

## My Memories at I.Chem.C.

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It is with great honour and pride that I write of my experiences at the Institute of Chemistry which have helped me immensely to mould my career and been a guiding light in my life itself.

At a crucial time of life, when as a school leaver I was faced with the difficult task of choosing my future career path, I saw an advertisement in the newspaper about the graduateship course conducted by the Institute of Chemistry Ceylon. As I had not gained entrance to the local universities, this seemed a golden opportunity for me to pursue higher studies in my pet subject without leaving the shores of my motherland. Therefore I applied for this course with much anticipation and was very fortunate to be selected as an undergraduate.

So began my long sojourn with the Institute of Chemistry and many other fond and unforgettable memories and experiences associated with this institution that I cherish and hold close to my heart.

My first memories are of the lectures held at S.Thomas' College, Mt. Lavinia during weekends. It was a tough beginning with many challenges to overcome, but we were fortunate to have some of the best and most dedicated lecturers in this field from different universities, institutes and industries who gave of their best and made our learning experience a most interesting and fruitful one. They imparted their knowledge and expertise without any reservations which helped us overcome all obstacles and challenges we were faced with. I take this opportunity to place on record our gratitude and appreciation to our course coordinator Dr. S Kumarasinghe, whose personal touch and tireless efforts contributed much towards the smooth running of our course.

Following this course was a whole new experience to us school leavers as we had to get used to self study, and to research on our own, which was a daunting task at the beginning. We had very gainful study experiences at the CISIR library where we did combined studies and discussed past papers related to our subject from our own institute as well as other universities. This helped us gauge our standards and improve where needed.

The practical classes played a vital part in our path to knowledge, specially the inorganic chemistry practical classes conducted by Prof. H D Gunawardhana, where we learnt not only to do the titrations, how to handle burettes, pipettes but also to open reagent bottles the proper way. Practical classes

also disciplined and trained us to work on time and to keep proper records. We enjoyed everything we did, the lectures, practical classes and specially the combined studies at the library.

Well who ever said it was all study and no play at the Institute of Chemistry? We had loads of fun filled times, and one particular experience that I recollect is the Annual Christmas party that we were asked to help out with. We were thrilled to be entrusted with the task of decorating the SLAAS auditorium as it was the first time the student body had been given such a responsibility. With much enthusiasm we got together and pooled our artistic talents to turn out a stunningly decorated auditorium filled with a typical yuletide atmosphere. This experience was a boost to our confidence and gave us the much needed courage to face up to any challenge. The Organizing Committee was so impressed with our contribution that we were requested to organise the exhibition "Chemistry for Everyday Life", for the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Session. I must emphasise that be it in studies or any other extra curricular activities, our lecturers always guided, encouraged, appreciated whatever we achieved which was a great morale booster.

Another event that is etched in my mind is the dinner hosted by Prof J N O Fernando in celebration of his induction as President of the Institute of Chemistry. As mere undergraduates we were honoured to be invited as guests of such an eminent personality. These experiences helped me immensely to come out of my shell and to willingly involve myself in Institute activities.

After graduation, I joined the Open University of Sri Lanka as a Demonstrator in Chemistry. It was my first job. I enjoyed my work, taking discussion classes and conducting practical classes. It was not the same as learning by yourself. You have to be very thorough with the subject and well prepared to answer the questions raised by the students. The knowledge and experience I received at the Institute helped me to do my task well.

At this juncture, as I wanted to gain more knowledge and qualifications, I registered myself for a M Phil Degree on Natural Product Chemistry at the Open University of Sri Lanka under the supervision of Dr Kamal Bandara Gunaherath. I had to face lot of difficulties as I was the first student to start on Chemistry Research at the Open University and there were hardly any facilities available at that time. The encouragement and guidance of my supervisor helped me whenever I was discouraged or had second thoughts of giving it all up when things were not going smoothly and I sincerely give all credit to him for guiding me

towards the completion of my M Phil Degree.

While I was in the process of completing my thesis I was offered a project at the Information Services Centre at the ITI, to develop a database on Medicinal and Aromatic Plants. This was quite different to what I was doing, but I took the challenge, and completed the task. There after I got the opportunity to join the Information Services Centre as a Scientific Officer after successfully completing my postgraduate degree. Everyone wondered why I changed my field from Chemistry to Information Science. This was because the ITI library being a S & T library, the work that has to be carried out is mostly related to chemistry. My Manager and colleagues were very supportive and I realized that if you have a desire and are dedicated you can do anything.

Through the passing of years and all the challenges I have faced, I never severed the ties I had with the Institute of Chemistry which holds a very special place in my heart. Since my graduation, I have served as a teaching assistant in Physical Chemistry

practical classes during weekends, which gives me the opportunity to impart the knowledge I have gained to the future chemists of our nation.

In the year 2000, I was nominated to be a member of the Educational Committee of the Institute of Chemistry and presently I serve as the Secretary to the Academic Board and as a Council member of the Institute. It gives me great satisfaction to give back to the Institute what it has given unto me and to show my gratitude for opening my way to the world.

I am ever grateful to the Institute of Chemistry and Prof. J N O Fernando for what I'm today. I implore to all undergrad students to make the best use of all the facilities provided to you by the Institute of Chemistry with perseverance and diligence and when you go out to the world as graduate chemists never forget the Institute which has given so much to you and to which you owe so much. Help the Institute to reach even greater heights, so that it would shine as a beacon of knowledge for the future generations to come.

### Inter Level Debate Competition

Inter Level Debate Competition was organized for the students of the Graduateship Programme. The debates were held on the following topics

- Gene technology has a negative impact on humankind (Level 2 vs Passing - out Batch)
- The findings of Sri Lankan scientific research should be limited to benefit Sri Lanka (Level 2 vs Final Year)
- Sri Lankan chemists have not been adequately used for national development (Final Year vs Level 3)
- Current use of science and technology has benefited humankind (Passing -out Batch vs Level 3)
- The GCE Advanced Level examination should have practical examinations (Final Year vs Passing-out Batch)
- Development has taken place at the cost of environmental degradation (Level 2 vs Level 3)

The winners were the Level 3 team, while team from Passing out Batch and Final Year were the first and second runners up respectively.

A series of debates are planned between teams from Chemistry Special students from universities in Sri Lanka and a team from the Graduateship students is scheduled to be held on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2008.



Inter Level debate competition held at Adamantane House.