

Pertaining to Experiences

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I consider it as a great honour bestowed on me to have been requested to contribute a short account of my experiences at the Institute of Chemistry, to publish in *Chemistry in Sri Lanka* at the Silver Jubilee passing out batch graduation. I would like to

extend my grateful thanks to the Institute of Chemistry for giving me this opportunity to express my experience as a Graduate Chemist and Ph.D. student in Ireland.

I had my early education at St Lawrence's School, Colombo and then proceeded to St. Bridget's Convent, Colombo to complete my school career. Soon after completing my Advanced Level examination I was pondering as to what to do next.

I came to know about the Institute of Chemistry Ceylon from my father, who was then the General Secretary of the Organization of Professional Associations, Sri Lanka (OPA). The Institute of Chemistry Ceylon is one of the member associations of the OPA which is the apex body of professional associations in the country.

Chemistry

My interest in chemistry developed while I was preparing for my Advanced Level examination. Several experiences stimulated my commitment to chemistry. As a result my desire was to learn more about chemistry and to understand the phenomena behind chemistry.

As a young school leaver I was not interested in attending National Universities in the country. Our Universities close many a time during an academic year due to internal problems in the university system. Therefore, my intention was to attend an Institution where I could finish the first degree without wasting my time and getting frustrated. It was thus a hard decision for me, whether to carry on my higher studies here in Sri Lanka or abroad. As we know, Sri Lankan universities have a monopoly of offering higher education especially in the field of Science.

I joined the Graduateship in Chemistry Course (GIC) conducted by the College of Chemical Sciences, Institute of Chemistry Ceylon with many expectations and this was the best decision that I have ever taken.

As I joined the GIC course, one month after the commencement, I had doubts as to whether I could catch up the lectures I had missed, especially in Biology because I was a student of the Advanced Level Mathematics stream. However, I was able to get through the first year, and became third in the batch

winning the Dr. G C N Jayasuriya Award at the G.I.C. Examination Part I (Theory).

Soon after the 2nd year examination I registered for Part II C to do the research project with Dr. (Mrs.) Janitha A Liyanage, Senior Lecturer, Department of Chemistry University of Kelaniya. I started my research work at the University of Kelaniya under her supervision and had to complete my laboratory experiments at the University of Sri Jayawardanepura. I was the first student who submitted a dissertation for the Part II C examination based on research work. My research findings were also presented as a Poster at the 60th Annual Sessions of Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science (SLAAS) of which I am a life member. The abstract "*Analysis and Speciation of Natural Mineral Fertilizer to be used in Prawn Farming*" was published in the SLAAS Proceedings 2004.

At the final examination I passed with First Class Honours and was placed 3rd in the batch. I was the first ever recipient of the N I N S Nadarasa Prize for Organic Chemistry and I was the only student who obtained an A Grade for the Organic Chemistry II paper that year.

My Experience as a Graduate Chemist

Just after graduation I got an opportunity to work as a trainee chemist at the toxicology laboratory of the Government Analyst's Department for three months. There I was able to gain more knowledge on instrumentation quite apart from what I had learnt at the Institute of Chemistry.

After I finished my three month training at the Government Analyst's Department, I got an appointment as a Teaching Assistant in the Department of Chemistry, The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL). I worked there for one and a half years.

During this period I also worked as a visiting Teaching Assistant at the Institute of Chemistry in inorganic and organic chemistry. I was fortunate to serve my professional body of which I am an associate member.

I served as a Joint – Secretary to the Graduate Chemist Alumni Association and was co-opted to the Academic Board as a Member of the College of Chemical Sciences for the year 2005/06.

Looking Back

The GIC programme has opened up numerous avenues for my career and I am extremely indebted to the Institute of Chemistry Ceylon and all my lecturers. I was the youngest student in my class at the Institute of Chemistry and was lucky to complete my first degree at a very young age compared to the others. When I

joined the OUSL staff, there again I was the youngest member of the Departmental staff.

As a Graduate Chemist of the College of Chemical Sciences I was awarded a Trinity full and scholarship to read for my Ph.D. at the University of Dublin, Trinity College, Ireland which is one of the leading Universities in Europe. I am working in the largest chemistry research group in the School of Chemistry in Trinity. I am a visiting Chemistry Tutor

for the Dental Technicians in the School of Dental Science at the same University.

I am relating my experience here in order to share it with my younger colleagues and to inspire those who are hoping to choose chemistry as a career. My advice to them is- 'be ambitious, plan your career based on your personal attributes, set your targets and through hard work you can achieve your goal!'

Present Structure of the Graduateship Programme in Chemistry

The present structure of the Graduateship Programme in Chemistry has multiple entry and exit points as indicated below.

