and then examining their gills through a microscope. In fact the experience of academic study is akin to looking through a microscope, where attention to detail and heightened perception are integral to the process.

But saturation in study, albeit fruitful and rewarding, can lead to imbalances in life. I found there were times when I was looking at life too often through one end of a telescope and that it was necessary to turn it around in order to appreciate the bigger picture. There were times when other aspects of life became peripheral and when it would have been more healthy and helpful to family, friends and no doubt to myself to have taken a step back from the

brain-burn and to have punctuated this period with more 'decompression' and down-time. Catching up on education in later life brings a 'do or die' mentality, where there is an avid need to make up for lost time, and where levels of absorption, as a result, are profound. There were times, also, where this level of absorption inevitably resulted in an implosion, and exhaustion and panic ensued. I was fortunate to be given good advice and support by the university and consistent family back-up (despite their wry amusement at my obscure linguistic interests and despair at episodes of maternal disengagement). The support of a personal tutor who was also my dissertation supervisor was invaluable and her response to one of my more anxious e-mails read, 'Whatever you do don't panic – all will be alright' and was characteristic of her calm and encouraging approach. Life runs in tandem with academic studies and just as the latter impacts on the former, so do life events arise and disrupt the flow of university studies. Bereavement and illness made study seem superficial and irrelevant and I had to work hard to re-submerge myself in studies: like a child hampered by armbands who strives to swim under water. The university counselling service was a confidential catalyst for regaining focus and for seeing through the project to completion. And then there were the usual suspects - bite-size chunks, realism, rewards, perspective, motivation, diet, exercise, the glib advice I have given my own children weary from exam pressure. Glib, but helpful. One basic mistake I made was to become so involved in the momentum of the mind, especially during the final year, that my body became static and creaked like the tin man. It is easy to forget that body and mind are interlinked and that the brain functions better with judicious doses of fresh air and movement; mine certainly does.

And why did I see it through to completion? Stubbornness, an 'I've started so I'll finish' mind-set, university fees, job prospects, pride, determination. I also wondered what sort of role model I would be for my own children if I opted out when the going got tough as my daughters were all engaged to varying extents in academic hurdles of their own. All these factors contributed to my staying the course. But above all it was the pleasure of learning, the total absorption in areas of interest, to the exclusion of all other thought which was the most motivating factor. Meditation in reverse, where instead of emptying, you are actively filling the mind-tank and making improbable connections. It doesn't matter that these have been made by a thousand students before you, what matters is that *you* have realised them for the first time. To be immersed is supremely creative – and to be creative you have to be utterly immersed. There are no half measures. It is a transforming process. It is what learning is about and it is the greatest stimulus to deep and sustained study.

Childbirth, the study of literature, playing the cello, acute illness, creative writing – these have all been situations where intense focus and energy have resulted in an experience of being immersed. They have been the moments that have made life less ordinary and which have given insight into our condition. They are (apart from illness!) supremely fulfilling and demand a retreat from the periphery and concentration on the core of the task. They are both a discipline and a pleasure. My learning experiences at Surrey University provided many such situations and the rewards, both concrete and intangible, have been great. I am currently mid-way through an MA programme at Surrey and hope the immersion tactics I have learned at university can be translated to other areas of work and interest in the future.

Finding me

Manmit Rahis

The word 'immersed' can mean going through various emotions, searching deeper for answers to questions such as 'what', 'why' and 'when'. My experience is a reflection of these questions that has allowed me to truly understand who I am.

I have been a student at the University of Surrey since September 2004. My years leading up to this, involved searching, questioning and understanding education, but not myself, as I never truly had the opportunity to immerse in finding more about me as a person than merely the identity of a student. This opportunity came as part of my degree programme which included participation in a placement year.

My placement year began at a company called 'Quantum tm', who are involved in providing marketing and sales services to many of the well-known companies such as IBM. It was this very catch phrase that caught the student's attention inside me and resulted in the year of experience for that I am now so thankful. It was not until a few months of the placement had passed by, that I realised something: my identity as a student was no longer prominent in defining my contribution. I was an individual, working within a firm, whose actions defined every success or failure that was to come.

During my placement year, I was selected to take part in the, 'Future Stars Leadership Programme' an initiative started by the company's Managing Director. The programme was an 11 week, off the job course, with the primary aim of bringing learnt theory into practice. The set up of the course included weekly board room meetings, with the chosen 14 participants and the company's Business Excellence Team. We were informed that through discussions, reports, and group work (that would take place at every session), individual's effort, and achievements would be scored. The person with the highest score at the end of the course would win a company weekend trip.

The first week started and with all the excitement, I remember going into the board room wondering what I had let myself into. As the weeks progressed, the work got more demanding and time consuming. Our weekly assignments meant that a lot of preparation had to be done outside working hours and with our own initiative to develop. I have been told at times, that I embrace a very competitive soul, that it takes a mind of its own when I am in a competitive environment. I had, therefore, decided prior to accepting a place, that this programme would have to mean more than just winning in terms of scores, I had to accomplish something else, like; my presentation skills, working with strong personalities and so on.

Although I knew what I had decided, the programme started and things remained the same. Every one of us was encouraged to bring the best that we could to the table, to fight for the scores, to show we had it. Before I knew it, my entire focus was on just those scores, until I sat with my team leader to understand why this learning felt so empty. It was like every week I was taking on board new knowledge, a way of implementing it practically and yet it didn't feel important or of value. I guess the answer was pretty obvious; I had not opened up completely to what this experience could do for me. My conversation with my team leader, made at least one thing clear to me, this programme now had a different direction and a different goal that I needed to achieve. Moreover, it would be for personal reasons, for self

identification. My goal was no longer to reach the maximum scores, but to take that something away from each session that I knew made me better in one way or another.

From then onwards, I felt as if with every step I took, I was able to better understand myself, my motives and what really affected me in life. My work was the centre of what I did nothing else mattered. The experience of being so involved in a situation, where the concept of time and effort were no longer quantifiable aspects, made me feel happy yet left me slightly confused. It's like a rush of some sort, where you don't have enough time to stand and reflect on what is happening or what you are going to do. On the other hand, you have to be calm and collected, if you are going to remain focused. One could say it's like a marathon, a slow marathon, where there is a clear finish point, a struggle in the journey and a phase where you cut off from everything else except the race that you are in.

I guess if you do compare it to a marathon, then there are always seconds in the minds of those who participate, wondering if they truly have what it takes to succeed. I went through that too, times when I didn't want to be a part of the programme anymore, when it got a bit too much to handle. However, what astonished me was how this experience was making me feel. As much as I wanted to stop, like the person running, I couldn't. I just couldn't quit, I couldn't disengage myself and leave. I don't think that I still know why I just couldn't do that, maybe a sub-conscious belief system or maybe the feeling that you get so involved in something, that the way out is just not an option. Instead, your mind keeps thinking, how to make things better, how to reach your goal successfully, and then when you do, there is this strong positive feeling that you get.

An example of this is times when I was leaving the office at 11pm at night, and yet, instead of feeling tired, I had a sense of self power. I had never been so involved in an aspect of work, that I lost all perspective of everything else. My focus, determination, and engagement with the work were as such that my actions and my being were to ensure that I reached my goals, without giving up. This is when I realised something that I didn't know before, I realised how much any work I took part in, meant to me. A disappointment or failure at work affected me on an emotional level as well; it would knock my self confidence down and increase any doubts I had in terms of my abilities to succeed.

The challenge helped me to not only grow in terms of developing myself professionally but on a personal level, there were a number of changes. Having been through the experience, I was able to have a clearer perspective of differentiating between aspects such as criticism of work versus criticism of oneself, what winning is or can mean to different people and the best lesson of all, improvement happens when you engage.

Once the programme finished, I made sure I knew what I learned wasn't a waste. I liked how the experience made me feel, I had this sense of accomplishment that I wanted again, however, I knew that some changes would be necessary. I had to come up with a way of letting myself be engaged in experiences, but also having the ability to exercise control over it. The line which dictated when being involved crossed over to the experience taking precedence over everything else. Since then I have been working to implement this control and though it is working, it will be a long time before the art is mastered, unfortunately.

To me, being immersed means getting lost in something that you value, to the point where you lose all other focus. The emotions are endless; you go through stress, a feeling of being uncomfortable and not in control when things get difficult. At the same time, any positive

success or accomplishment brings pride, self belief and a feeling of empowerment. It affects you emotionally, physically (draining and tiring) and intellectually.

If I was to compare all what being 'immersed' means to me, and say when else I have experienced it, then I guess it's during the last few days before every exam, assignment and project has its deadline. It does not mean that I am not involved beforehand; just that the involvement is so heightened during this, there is no separation between the work, and me.



Jung and the PhD: on being immersed and emerging

Cécile Rozuel

To a large extent, the three to four years spent doing a PhD *are* an immersive experience by themselves. When the boldly enthusiastic new researcher I was back then stepped into what would become my research office for the coming years, I was emphatically impressed by the studious atmosphere that reigned in the room. This was it, and here the ‘magic’ of inspiration and hard work would happen and produce a thesis. Yet, although I let the excitement and pride of the future achievement fill me in, a certain anxiety kept bugging me, reminding me that the path towards the completion of an awardable thesis ought not to be so straightforward. But the first few weeks didn’t seem the best time to fall into introspection, and after all, I liked challenges – that’s why I went in for a PhD in the first place.

I started to explore the fields of literature that were supposed to inform my research and help me define my research question. Those phrases I had been welcomed with kept crossing my mind – ‘significant contribution to knowledge’, ‘expert in your own field’ – strange how some sentences can be stimulating and upsetting at the same time. But at that stage, I tried to ignore the pressure and instead focused on learning as much as I could about the literature and the threads of research that seemed promising. I scanned a lot of Business Ethics books and journal articles, and touched a few other disciplines, from philosophy to behavioural studies, some which were estranged to me, some of which I simply did not understand – but none of them made me feel passionate. So I began to feel anxious, and what I wrote at that time is a collection of summaries with no trace of a sound, articulated argument. From a dare-daring child who first discovers the ocean and runs to plunge into the sea, I had become a desperate swimmer who’s afraid of drowning and can’t seem to reach the safety of the shore.

I spent the first part of my second year wondering if I’d ever find the way out of the PhD – even considering that maybe the best way out of the PhD was to leave without the PhD. Yet, isn’t it silly to quit just because I didn’t seem to locate the finish line and thus figure out my itinerary to reach it? So it is, I thought, and I then started to reconsider my strategy. I was looking for something that would make sense to me, stir up my curiosity and constitute a manageable and interesting topic on which to write my thesis. No problem. So far, I had proceeded in a fairly logical way, starting up with my supervisors’ suggestions and expanding by cross-referencing my readings. Since this didn’t seem to get me where I was due to be, I decided to adopt a more spontaneous approach. In fact, I listed the basic questions I wanted to enquire about, and I tried to feel them instead of just thinking about them. Okay, you can’t literally ‘feel’ questions; what I mean is that I tried to perceive what it evoked for me personally, and to let my emotional response add substance to my purely intellectual reflections. This was a time when my brain was the locus of many internal debates and soliloquies, many repetitive but some enlightening.

After three months, I began to feel I was getting somewhere as I could sense my enthusiasm grow. And not just my enthusiasm, but my dedication, which had suffered a setback, was growing too. My first incursions out of the traditional literature I had been exploring so far proved unsuccessful in that it didn’t make sense as a whole when confronted with what I had already gathered. But then, I came across the works of Carl Gustav Jung, and I immersed myself into his thoughts.

Now, there are, in my experience, several degrees of immersion. I have been immersed in my PhD from the very beginning in that I confronted everything I read, listened to, watched, thought or found out, to my research topic. I nourished my reflection with every single bit of information I could find or that came to me incidentally. This was a conscious effort, in so far as I was trying to spot an interesting and uncommon way to approach the issue I wanted to examine. Indeed, experience had taught me that sometimes good ideas spring from free-association and mind-wandering. But I soon realised that my mind was constantly mulling over my research, no matter what I was doing or what I was thinking in the first place. I just could not stop cogitating upon my research. Yet, the ideas that emerged from that rather intense brain-activity were either very general or anecdotal. This was because I was swimming in the ocean without a real purpose except to see what was in the ocean. Consequently, my quest was set to be never-ending, because it was not bounded by anything *per se*.

It has been different with my Jungian immersion – or should I say obsession? I believe that these two words can describe my experience. I was so happy to have found a piece of literature that made sense to me, was coherent with my research and the rest of the literature, and yet was something apparently new to my field of research. I became convinced – or maybe I convinced myself – that I had finally found ‘it’, that framework around which to articulate my research question and build the whole thesis. I started to read his writings with confident eagerness, and I highlighted each sentence which I found illuminating – so well that soon the books were coloured with post-it markers on each single page. But that did not matter, because it really made me discover things I wouldn’t have else discovered.

Not being a psychologist, it was not easy to understand some theories or technicalities. I was also supposed to apply some of his propositions to a clearly non-clinical setting, and this required some careful thinking. But when you are immersed, you just trust that you will manage, that you will succeed, that you will achieve. I was no longer lost in the ocean. I was still small and ignorant, but I had a clearly defined target, and my path was marked out. I felt I could dive further in confidence because it just would make sense. Of course, at times, I could not help a sense of panic when I faced the vastness of what remained to be learnt; however, that feeling was quickly discarded by the amazement I experienced for Jung’s ideas, insights and influence on modern times. It was almost as if that immersion into Jungian ideas had boosted my faith in my PhD research. Yes, I was progressing fine. Yes, I was on the way to provide a significant contribution to knowledge. Yes, it was all worth the efforts and the pain. And yes, I had found an incredible source of knowledge that could foster my reflections for the years to come. So I thought.

Being immersed in Jung did not come without drawbacks. Academically, the risk is that you lack distance to ‘critically evaluate’ the resource. Indeed, little by little, as your knowledge develop, you begin to see the world through that lens, and that lens only. I thus began to analyse the world in a Jungian way (or to be more accurate, in my Jungian way!), searching for archetypes, identifying shadow projections in human relations and trying to connect to that state of wholeness that was held to be the ultimate life achievement. Furthermore, I noticed how often Jung’s name appeared in my daily life: in newspapers, as a quote in a fantasy novel, even in TV adverts. It was as if I was connected to the proper frequency and everything coincided to confirm that I was on the right track. But I did not handle criticism and scepticism well. To me, Jung had something to teach us and it was important to try and apply some of his ideas in the field I was researching – full stop. I just could not question in

great details the theories that I was using to direct my enquiry. It's not that I was blind and gullible to whatever was presented as Jungian. Rather, I was convinced that something was worth being explored on that level and I would not give up until I had found it; so in the meantime, I became a true disciple in order to grasp the essence of the theories and eventually master the concepts enough to apply them efficiently. On reflection, I believe this was necessary to write the thesis; but at the time, it just was the obvious thing to do.

On a (slightly) lighter note, being immersed may cost you socially. I noticed after a couple of months that I was seriously alienating my friends and entourage by getting back to Jung in everything we were discussing. Excerpt:

“ ...

- *Have you heard the news about such friend who still has that irritating habit?*
- Well, you know what? Jung would say that if we are irritated by his habit, it's because we project this habit onto him. In fact, we are annoyed by an aspect of ourselves we are unconscious of, but that we project onto others.
- *Sure, it's not good to criticize. But anyway, the point is I met him earlier today and while I was talking to him he kept doing it, and I was really really irritated by that.*
- Well, according to Jung, we are essentially dual and we should try to integrate our dark side with our good side in order to reach the state of wholeness. If you are angry, you also create negative energy for yourself and that's not good.
- *Yeah, maybe...oh, look at that cloud – that's a really unusual form, isn't it?*
- Yes, it looks a bit like a mandala. You know, Jung considered mandalas were a symbolic representation of the self archetype, that lead to wholeness.
- *Okay – can you stop now?!?”*



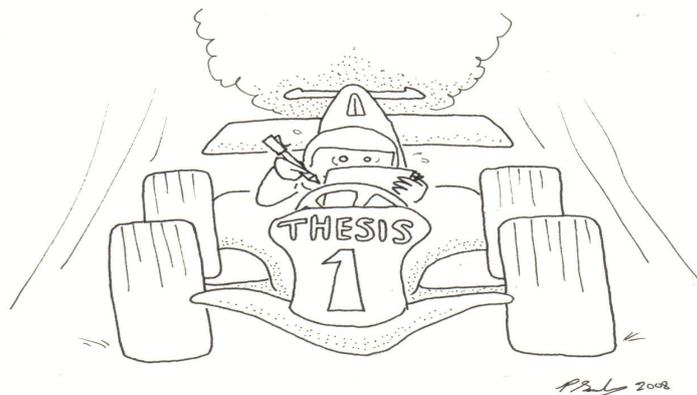
The most intriguing part of the phenomenon is that you don't even realise you are so obsessed with it you keep talking about it, again and again. What's the cure, doctor? Let live. Little by little, I emerged back into the world 'as it is' and I regained my critical mind. Strangely enough, it was as if it had been rejuvenated by that immersion. My thoughts were

both more assertive and more moderate, balanced. I could put Jungian ideas in perspective and remain assured in my choice of framework. I could confidently let the data speak and tell what they wanted to tell, accepting that maybe they would not tell me anything Jungian. What mattered was that I had come to a workable, coherent framework around which to articulate my clearly formulated research question – and that's what is essentially required from PhD candidates.

As I am finalising my thesis, I already know this was all worthwhile. I am grateful for what I learnt, both from Jung and his followers, and from the many authors I read but with whom I did not catch on. I thoroughly enjoyed being immersed because it allowed me to ask questions I would not have dared to ask, about my research and about myself. I was lucky to be surrounded with patient friends who bore with me despite my obsessive discussions, and I appreciated their hints to bring me back to a more balanced reality. This certainly helped me emerge and rediscover Jung from a healthy distance. I cannot promise I won't do it again for I am naturally passionate, and passion leads to immersion. But I know more about the process and maybe will I be able to speed up the recovery stage. Not too much, though – the magic of the discovery must remain...

In which we learn that driving a formula one car is not the same as writing a thesis

Catherine Slater



Over the Christmas holidays there was a documentary on ITV4 called 'Life behind Lewis', a documentary following the Formula One season of Super Aguri driver Anthony Davidson, the title just a cunning ruse to make all Hamilton fans tune in. Well, it worked. Joey sat there, listening to Davidson talk about Hamilton's first ever Formula One crash, a smash into the tyre barrier at the unforgiving Ste Devote corner in Monaco. Davidson was the first one to see Hamilton as he climbed unharmed out of the car. Joey heard Davidson describe the concentration and mental involvement of an F1 driver, and the feeling of crashing a Formula One car when the driver, until the moment of impact at one with the machine, is catapulted viciously and unceremoniously back out into the real world, where people don't drive *that* fast and where the car reverts to being just a piece of machinery, no longer a part of the driver's being. The timing of listening to Davidson's description of the car being an intrinsic extension of the driver's being was not lost on Joey. Only the day before she had complained to her mum that she no longer felt wholly connected to the work that she was doing and that there were always other things intruding into her thoughts when she was supposed to be working. That's what she wanted: to feel as though the work is an essential part of you, who you are and what you are made of. She felt a bit silly making the analogy between driving a Formula One car and writing up her thesis, but the principle of giving yourself entirely over to the job at hand was the same (albeit with fewer safety concerns – writing a thesis can lead to a huge number of paper cuts).

Joey panicked: she hadn't felt that feeling of being engrossed, whole-heartedly and whole-mindedly, in a long time. There was always something else praying on her mind, particularly this term, when buying a flat and moving in had sapped every last bit of energy. Rather a stupid plan to try and move in the final year of her PhD, but that was all very well with hindsight. It wasn't just the time spent painting or waiting in for furniture deliveries or phoning utility companies that had distracted her, but also the feeling when she was trying to work that there would be a hundred other things to get sorted out when she got home and that the piles of stuff and still-packed boxes would drive her slowly insane. Instead of being engrossed in her work when she arrived at the office, her days were spent arguing about the non-delivery of goods and arranging viewings of her old flat. Perhaps she could have understood the feeling of never being wholly given over to her work if it had just happened during this one term. But it was ongoing.

It was her mum that had hit the nail on the head: working on a thesis for three years is not the same as working for an undergraduate degree, or even a Masters. As an undergraduate, Joey had worked hard. She was able to close the door to her room, sit at her desk and get on with her reading, writing or revising in peace. And when it was finished, it was finished – there were friends to see, evenings out, no other responsibilities to worry about. Even as a Masters student Joey planned her work in manageable chunks, focusing on one piece of work at a time, in the knowledge that when it was finished she could tick it off her list and move on to the next thing, whether that was work or play. She worked in intense bursts, feeling really captivated by what she was reading or doing, and with the joy of learning that she had grown up with. When the work was done, she left her desk with a feeling of liberation and satisfaction, knowing that her mind had been completely focused on what needed to be achieved.

Now, though, Joey was struggling to keep her mind on one thing at a time: no longer mentally gripped by the piece of work she was doing, but always with part of her mind whirring away on some other plane, thinking about jobs that needed doing in the flat, emails that needed replies and always the lure of the internet, sitting there like one of Bad Idea Bears from *Avenue Q*, two innocent-looking bears who do their best to distract the main character in the musical from fulfilling his true purpose in life.

Then there was her teaching, taking time and energy to prepare the classes, as well as marking, setting exam papers and going to meetings. Joey loved her teaching but it didn't half take up a lot of time. And more than that, it wasn't just the time, but the constant awareness in her mind that she needed to get the marking done, that she needed to find a text for next week, that there was still more research she needed to do for a class. All these thoughts invaded her mind, all demanding attention at the same time. Joey was scared because even her usual and well-honed organisational skills weren't helping this time. Even armed with a list and a schedule of what she was going to do during the week, somehow all the jobs that were unrelated to her thesis took priority, until she had reached the point that her thesis was something she did when she had some spare time.

All these things were conspiring against her, preventing her from that feeling of being at one with her work, to the exclusion of all other demands on her time. But then her mum – who, as we shall see, is the heroine of the story – pointed out that her life had changed, that she now had other responsibilities to family, to her home, to her students, which weren't there before. It was inevitable that she would struggle to focus solely on one thing at a time. Instead of being immersed in a positive way – that sensation when you are so engaged in what you are doing that you don't look at the clock ticking away, that you don't notice people coming in and out of the room – she was now experiencing that dreadful sinking, drowning feeling which comes with fear.

Joey knew she needed to pull herself out of this feeling of drowning and to do this, she had to learn to accept the differences between what she was working on now, at the time she was at in her life, and everything that had come before. Of course there were little adjustments she could make to try and regain a semblance of that feeling of being engrossed in her work, such as turning off her email and accepting that if she didn't reply within five minutes of receipt the world wouldn't fall apart, and trying to stick more rigidly to her weekly work plans, so that she would not only stop worrying about finding time to get everything done, but would also have the satisfaction of ticking off work she had completed. But the main thing Joey had to learn was that the nature of the goal she was aiming for had changed: it was no longer short pieces of work completed during set periods when she was at her desk, but an ongoing, constant immersion – obsession, almost - like a flame lit under a slow-cooker, with thoughts continuously bubbling away in the background. She needed to take into account the time she spent thinking about how to structure her next chapter when she was doing

the washing up. The time she spent making links between different scholars' work when she was doing the long drive up to her sister's in Sheffield. The time she was so busy thinking about how to open a section of her thesis that she squeezed face wash onto her toothbrush instead of her toothpaste. It was all this time that counted towards being absorbed by her work that needed to be counted, not just the time spent in the office.

Doing her thesis, Joey realised, was more like driving a normal road car than a Formula One car: slow and steady rather than all-out speed. It was a different kind of immersion, of being in control of something, that she needed firstly to learn and secondly to accept. It might not be as much fun, but it was certainly more likely to lead to the checkered flag.

Steep learning curve

Jonathan A. Stewart

The year was 1996, and I, a fresh, bright-eyed, bushy-tailed A level student took what many described at the time as a rather profound leap of faith, that would not only impact on my chances of university entrance but also on my life. For that autumn I would be embarking upon, it was hoped, a degree in Anatomy and Cell Biology at the University of Edinburgh, but what preceded that planned journey of educational discovery was quite unlike anything I had ever contemplated before.

June of that year was a rather balmy month, and a month that heralded something new for the then 22-year-old fresh from sitting examinations at the city's further education college! In fact, that entire summer was a sultry, humid affair and one that will remain branded upon my grey matter until the day I depart this Earth.

The 'experience' commenced no sooner I had sat the final exam, and the day in question began as most did that summer, with a bright sunrise and vapour trails traversing the blue morning sky. The car ride averaged a solid 30 minutes during which time my focus was 'elsewhere' and seemingly not on the idle chit-chat my mother was offering to ease my jangling nerves. The destination had soon been reached after negotiating the plethora of traffic calming measures randomly located en route, and they did nothing but frustrate both passenger and driver, and heighten the sense of trepidation of the former. As the car slowed to a gradual halt, I was overwhelmed with the magnitude of what I was about to undertake. The building that stood before me was bland, both in palette and architecture and the air of foreboding lingered intensely. At that moment, I broke into a cold sweat, felt overcome with a burning urge to expel my breakfast, but the calming and reassuring look and touch of my mother's hand allayed those acute feelings of stress.

In the near distance a suited figure stood waiting patiently amid the stillness of day. He was a portly character, short in stature but with a personality that outmatched his frame or height. A confident man in every sense of the word, he was my contact, the one who would effect change on huge scale, and someone I owe a great deal of gratitude and appreciation to. After the customary kiss goodbye and yet another look of reassurance, I stepped out to greet this fine fellow and take my 'leap of faith'.

At this juncture it is worth noting that my purpose for being at this 'place' was to learn, and learn I did. It was an experience that was, as I later found out, never repeated to this day, and one I feel very privileged to have been exposed to. It was what many would say as 'hands-on' work, and I won't deceive you, it was.

The man looked pleased, taking his right hand from his trouser pocket to formally greet me. The handshake was firm and measured, and his introductory tone was inviting and warm. Soon the conversation turned to my purpose for wanting to do what it was I had arranged to see and do, and he seemed pleased by the answers I gave to his casual questions. In themselves, the questions were not at all probing, and at one point a digression broke the flow to talk about the local football team's performance the previous season, and how best the management should tackle the forthcoming fixtures. After a short walk down a slight gradient 'under' the building itself, we arrived at a large chrome door covering beneath an outcropping of grey masonry. He pushed the doorbell that had a very grating sound about it, and soon voices from within became clearly audible. The door opened outwards, and I took a couple of paces back. There stood like a colossus was a tall, silver-haired man dressed from neck to ankle in grey linen overalls whose first words spoken in a

mid-west American accent were: 'Hello Colin!', the name of my contact and the arranger of this rendezvous. I walked through the door into a compact world akin to a rabbit warren: a central foyer with an array of tributaries leading off into unfamiliar territories. Before long the foyer became a hive of activity, as many more overalled men converged upon the epicentre of much chatter between myself, Colin and the tall American, whose name was Ken, and who hailed originally from El Paso, Texas. It was he whom I became good friends with during my time there, not least because he was simply a 'funny and smart guy'.

Incidentally, Colin was a high-ranking boffin who oversaw the work of Ken and others, and someone who pulled no punches. Back in the Eighties, people who dressed in Colin's attire would be classed as 'yuppies', and on a couple of occasions the name Gordon Gecko, that ruthless Wall Street tycoon, was mentioned in reference to Colin.

The 'warren' was resonating with the sound of intermittent bursts of sawing coming from the adjacent room. Like any curious person in a foreign land, my eyes began surveying the landscape and what I saw from the foyer was sobering: to my left was a rather capacious area devoid of any artefact but for a hydraulic trolley, and enclosed by a sliding door, though bearing quite a sizeable population of 49 people; to my right was a pokey cupboard of miscellany, comprising largely plastic containers of various sizes and cleaning implements of one kind or another; and directly ahead was the office, too small for more than 2 persons and not at all inviting even for those whose job it was to administer the premises and its business.

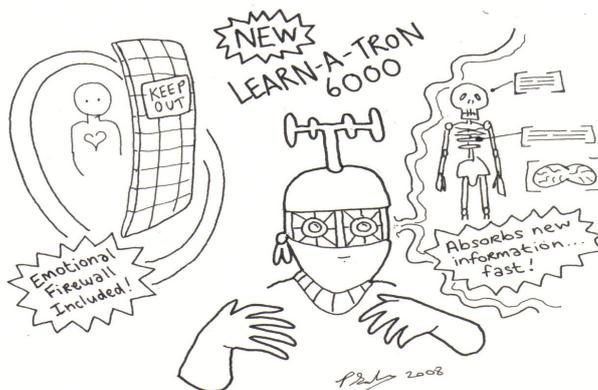
After receiving my instructions to 'get some greys' I followed the sound of the power tool through the shoe box of an office into yet another confined space where I changed into more suitable garb. As I removed the garments of formality: the polished shoes and suit jacket, I gazed in somewhat disbelief at the sight that awaited me through the door leading to the source of the noise. The last item of clothing that would confer 'worker' status, the white shoes, was soon exchanged for a white pair of rubber boots. In the distance I was met with what I had only seen on television or on the glossy pages of American textbooks, and it was a marvel and a treat rolled into one.

The room was laced with a strange odour that was sweet but tinged with unpleasantness; the ceiling was high and busy with many a bizarre and intricate looking piece of engineering that gave a very eerie feel to the place; at ground level white tiles adorned every nook and cranny, but dominating the field of vision were huge hulks of chrome blocks, five in total, all lined up in single file. The periphery was awash with yet more metal, and the significance of these cold areas became apparent instantly.

The masked man wielding the saw glanced towards me, still crouched in the 'sawing' position, and flanked by two heavily robed onlookers standing to his right with their arms firmly folded. He did not utter a word and proceeded to resume sawing, so I began walking towards him, all the while casting my eyes over the activity of the room in particular on what the masked man was doing that made such a shriek. What lay before me was breath-taking, for the block of chrome was a table and on that table lay the remains of a woman, disembowelled and riddled with the ravages of trauma. There she lay, naked, an empty husk, the contents of her torso overflowing in bowls of stainless steel poised unceremoniously between her legs awaiting examination. She was not recognisable owing to her face being obscured by her scalp that had been reflected to facilitate the opening of her skull and hence removal of her brain. The smell was unpleasant but in no way nauseating. In staring in amazement at how structurally vivid and polychromatic we really are I found myself contrasting that sight with the anatomical illustrations that I had come to know and learn from my textbook. It was a very enlightening and momentous event, but seeing is no match for touching. After a short wait, it revealed itself: the brain, in all its splendour and mysticism. So beautiful a thing

and yet still so misunderstood and complex, it was added to the collection of organs and taken to the examination bench at the margin of the room. The onlookers soon departed after bearing witness to the dissection of this unfortunate soul, and thereafter I found myself alone with the deceased road traffic accident victim, whose vehicle ploughed headlong into a tree at speed.

I stood transfixed on her disfigured body, so battered and bruised, and yet I couldn't help but be taken aback by what I had come to learn months earlier in college. I kept wondering why I hadn't 'kissed the tiles' as they call it when first time visitors to this place of death, the mortuary, pass out by the sights and smells, and then it dawned on me why I was still bipedal: I viewed everything in a purely educational context, not as some Victorian circus freak show spectacle where curiosity was the driving force behind my being there. That case was just 'the tip of the iceberg' for no matter how sobering a 'Baptism of Fire' it served to be, one thing was true and palpable: the de-sensitisation of my very being, for over the coming weeks I would be exposed to a vast spectrum of horrors that inevitably 'changed' who I was and what I stood for. The experience was unquestionably a rollercoaster ride in terms of the very gritty nature of what I was seeing and the degree of 'impact' the learning had upon me, but it was also a time in which friendships were being forged and fresh perspectives being considered, and all amid an environment of morbidity and monotony. I found myself resolute in the face of often harrowing and challenging situations, but after a short time the 'changed' side of me prevailed and I assumed the behaviour of an automaton, not consciously thinking about a great deal as if a protective function had overridden my mind, but nevertheless one that permitted my continued receptiveness to the wealth of information I appeared to avidly absorb like a sponge.



It is a fair summation to state that I was learning even without realising it: a kind of 'osmotic' effect for want of a better expression, and this prevailed from start to finish. The experience had to be seen in that light, for the absence of attachment and emotion was wholly natural yet something I tried, nevertheless, to fathom on a couple of occasions. I did not those know people so I felt nothing, as strange as that may sound to some people. I did, however, feel a great sense of sorrow for their bereaved, and for the young who were so untimely taken.

In conclusion, my mandate for being there was well defined and ultimately achieved, and that was to learn human anatomy as a prelude to a university course. However, the irony of the experience soon appeared toward its conclusion, for I no longer wished to labour over learning the intricacies of Man given what I had been exposed to, so I looked elsewhere for an inspirational path to follow. Hence forth I embarked on a very different journey...into the field of microbiology!

Ecuador: learning to belong

Freddie Sumption

I remember the first time I felt the fear. Cruising at 10,000 feet, I had contentedly frittered away the last 10 hours with a mix of sleep, chocolate brazil nuts and a Spanish phrase book. I felt as if I were going on holiday. Then the announcement came. 'Ladies and gentlemen,' said the captain in a confident home counties accent, 'we will shortly be arriving in Quito...' My stomach did an involuntary twirl as I took in the words. Quito – my home for the foreseeable future.

Two months ago I had come across a job advertisement for an editor to set up and edit a new online travel guide to Ecuador, based in Quito. I had been happy in my job as the deputy editor of a travel magazine in London, where I had worked since graduating two years before. But it was time for a change, and this looked enticing. I emailed the company director my CV, and he called me straight back and asked me to come into the office for an interview. I explained that I was in London. We talked for a while longer. "Listen", he said, "I can't offer you a job over the phone. It's a tough project and we all need to be sure that the four of us can work together as a team. But from what I've heard so far I think you've got a good chance." So here I was, hurtling at 500mph towards a city where I had no job, no home, no friends and no language skills. Or to put a more positive spin on it, a year of extreme challenges and opportunities.

I looked out of the window as we descended bumpily through thick cloud which shook the plane and lashed the windows with rain. As we snaked through the mountains, the city came gradually into view; mile upon mile of grey and white blocks lining the bottom of a deep mountainous valley, some scattered on the hillsides as though they were trying to crawl out. It looked hostile.

Eli, me and Vilma



Our street



The next morning, I woke up in my hostel dormitory, picked my way through my slumbering compatriots, backpacks

and piles of clothes, and got ready for the interview. The office was a square unpainted concrete building in the financial district of town from which the company name flapped half-heartedly from a flagpole. A well dressed Ecuadorian woman answered the door, and I trotted out my rehearsed phrase-book greeting, to which she replied in perfect English, and ushered me upstairs.

The staff comprised mainly Ecuadorians, so my introduction was conducted entirely in Spanish. I smiled, trying hard to look friendly, clever and humble at the same time, as Jason, the company director, told them a bit about me. An interview with the editorial team followed, at the end of which

they told me I'd got the job. I was ecstatic and didn't hesitate to sign the minimum 1-year contract. But I was also very well aware that it was the first hurdle of hundreds.

For weeks I hardly thought about home as I threw myself into Spanish classes, a 9-5 job and house-hunting. Everything was thrilling. I walked around the city, struck by the beauty of the colonial architecture, the vibrant markets, the torrential storms which were so sudden and frequent that the police wore uniform ponchos. I tried roast guinea-pig, drank cocktails and even introduced my two left feet to salsa dancing, with interesting consequences.

I loved the job too, though the Ecuadorian work ethic took some getting used to. Socialising came first, coffee second and work third. Every time someone arrived or left the office for the day they would do the rounds of all their colleagues, a kiss on both cheeks, a 'como estás?' and a bit of banter. This made the first few weeks mentally exhausting, as my patient Ecuadorian colleagues tried to engage me in conversation and I put every ounce of effort into trying to understand. The first time I could laugh at one of their jokes, rather looking sheepish and confused, was like finding a diamond.

Then there were the 2-hour lunch breaks, the hourly coffee breaks which seriously tested my love of coffee, the postponement of all possible tasks until tomorrow (mañana). There was no point turning up to work on time as there would be no one to let you in. Having adapted though, I wondered if I'd ever be able to change back.

Still, the job was by no means a doddle and I was quickly given responsibility far above my station. The organisation developed and managed websites for external companies and on one occasion I was asked to help out on designing a proposal for a travel company. When the owners turned up on time to hear our pitch, my colleague was still polishing off a grilled guinea-pig and refried beans at the local. This left me, with shaking hands and a limited knowledge of Spanish and web design, to explain how the site would work, and why our company was far superior to the one two doors down. After that, I thought, I'll never worry about a work or university presentation again.

If the first few months went by in a blur, the next few were a jolt back down to earth. At the beginning, this job, this life, had been something to aspire to, something that would be easy once I'd learned the ropes. It had taken stamina and energy in abundance but I knew what was required. Now I could communicate well enough, I had a job, a shared flat, friends, great colleagues. But there was something missing.

I can't pinpoint when it happened, but somehow everyday existence replaced excitement. The striking Andean peaks outside my window no longer warranted a second glance, the tropical downpours became an annoyance rather than a wonder. Life sometimes felt transient, monotonous, lonely. I don't think anybody would have guessed I felt that way, and I didn't tell them because I felt guilty that I wasn't relishing every moment. It was exacerbated by the tacit expectations of family and friends back home, who cut phonecalls short because they didn't want to use up my phone credits or keep me from whatever exciting activity they imagined I might otherwise be engaged in.

It was as though there was a thin layer of film between me and Ecuador that all the boisterous determinism I had applied to the other tasks couldn't pierce. A Canadian teacher I met summed it up perfectly when he said 'there's a big difference between being accepted and belonging'. You can be accepted straight away, but you might never belong.

If it were not for my own stubbornness and the company of the family I lived with – flamboyant parents in their 60s with two girls my age, Eli and Vilma – I might not have stayed until the end.

They got me into basketball, which they played with their cousins at weekends, and invited me on their crazy daytrips to the 'country', 12 of us packed into an open-backed trucks for the four hour drive each way. But more than that, they trusted me with their secrets. Vilma and I used to lie on my bed and chat for hours about everything and nothing, and when Eli had an argument with her boyfriend, of whom no one in the family approved, it was me who she would come to.

They probably don't know it, but they helped me develop a sense of belonging in Ecuador that made it possible to experience my other pursuits much more fully. Coming back to the house at the end of a weekend away, or a long day at work was something to look forward to. People cared what was going on in my life, and I theirs. My enthusiasm for the country started to come back, but this time it was much richer, more meaningful.

When I returned home, my accounts were full of the things I'd learned and experienced – a new language, the travel, the festivals, the work, the cultural peculiarities, the kindness of people, the history and the politics, all valuable CV fodder. But looking back now, the most valuable things I learned were those I had not expected to.

In particular, the profound need for belonging surprised me and required a depth of patience and self-reflection that I'd never really exercised before. I've always thought I was quite independent, but without family and friends around me, I realised how much their support really meant. I have a greater affinity with my own country now too; English soil may not be exciting, but it will always be home – even the drizzle and the tube delays put a smile on my face for a while. Complaining is endemic in England – I think it's part humour, part habit, but I do it less now. Like many returning travellers, I appreciate the NHS, the police force, the fact that we have a functioning democracy.

Intellectually, too, my experience got me thinking about cultures in general, and particularly the experiences of others in my own country. Immigration and integration are hot topics for policy makers at the moment, but what do they really mean to the people experiencing them? Roots are hard to put down and they can be even harder to dig up. What is it like arriving in a new country, knowing you will never go home? I started thinking about all the reasons why people emigrate, when they have a choice, and what would make it easier or harder. I wondered how many of them felt disillusioned as I did, and whether that feeling ever disappears completely.

The most unexpected thing about my year abroad was that it set me on a new career path as a social researcher, and I am currently studying for the MSc in Social Research Methods at Surrey. This too, has been challenging at times, but I have been able to draw on my Ecuador experiences. Statistics can be like learning another language; once you get to grips with the vocabulary, it starts to make sense. And how scary can it be to give a presentation to a class of students and lecturers when you've already done it in another language on a subject you are unfamiliar with? Well, pretty scary actually, but you know deep down that it will probably turn out ok in the end.

In its most literal sense, immersion is a very accurate metaphor for my experience. Like jumping off a high rock into a tropical ocean for the first time, it's exciting, risky. You take a deep breath and plunge in, letting the water invigorate you as it washes over every pore. The coral is strikingly intricate, the sea life diverse and colourful. But once you start needing to come up for air, none of that matters much. So I'll be forever indebted to the two girls who handed me a snorkel.



Hearing the voices of others

Anna Tickle

When I became an assistant psychologist in a psychiatric unit, I had little idea of what my day-to-day role would entail. Upon arrival, I quickly realised that the team I was joining had not previously included a psychologist and they were uncertain about what my role might be. This meant that the situation I found myself immersed in was somewhat tentative and would require working with the team to explore the possibilities. Here, I will focus on just one of those possibilities, which came to fruition and proved to be an unrivalled learning experience in my professional life to date: providing a group experience for people who hear voices. I have changed the names of those involved in order to protect their identities.

I was very fortunate that my line manager, Daphne, was happy to share her extensive experience and knowledge with me but also had the confidence to allow me to learn from my own practice. This allowed me to feel supported but not over-protected or stifled in any way, despite my inexperience. It was Daphne who suggested that I could establish and run the group. The opportunity to work with people who hear voices caught my interest, perhaps because of my own lack of knowledge and curiosity about the phenomena. I was immediately engaged because I wanted to find out more about people's experiences of hearing voices and how they might be supported in coping with the resulting distress. My curiosity drove my initial motivation to engage with the challenge and my investigations perpetuated further interest.

The first task was to research why people might hear voices, how the experience might affect them, and whether there was anything that I could offer individuals who might join the group. I was sensitive that being asked to run a group suggested that I had something valuable to provide and yet I had no previous experience to support this. The group was not positioned as a joint endeavour of learning, but as a therapeutic process being provided by professionals for people who required support to cope with experiences that caused them acute emotional distress. I felt that this placed pressure on me to do everything possible to validate my position. This was in fact pressure that I placed upon myself, because of a feeling that I would be somehow exposed as fraudulent if I had not acquired extensive knowledge about the topic that would bring us together. It was the pressure to learn, within a limited period, which led to me immersing myself in the situation.

As I researched the phenomena of voice hearing, I discovered that I held assumptions I had not been conscious of. I found myself constantly surprised by what I read, despite knowing nothing about the subject to begin with. I learned of the examples of famous people who it is claimed heard voices, including Socrates, Joan of Arc, Mahatma Ghandi. This led me to consider that 'voice-hearing' might be constructed as a spiritual or religious experience or as a sign of mental health difficulties. Learning that the Xhosa of South Africa train people who hear voices to become healers suggested that there could be positive explanations and responses to experiences that seem so far removed from Westernised medical conceptualisations. This increased my curiosity and I wanted to include these thoughts into the content of the group, in the hope that this might spark inquisitiveness in group members and broaden their thinking about the experience of hearing voices. Fortunately, Daphne supported this approach and encouraged me to include such ideas in the material of the group sessions. This carried with it some risk. I imagined scenarios in which group members would argue that such examples were irrelevant to their own distressing experiences, which were commonly constructed by their psychiatrists as symptoms of mental illness that should be treated by neuroleptic medication. These concerns proved to be unfounded as group members expressed interest in the variety of different explanations for hearing voices that

are found in different cultures around the world. Their receptiveness was a lesson to me that it can be valuable to challenge dominant discourses by considering much broader perspectives.

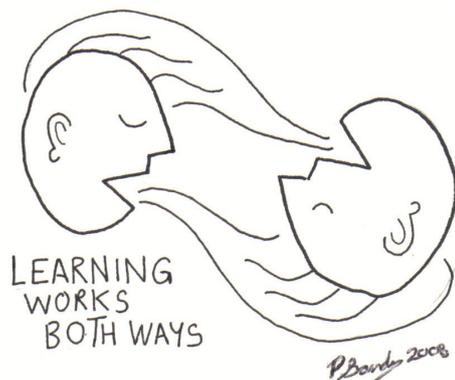
Daphne and myself interviewed all of the potential group members. Their stories were fascinating, a blend of tragic circumstance and astounding resilience that had helped each of them to cope with voices and images that persecuted them relentlessly. For some, the voices were within their head and for others they were external. Voices could have strong identities and even fight with one another with such fury that the person hearing them found it impossible to hear their own thoughts. "*Don't eat that you fat bitch*", Lisa's voice would tell her. She knew it was her father, despite having never met him. For a long time Stewart had seen visions of himself hanging from a beam in the barn outside his house. His wife had chained and padlocked the doors of the barn but the voice would tell him "*It will be okay, you've got the keys now*". During some nights he would lie frozen in bed for hours because he could hear somebody calling his name. Dan's voices began when he was a child. They had been a comfort and helped him to cope when his father crept into his room at night to violate him. As the years went on the voices changed, telling him to hurt himself and others. The scars running down his cheeks served as evidence of their power. Standing at a bus stop was at times impossible because Dan was so tormented by the voices' claim that everybody around him thought he was a paedophile. Hearing each person's story opened my mind to experiences so far removed from my own that I had to learn to suspend disbelief in order to accept that people could learn to cope with such distress. This increased my sense of pressure and the size of the challenge that was to offer something that might be useful for each of the group members.

The group was to run for twelve sessions, and I expected that it would take time for the members to build trust and feel comfortable to share with each other. As a starting point, we worked together to set the rules for the group. This gave an insight into the needs of the group members, but also their level of sensitivity and kindness towards each other. Although the group felt awkward initially, it was clear that the members had respect for each other and were willing to embark on a journey together in the hope of finding new ways to manage the voices that they heard. For one member, Martin, the situation was overwhelming. He believed abuse during childhood and years of illicit drug use had led to his worries that other people were talking about him. This, together with the voices he heard, had destroyed any confidence to be in social situations. Martin asked to go to the toilet during the first session but did not return. He was embarrassed when I contacted him after the group, but we worked through this and thought about what might be useful to him. The group situation had felt threatening and Martin was unable to return. Instead, we agreed to meet separately each week but follow the work of the group. We did so over the next three months and Martin attended the entirety of every session. As we progressed, he developed new ways of coping with the voices' challenges to his confidence and he experimented with new social situations. The pinnacle of his achievements was being able to attend a charity ball that he expected his voices would force him to leave early. He enjoyed it so much that he remained until the end and told me about it with such excitement and pride that I had the sense of it being a truly momentous occasion. Had we allowed Martin to leave the group without exploring ways of working that might be better suited to him, Martin might not have achieved his new-found confidence. This taught me that being adaptable can enable ways of persisting with situations that would be easy to abandon. I think that this also reflects that through preparation for the group I had developed a sense that I might have something to offer that was worth persisting with. This gave me the confidence to suggest to Martin that we could find another way of working together.

As the weeks passed, the group members became more comfortable with each other and we worked together to think about their understanding of their experiences and how they managed their distress. The accounts that group members told were so absorbing that listening to them could not have been anything other than an immersive experience. Being able to hear what was being

said without expressing shock or disbelief helped me to guide the group through the therapeutic process. This could be challenging at times, not because I did not believe individual accounts, but because I found it hard to believe that people can be so resilient to such testing experiences. I found myself able to learn from watching Daphne, who always listened sincerely with calm body language and empathic expressions. Of equal importance was what I learned from the members of the group, who attended completely, never disputing what was said. While I was the mental health professional with little experience, they were all experts by experience. Learning to learn from them was crucial and is something that I hope will serve me well throughout my career.

There were times when the group felt uncomfortable. This was perhaps inevitable given that we were discussing such sensitive concerns among a people for whom paranoia, anxiety and depression had been a part of everyday life for many years. I had to be able to contain anxieties felt by the group, such as when Dan said that the voice was telling him to tear out people's jugular veins with his teeth. The look of anguish in his eyes made it seem that this was a possibility but the group worked together to support Dan rather than express fear or abandon him after he shared his most perturbing thoughts. At times we had to offer reassurances that the group was not being filmed or recorded and we had to adapt the work so that some individuals did not have to write anything down, for fear that it might be used against them. As I had found with Martin, learning to be flexible and adaptive helped the group to run more smoothly. I also learned to position myself not as the expert, but as a facilitator who could help the group members to learn from each other. This relieved me of some of the pressure I had felt before the group had begun, so that I was less concerned with imparting knowledge and could make myself more emotionally available to the group.



There was never any question about whether I would persist with the group, as it was my job to do so. Despite this, my motivation increased as I found each session more rewarding than the last. What was most interesting for me was that each of the group members seemed receptive to the group was an immersive learning experience. As I watched them return each week to persist in their quest for a better understanding or more control of their experiences, I was driven to continue to both help them to learn and to learn from them. The experience broadened my thinking in ways that I can apply to many situations. I anticipate that its memory will stay with me forever.

Highs and lows in the valley of Quito

Elaine Woods

Last year, I went to Quito, Ecuador as part of a volunteer programme organised by the international organisation EIL (Experiment in International Living), in which I lived with an Ecuadorian family, learnt Spanish, and worked as a volunteer on projects. Being away from family, friends, and everything familiar enables you become truly immersed into a different country and a different culture. Every volunteer has his or her own very different experience. Personally, I've never had so many consecutive emotional highs and lows as I did in my three months in Quito. I'm going to try and do my experience justice in words.

First Impressions...

Looking back, I don't think I ever completely grasped exactly how big a step I was taking by going to live and work in a completely unknown country, and I had no expectations. To be honest, I never really had the time to think about it. I always wanted to do something like this and I had recently graduated and had the time. The period between booking it and actually getting on the flight in Madrid that sunny morning last March was spent fundraising, working in a demanding job, meeting my friends as much as possible before I left, seeing a boy that had inconveniently arrived on the scene, finding a flatmate to take my place, and tying up other loose ends. But then perhaps if I had have thought about it too much I never would have gone. So as my plane landed in Quito, the fear of the impending immigration officer at the airport (needless fear might I add) and the intrepidation of my first meeting with my Ecuadorian host family were mingled with the excitement of the truly unknown that lay ahead.

In Quito, I lived with my new mother and sister in an apartment overlooking Parque La Carolina, in the rich district. Instead of poorer living conditions as one might expect, my family had a maid to do the cooking and cleaning, which in itself was a culture shock. My mother Raquel had a high-flying job in the central bank of Ecuador, and she had built up quite the property portfolio. She was small with shoulder-length black hair that she would dye every 2 weeks. She had tattooed eyeliner and exuded an air of confidence that I admired. Her daughter Paola was more or less my age at 22. She was a student in an expensive university in Quito and had excellent English, thanks to her schooling and year of study in the states. She was tall, attractive, smoked as much as her mother, and talked constantly about her friend Hugo, with whom she was in love. Having met Hugo, I'll never understand why!

And so I started my new life in Quito. I walked to Spanish lessons in the morning, dashing across busy roads full of aggressive drivers with little regard for traffic lights. After Spanish, I ventured out to explore the city. Quito is a long city, with a very poor south that was too dangerous to venture into, and a more prosperous north. A hill containing a statue of the Virgin of Quito separated the two sides. Colonial Quito contained open plazas, fountains, pickpockets and churches that were laden with gold and full of dubious looking statues that were refreshingly imperfect. Volcanoes surrounded the city, giving it its very own climate of sunny mornings and rainy afternoons. I walked the streets with only my Lonely Planet Guide for comfort. I visited an observatory where there were no English-speaking guides, I climbed the cathedral bell-tower and was absorbed by the enormity of the city I found myself in, and I clutched onto my bag on the cities trams on which I was the only visible foreigner. On my first weekend I went out to a club with Paola and her friends. I hadn't brought any dancing

clothes with me, I couldn't speak Spanish, and I couldn't dance the salsa and merengue that all around me were. I couldn't even order anything at the bar as the barman didn't understand me, and there was a pay-by-card system that no one had told me about. When I made to go home, Paola was drunk and quite aggressive, but she did get me a taxi. This was the first time I realised just how out of my depth I was in a foreign country with a foreign culture, and alone. But I knew that it was a once in a lifetime experience, and though I was often lonely in my months in Quito, I never once wished that I was back at home.

Volunteering...

After a month of Spanish lessons, I had 2 months of work. I chose to split my time between teaching English to children in a pre-school in Las Casas, a poor district of Quito, and working in Albergue La Dolorosa, a shelter for children whose families are unable to care for them. Having never done anything like this before, I didn't know exactly what I was expected to do. I was teaching with an English girl, and we tried to plan lessons as best as we could, but it was often in vain in a class of very young children with a poor attention span and little desire to learn anything. In the children's shelter, I played with the children, and helped one boy in particular with his homework every day. However, I still didn't feel like I was actually doing anything. I had fundraised for the volunteer expenses, and so I felt this added pressure to really do something worthwhile. My poor Spanish was constantly a barrier between what I was, and what I wanted to be.

It didn't help that I kept becoming sick, which made me very miserable. Things were going on back at home that I was missing, and I think it all just built up too much and there were a few days when all I could do was cry. I know Raquel and Paola were quite worried about me, and Paola came to talk to me to see what was wrong and I tried to explain it all to her. She told me that for a job to be satisfying, all you have to do is do it with love. That really changed my outlook on being a volunteer. I needed to stop worrying about what I was supposed to be doing, and just try and put as much of myself into what I was doing. She also told me that when something's wrong, you should put your energy into changing it, rather than letting it get you down. These are really simple words, but I needed to be told them, and it is advice that I will always remember.

This was a turning point. In the school, I decided to really try to get the children to actually learn something, rather than just getting frustrated when they would not settle down. Admittedly, the situation didn't get much better. The other teacher and I played musical chairs with the kids more often than taught them anything. In the shelter, I decided to use the extra time when the children were in school to re-decorate their playroom. I picked a sea-life theme, and painted murals of sea creatures on blue walls. When the children got back from school, they helped me out, often getting more paint on their clothes and feet than on the walls. There was paint on the carpet, huge drips on the walls, and one girl stood on a tube of paint that squirted all over the place. It really was a mess, and I had to reign in the perfectionist tendencies I sometimes have and try not to mind. It was really great working with the children, and they enjoyed it too. I have never been so stressed as I was about that playroom. I was leaving Quito in a few weeks and needed to get it finished before then. I had sleepless nights over it, and I feel stressed now even thinking about it, but it was completely worth it.



Me with the children from the shelter in the playroom

Happy Families...

My Ecuadorian mother Raquel was a very strong woman. Being a single mother and career woman in a country that is still very chauvinistic and where women can't walk a few yards without the standard catcalls and whistles, she needed to be. She was sharp and I was quite scared of her. In my first weeks, I'd come home from Spanish lessons and she would ask me about my day, my life at home, etc. She was trying to help me, but I'd never spoken another language before and I was struggling with it. She would get frustrated whenever I didn't understand her, and attempt to say it in English in a really loud voice that always felt like she was shouting at me. I would generally let something like that wash over me, but in Ecuador I was very vulnerable and sensitive, and I was often close to tears whilst attempting to speak to her. I dealt with this by basically retreating from her, and trying not to care. I didn't see her as my mother or her apartment as my home. I stayed long hours at work and travelled whenever possible at the weekends with other volunteers, and had some fantastic experiences with them. They would talk about their good relationships with their host families, and I envied them. I questioned my relationship with my actual mother, and decided to make a more conscious effort when I got home. I should have made more of an effort with my Ecuadorian mother too, as the host family is all part of the experience.

To make matters worse, a previous host daughter of Raquel from Switzerland arrived to stay for a few weeks. Bianca was lovely: her warm open personality and fluent Spanish highlighted our differences. I'm quite reserved, and this is often construed by Latin-Americans to be cold. The whole saga is much too long for this story, but basically it culminated just before my final week in Ecuador. I went to visit my hosting organisation to get evaluation forms, and when the host organiser Myriam asked me how my family was, she wasn't convinced with my reply of "good". I decided to just go for it and spilt the whole story of the trials and tribulations with my host mother. Myriam was upset that I hadn't told her earlier, as it often happens that families just don't click with their host son or daughter, and new families can easily be found. It upset me further that perhaps I could have had a really good host family experience.

This was the lowest point of my time in Quito. I went back to the apartment still very upset and made a terrible attempt at explaining everything to Paola. Bianca thought it was her that was the problem and also got upset. It was absolutely a complete disaster. I've never been in a situation like that before, and I remember thinking at the time that I couldn't believe that this was actually happening. But it had to happen, as it was a revelation of sorts. Once I had let everything out that had been building up in my head, I was able to look on the situation as an observer and see how it really was. Raquel had only ever looked out for me, and looked after me. Her nature was sharp, but I shouldn't have taken it so much to heart. I am still ashamed about it all, but I had to learn the hard way how important it is to talk about things, as just letting thoughts build up in your head distorts them and only makes the situation worse. It is true that I didn't click with my Ecuadorian mother as I would have liked, but I should have given it more of a chance.



The Last Week...

The air had been cleared, my Spanish was at its best and the playroom was nearly finished. After nearly three months the city was beginning to feel like home. I loved my journey to work in the morning when I could buy fruit on the street, converse with people in Spanish, jump on moving buses (something that I had put off doing for many weeks), run across the manic roads. One really memorable thing for me was buying curtains for the playroom. As I was dealing with the shop assistant in the drapery store, various customers would come over and try and help us figure out exactly what I wanted. When I had the material bought, the shop assistant took me down the street to a dressmaker, where another conversation of what exactly I was looking for ensued, again with the input of the other customers in the queue, and some pen and paper. It really was such a buzz being able to get by in a country in a way that I had never envisaged when I first arrived.

When I think of immersion, I think of being thrown into the deep end of a swimming pool. That was how Quito was for me. At first I struggled, but bit by bit I learnt to swim. However, I never got quite as far as growing gills and breathing. It was time to move on from Quito, to go travelling, to meet more new people, and on the plane to Bolivia I was in need of a holiday! I was filled with relief that it had all gone well, happiness for the things my Ecuadorian mother had said to me on the way to the airport and that it had all been resolved, frustration at my inability to say what I would have liked to say back to Raquel and to the children I worked with, sadness that I had to leave it all behind.

I often think of my time in Ecuador but I rarely speak of it. I know I should, as part of the point of doing volunteer work is raising awareness of global issues, such as the insurmountable inequalities that can exist within one country, that exist in Ecuador. But it was a different world, and I find it hard to explain my time there to people. I am normally very stable, but immersion into a different country and a very different culture had the effect of magnifying everything that I was feeling, and I often questioned my sanity.

The experience made me appreciate how good my home country of Ireland is, and how lucky I am to have been born into a place where there are endless possibilities. Through the volunteer work, I realised that volunteering is a universal thing. There are always projects that need help, and you don't have to go thousands of miles away to make a difference. On the surface I don't think I've changed, but perhaps at a subconscious level I have developed the mechanisms to deal with being in a new place in a new situation with new people, as I found myself yet again in Guildford last September. I will always have the memories of Quito, but thankfully I left the highs and lows behind where they belong.



Bianca, Raquel and Paola, with Quito in background

Who I became

Hayley York

“Hello, my name is Hayley”. It was my first day teaching English as a Second Language in Madrid, Spain. I was told this particular class had English classes the year before, so while they were beginners, they did have some grasp of the language. As I introduced myself that first class, I was greeted with blank stares. I tried again, more slowly, “Hel-lo. My name is Hayley”. This time, they all spoke: “no intiendo”.

Before I continue, what you need to understand is exactly how terrified I was at that moment. I had just moved to the capital of Spain from my hometown in Canada. I had never lived on my own, I had never visited Madrid, I moved by myself, and I didn’t speak a word of Spanish. I was as overwhelmed as a person could be. On top of that, I was beginning a new career as an English teacher in a successful architectural company – teaching lawyers, engineers, and managers. And now, after introducing myself to my first class, my students’ response – in Spanish – was ‘I don’t understand’. I was seized with panic.

Somehow, I managed to get my class through our two hours together, and when I left I knew I had to come up with a new plan – and fast. But how? There I was: unsure, afraid, and naive. By the next class, I had a new lesson plan; I was going to start at the very beginning with the alphabet. This seemed to me to be a good plan; however, I was met with icy acceptance in our second class. The students – all native Spaniards – participated minimally. I left feeling completely intimidated and defeated.

The next day I went to my boss and asked for help. I was intimidated by my students who were all much older than I was and very successful business-people. And as I found in all aspects of my life at that point, I was having trouble communicating even the simplest of concepts. What my boss told me was one of those pieces of advice I will never forget. He said, “Don’t be intimidated. Remember, you are there to teach these people something you know and they don’t.” After our talk, I left his office with a slightly renewed sense of composure.

By the next class, I had purchased a Spanish-English dictionary, which I told my students they all had to buy before our next meeting. Looking up almost every word was a slow and tedious process – but it was necessary for making any kind of headway. I was by no means very confident yet, but I was starting to feel a little more comfortable in front of the class. My students and I continued, making slow strained progress, for a couple months.

Then one day, my boss told me I was to give my students a performance evaluation. This made me very uncomfortable as I still wasn’t completely confident teaching them – and here I was to evaluate their progress. After much thought and consideration, I came to the decision that in turn for my evaluations of the students; I would ask the students to evaluate my performance. I went to class that day, evaluations in hand, and attempted to relay my comments to each student. As their grasp of English was still basic, it was challenging. What happened next though permanently changed my experience living and working in Madrid. When I asked for feedback from my students, I received performance recommendations and more. The students appeared genuinely appreciative of the reciprocal offer for evaluation. Not only did they initiate conversation, they were more attentive when I spoke as well. It was as if by opening myself up to the students, they in turn, offered more of themselves. For the first time in months we all were really hearing what each other had to say and it created a wonderfully positive atmosphere.

After that day, things in class started falling into place. My students' attendance was up, they were asking for and completing homework and I started feeling confident and comfortable in the classroom. As their English improved, my Spanish did as well – it was as if we were teaching each other and enjoying each moment. My students had constant questions about life in Canada and were equally as enthusiastic about sharing information about the Spanish lifestyle. As they learned about me, I learned about their culture – and the benefits reached all aspects of my life in Madrid. I was gaining understanding, appreciation, and confidence in my daily life, as well as in the classroom. The end result was my students went from a level of no English to an intermediate level in the span of six months. The benefit for me – I believe – was far greater. In hindsight, completely immersing myself in Spanish culture was a drastic and valuable decision. While those first few months in Madrid were the hardest I've ever survived, I realize now that I was my biggest barrier in integrating into Spanish society.

I was so caught up with trying to conduct my life as I knew how to (from a Canadian perspective) I didn't even consider those around me. What I mean to say is that I didn't consider how my presence affected my students. Over those first two months, I learned that the Spanish people resent foreigners (especially Americans) and they associated me with those preconceptions. Second, I learned that the Spanish people appreciate foreigners who make an effort to "live the Spanish life". By opening myself up to the students, they began to trust me. It demonstrated I was willing to understand their perspective and it opened the door for our relationship to grow.

While I wanted to give up in those first few months, I didn't want to let my parents down. I didn't want to let myself down. I had moved to a new country for a new adventure and I knew it would be hard. I had no idea it would be as hard as it was, however I became the person I am because of that experience. I learned to appreciate a new culture and to be wholly open to it. By the end of my time in Spain, I made countless friendships and was invited into the lives of my students (many of which I still keep in touch with today). Most of all, I gained confidence. I gained the confidence that has allowed me to progress to the newest chapter in my life.

For the second time I have moved my life overseas. I moved to Guildford in September to further my academic career. With this move, I wasn't nervous to immerse myself in a new culture – I was excited. I felt confident I could handle whatever obstacles may come my way because I knew I'd survived and benefited from my past experiences. Now I look back on my time in Madrid with nothing but joy, satisfaction, and pride. I am so grateful I persevered, as it made me the confident, open, and appreciative person I am today.



Immersed in dance

Rebecca Young

Coming from a physically active course to university was a big shock to the system. Instead of doing 6 hours a day of dance I had to adapt 4 hours a week. Oh great, I'd traded in my passion for dancing to reading about it. Not exactly what I was looking for at all. The lectures were stimulating but I wanted things to be the way they were. I wanted to wake up every day and look forward to it, to sit on the seat nearest to the door so I could get to the studios to begin reliving my passions every day. I enjoy, no, even love the feeling of working hard, sweating and pushing my body to its limits. To be creative. To be around people who were open and kind. Making dances. Performing. The further away I became from that hope the more I began to give up on the academia.

I started to give up on myself. Dance is my passion and by going into higher education I thought I would be in my element, with people like me who were passionate and creative, different and fun. Instead I found myself struggling to engage with the course. Other people seemed to click right away. All the same breed of people. Academics. People who were good at writing about dance, who had 2 hours a week of practical and 6 hours per week in total. How can that ever be enough to become an excellent performer? I realised that my course was not giving me the opportunity to immerse myself in what I loved doing. It made me appreciate the training I had before I came here. I felt like a loner in the playground. To want something so much and to then realise that it is nothing like you expected was painfully difficult. It was a difficult time, like the song says, and my feelings asked me 'should I stay or should I go?' This was indeed a very tricky situation, but in order for me to have the chance to teach dance as a living this is something I had to do.

I had gone from being deeply committed to developing/improving yourself as a dancer to a person who was stuck in a system which seemed to be increasingly inhibiting. My growth as a dancer and as a professional seemed to be getting smaller and smaller. How is physical and creative ability ever judged on essay writing skills? No musician can grow and improve unless he practices his instrument; why wasn't I being allowed to practice mine? The environment which I thought would help me to excel had seemed to stunt my growth as a dancer. How was that right?

By the time came, I had begun to face the facts that I was regressing in my technique and fitness levels, and that I would never get to be a performer. A new and exciting opportunity came up in one of my modules. I could do 5 performances of anything I wanted to, and from that my best 3 scores would be accounted for towards my grade. I've never been so happy about anything on this course since I've been here. I get to go to rehearsals, create and develop ideas. I get to be in my ideal working environment, what more could a girl ask for?

I've never had a passion like this before, but since I found it this passion has grown within me and has helped to mould the person i am today. Without it I would never have experienced the feeling of being free, having more drive to succeed in life than I've ever had before. Like Billy Elliot says, it feels like electricity. It really does. You get the rush of volts running through your veins, powering you to move through space like an autumn leaf with the drive to push your further than your body has ever experienced before. Feeling lost within yourself but at the same time having this roaring flame burning inside your entire being. The more you dance, the stronger the fire burns, then at the climax of the dance your body tingles all over. bursts of passion, power and pride immerse you. Time stops but your

heart beats on, faster and louder, echoing throughout the studio, you keep pushing and pushing to your body's limit. Vanishing into the wings, heart races, body sweating. The feeling of being complete, being a complete person. Nothing else matters now. The feeling when I dance is what I want, need to hold onto. it's who I am. The dance space is my safety zone, no limits, where I belong. I need to keep pushing, 'it's who you are, what you are, and exactly what you want to be', I kept telling myself.

With any rehearsal period problems arise between characters, but at the end of it all when I was on stage I thought to myself with a smug smile 'this is it'. All the hassle of the other stuff was completely and utterly worth it. Being on a course where practice was more important than writing and then going into a course which is the complete opposite turned my world upside down. I tried, got angry, felt very isolated, cried until there were no more tears at times. I struggled with every part of my being to just keep afloat. The feeling of working hard like I had been used to was great, but the feeling of accomplishing this in an environment where my strengths had become my weaknesses was amazing. I felt so alive for that time I was on stage. When I walked into the dressing room it was as if I was back to reality. Back to books over dance, back to lectures, back to feeling submerged by stress and pressure not to fail. Back to having blurred vision as to why I'm here. I don't see the light at the end of the tunnel yet. Although university hasn't been my ideal experiences or situations to be in I have learnt so much. In a way by feeling in the dark about a lot of things makes you want to keep your inner light shining. Not just to lighten a dark situation, but to make your light and inner passions seem brighter than ever.

Some may ask 'Is dancing on stage a lonely experience?', and I would have to say definitely no. a dance begins as an idea, then the idea develops onto your body, which ends as a fully choreographed work. Like thoughts and ideas, each is personal and have many different aims and meanings to them. There are so many ideas and thoughts within one person, and so many things you can do with your body to convey whatever it is you want. That in itself is the beauty of dance. The movement that is mapped out onto my body has been mapped out onto me and my dancers. The dancers each have their own interpretations of my idea, which is shown through their movement. The audience are like treasure hunters, reading the map of the bodies before them. My map will never be the same as anybody else's, it's impossible, which in a way makes me proud of my unique dancing body. Even if I was performing a solo instead of a 6 person choreography, I would never feel alone. Dance is one of those things that, wherever you are can take you to another place where it means something to you. That feeling is always with me when I dance, so I'm never alone.

The need to keep this light alive became essential to my success and motivation. Its difficult to keep that light on sometimes. It flickers and runs low on fuel. Sometimes I feel like there's just darkness, but when I was creating and performing my work on stage this dark place was so bright and beautiful. Almost blinding.

Dance has never been something that is based on essay writing the majority of the time. Especially not in education. Ever. It has been practiced to convey history, social hierarchy and technique. It has also rebelled against politics and technique, and any dancer, whatever their background or ambitions has had the chance to spread their wings and fly with their notions and ideas. That was advertised initially, but it has become ever more apparent that if you haven't got strength in ballet technique you are less able than people that do, which results in the 'good' people being able to practice dance on a regular basis. My parents allowed me to play as a child, not to take class, and I feel like I am being sorely punished for this now, with just 4 classes per week. I may not have technique, but I have the ideas and

the creativity and the passion. That's what dance is about. In my own special way, however small it may be, have had a chance to experience total completeness once again, yet gone in the blink of an eye, like it never existed.



Keep
your inner light
alive

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