

**FROM DAWN TO DUSK:  
STORIES OF THE  
POSTGRADUATE LIFE**

**VOLUME TWO**



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POSTGRADUATE LIFE**

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**EDITORS:  
VENOSHA RAVANA  
SARALA THULASI PALPANADAN**



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# FOREWORD

“From Dawn to Dusk: Stories of the Postgraduate Life (Volume 2)” is a compelling collection of 11 personal narratives that delve into the daily lives of past and current postgraduate students. Extending from the first volume which also published 11 personal narratives, this book also provides an intimate look at the journey of academia, offering readers a glimpse into the routines, challenges, triumphs, and reflections that define the postgraduate experience. Through a series of thoughtfully curated stories, this book captures the essence of what it means to pursue advanced studies, highlighting both the universal and unique aspects of academic life. This book is aimed at a broad audience, including current and prospective postgraduate students, educators, academic professionals, and anyone interested in the personal side of higher education. It appeals to those who are curious about the realities of postgraduate life and those seeking inspiration, guidance, or simply a sense of shared experience. The book has the potential to build a sense of community among postgraduate students and alumni. In short, this book is a big shoutout to postgraduate students who have survived and are surviving this magical journey from dawn to dusk.

Venosha Ravana  
Sarala Thulasi Palpanadan



# SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

In **CHAPTER ONE**, Shevane Sonthar Lingam discusses the challenges of balancing rest and academic demands during weekends as a Master's student. She emphasizes the importance of rest, structured time management, and physical activity in maintaining mental clarity, productivity, and overall well-being throughout the postgraduate journey.

In **CHAPTER TWO**, Minnie reflects on her unexpected decision to pursue a master's degree while working full-time. She shares the challenges of balancing work, studies, and personal life, the growth she experienced, and the invaluable support from loved ones that helped her persevere.

In **CHAPTER THREE**, Gary Seach reflects on the paradoxical journey of pursuing a PhD in English literature, highlighting the emotional and intellectual challenges faced between 2017-2022. Using witty wordplay, he writes about perseverance through highs and lows, ultimately finding hope and growth.

In **CHAPTER FOUR**, Liyana Binti Ahmad Afip shares her journey through PhD challenges, including high expectations from her supervisor and a competitive environment. Despite initial self-doubt and anxiety, she learns resilience and the value of perseverance and collaboration, ultimately finding clarity and growth.

In **CHAPTER FIVE**, Marzita binti Mohamed Noor reflects on her transformative PhD journey, marked by personal and professional challenges. Balancing work, studies, and family issues, she overcomes obstacles, grows personally, and gains deep self-insight, emphasizing resilience and self-motivation.

In **CHAPTER SIX**, Khairil Asyraf reflects on the challenges of balancing family, work, and PhD studies. He emphasizes the importance of self-care, sharing how activities like football and fishing helped him recharge. Ultimately, he learned to prioritize his well-being without quitting.

In **CHAPTER SEVEN**, Melissa d. Sumalinog shares her challenging yet fulfilling dissertation journey, balancing motherhood, personal struggles, and academic work. Despite obstacles like the pandemic and family issues, her discipline, determination, and faith helped her achieve success, culminating in a memorable graduation celebration with her family.

In **CHAPTER EIGHT**, Vaenthan Chellandy reflects on the unexpected benefits of pursuing postgraduate studies, emphasizing the importance of building diverse professional networks. Through collaboration and embracing different perspectives, he highlights the value of lifelong learning, personal growth, and leveraging global connections for career advancement.

**CHAPTER NINE** visits Shagufta's journey to a PhD which was significantly influenced by her mentor, Dr. Sarala. Dr. Sarala's support, guidance, and belief in her student played a crucial role in Shagufta's success. Through her mentorship, Shagufta developed resilience, confidence, and a strong sense of purpose.

In **CHAPTER TEN**, Rosemarie recounts her transformative journey through an MA in TESOL, supported by a CHED scholarship. Her studies deepened her understanding of teaching English to diverse ESL learners, revealing the

importance of context-specific teaching methods and effective assessment practices.

In **CHAPTER ELEVEN**, Sarala shares the importance of sacrifice to stay focused in achieving the targeted goals. In addition, the experience of her friends also highlights the importance of sacrificing the right factors to avoid being diverted. At the end of the day, the sacrifice done could somehow give happiness via success.



## CHAPTER 1

# A Weekend Warrior: Balancing Rest and Catching Up

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In the life of a postgraduate student, weekends tend to lose their conventional role as leisure and for unwinding, and rather, transforming instead as a pathway of an academic grind. For many, including myself as a Master's student who had enrolled in Master in World Literature at Universiti Putra Malaysia, weekends are a significant moment for getting back on track with research, writing, correction, and rewriting. My Master's program was a coursework mode and this meant that I had eleven subjects with a total of thirty-three credit hours exclusive of Master's research project seminar and my dissertation. The internal conflict between the necessity to unwind and take rest, and the obligation to continue to work on research and assignments is considered a ubiquitous struggle among postgraduate students. This chapter ventures into the chaos of balancing between rest and work during the weekends. This chapter explores how rest is commonly viewed as an indulgence when in reality, it is a crucial element of

quality products in research because mental health affects the journey of a postgraduate student.

The pressure to work in postgraduate studies is unstoppable, especially when the deadlines are nearing and the weight of expectations becomes heavier. Weekends, which used to be once a time for leisure and unwinding, have immediately transformed into a crucial phase for racing up to finish the numerous tasks that have been piling up during the week. Whether I am finishing up a chapter of my dissertation, getting ready for a seminar, or having a meeting with my supervisor, the pressure to utilize these two days effectively can feel overbearing.

In my experience, there have been times when I have failed to find the balance between work and rest. Early in my Master's journey, there was a particularly stressful weekend that took a toll on me, when I was rushing to finish up with editing a significant section of my dissertation. The pressure was intense, and I found myself burning through the midnight oil, amplified by the anxiety of the impending deadlines. Regardless of my best efforts, I realized that my productivity started to deteriorate as the hours crept by. My thoughts became increasingly fragmented, and the quality of my writing deteriorated. It was in that moment of failure that I realized the vanity of working without sufficient sleep. This experience became a harsh moment of truth for me, as it shed light on the importance of balancing work with rest to sustain both the quality of my research and my overall mental and physical health.

Rest is essential, not a luxury, especially for those pursuing postgraduate studies, which require a high level of intense thinking skills. I have learned the hard way that rest is crucial for preserving mental clarity, enhancing creativity, and promoting emotional health. For students such as myself, whose tasks require profound analytical thinking and consistent concentration, the advantages

of having a good eight-hour sleep are immeasurable. Lack of sleep causes mental exhaustion, losing creativity, and lowers the caliber of academic work.

In my own experience, I have found that taking time to rest and recharge is vital for sustaining a high-quality research product. After that particular overwhelming and exhaustive weekend, I took an oath to never bargain on sleep and to include regular breaks into my routine, including during the busiest times. For example, nowadays, I make sure that I take a full day off each weekend, and during those unwinding days, I participate in activities that are not related to my dissertation. The activities include reading a novel purely for pleasure, taking a long walk in nature, going for a hike, going to the cinemas, or simply spending quality time with friends and family. These moments of taking a break from my dissertation have not only enhanced my mood and energy levels but they have also brought me to a path of improved clarity and creativity when I return to continue my dissertation.

To be able to balance between work and rest at weekends, I learned that a deliberate and well-thought-out method is needed. Other than taking a full day off each weekend, I have also incorporated another method to keep my weekends relaxing but also productive. I call this method structured time management and this method has proven to be effective for me. The structured time management is done by dividing the weekends into blocks of time, where I fill the blocks with specific activities, which consist of both work and leisure activities. So, during the days that I do not take a full day off, I incorporate activities such as going to the gym early in the morning around 7 am, working on my dissertation from 9 am to 6 pm, and watching a movie at night. By setting boundaries

and adhering to my schedule, I can work efficiently without affecting the quality of my academic work, and nor do I allow my academic work to overstep my rest time.

Another strategy I have learned to utilize is the practice of setting realistic, and achievable goals for the weekend. I have realized that rather than forcing myself to achieve a huge amount of work in a short weekend is impractical and whatever I manage to produce turns out to be subpar work. Thus, I concentrate on achieving a few key tasks to a high standard. This method not only reduces the feeling of being pressured but also allows me to move at my comfortable pace. For example, I usually set a target to write a draft of a chapter, amend the corrections as per my supervisor's request, or finish a specific set of readings. Once I have accomplished the set targets, I allow myself to completely disengage from work for the rest of the day, because I know that I have made meaningful progress in that week. This method allows me to work on my dissertation without the incessant sense of guilt that often arises during the postgraduate journey.

In addition to these methods, I have found that integrating regular physical activity into my weekend routine is vital for retaining my physical health and cognitive clarity. I usually prefer to go to the gym but other forms of exercise like a morning run at the park, a yoga session, hiking, or even a brisk walk in the park, provide a precious break from my academic work and aid my mental clarity. Furthermore, engaging in fun physical activities, such as Zumba dancing, indoor cycling, body combat, or even going for a marathon with friends and family, helps me to express myself in ways that are not related to my academic work. This offers a highly necessary room to unwind and for self-reflection. I have learned that physical activity not only elevates my overall physical health but also sharpens my ability to concentrate when I return to my studies.

From a long-term outlook, the capability of a postgraduate student to balance work and rest is highly significant for maintaining success in the world of academia. This is because if the immense responsibilities of postgraduate studies are not carefully managed, then it will lead to mental exhaustion that may even cause a student to give up on their postgraduate journey. It is crucial to note that severe mental burnout can result in serious consequences on both academic performance and mental health. Hence, by prioritizing rest and self-care, students can avoid the pitfalls of burnout and keep attaining a high level of productivity over the long term in their journey.

In my own journey, I have come to the realization that finding this balance between work and rest is not about reaching perfection; rather, it is about making deliberate choices that improve both my well-being and my academic objectives. I have given in to the pressure to work nonstop on certain weekends, only to find myself worn out and unproductive by Monday. On the other hand, there have been weekends when I have made rest a priority, giving myself time to recover and come back to work with fresh enthusiasm and concentration. These encounters have taught me that maintaining balance is a dynamic process that calls for constant introspection and modification.

In conclusion, even though there is often a massive amount of pressure to catch up on work, it is important to understand the importance of rest as a necessary element of success and long-term productivity. As I draw closer to finishing my master's dissertation at Universiti Putra Malaysia, titled, "Selfishness in Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See* (2014)," I am more certain than ever that achieving this balance is not only feasible

but also essential. By acknowledging that a sufficient amount of time is needed to relax is an essential component of my academic path. This has allowed me to preserve my mental well-being, increase my performance, and actually enjoy the learning and discovery that personifies the postgraduate experience. Ultimately, this equilibrium will not only help me finish my degree but also set me up for future opportunities and challenges in both my academic and professional lives.

## CHAPTER 2

# Balancing Work, Study, and Life

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In mid-2022, I was caught off guard by a question I received: "Do you want to pursue a master's degree while continuing to work?" While I had always intended to further my education, I didn't expect it to happen so soon, especially since I had only graduated with my bachelor's degree two years earlier. My initial plan was to gain more work experience before diving back into academia, believing that this experience would enrich my studies and provide a practical context for what I would learn. However, this question prompted me to rethink my approach and consider the possibility of advancing my education earlier than I had planned.

Since then, I have spent many nights weighing the pros and cons, asking myself, "Am I ready to take on the challenge of balancing work, studies, and personal life? Can I manage the demands of a master's program while maintaining my job performance and personal well-being?" I knew that this decision would require a significant commitment and would test my time management skills and resilience. Despite my concerns and the uncertainty of how I would handle these responsibilities simultaneously, I ultimately

decided to take a leap of faith. I realized that the opportunity to further my education while gaining practical work experience was too valuable to pass up, and I was determined to make the most of it. This marked the beginning of a challenging yet rewarding new chapter in my life.

Fast forward to March 2023, I began my first semester. I will not lie—I was genuinely excited about studying again. It brought back memories of the good old university days; I was ready and eager to dive into each class and complete all the assignments. Although the beginning was a bit challenging, which was understandable given the significant shift in my schedule and lifestyle, I knew it would take some time to adjust. Fortunately, it didn't take long for me to get accustomed to the new pace of life. Before I knew it, four months had passed, and my first semester ended on a high note. This early success not only boosted my confidence but also became a buffer against the stress I would face later on. It reassured me that I was on the right path, motivating me to continue this journey with even greater determination.

At the same time, I am glad I made the decision to start studying again because I've learned so much from both my lecturers and my classmates. Through my lecturers, I have gained valuable knowledge that directly benefits my work. For example, in one semester, I took a course on Employee, Organization, and Community Relations. My lecturer assigned a challenging topic related to the future of industrial relations in Malaysia and the country's preparations for 2030. Although the assignment was difficult, it pushed me to delve into academic research and explore case studies from the Industrial Court. This expanded my understanding and taught me to view issues from perspectives I might not have considered on my own.

Additionally, my course is attended by many working adults from various industries and backgrounds, which brings a rich layer of diversity to our discussions. During presentations, my classmates often share their work experiences and the practices of their companies, allowing me to learn from their insights without having to experience these situations firsthand. For instance, in the first semester, when I took a course on Human Resource Development, my classmates discussed how HRD is implemented in their respective organizations. This was incredibly insightful, as different companies, due to their distinct business natures, have varied practices. I'm constantly amazed by my classmates and lecturers because they have opened my eyes to so many new ideas and perspectives. Their shared knowledge and experiences have enriched my learning journey far beyond what I could have achieved on my own.

As the saying goes, "Life is not always smooth sailing." I faced more challenges but also found opportunities for growth as I moved forward in my journey. Since the start of the second semester, the biggest and most frequent challenge I've faced is time management, particularly as I took on more subjects that were also more demanding. After all, time is a finite resource, and each of us has only 24 hours a day to allocate. As a working adult, a significant portion of my waking hours is spent at work, leaving me with limited time for assignments, revisions, and daily life matters. Consequently, I often find myself staying up late and dedicating weekends to completing assignments to meet submission deadlines. Although this approach worked, it has taken a strain on my mental health. The lack of proper rest coupled with a disrupted sleep schedule made me anxious and stressed. Reflecting on my last semester, I have to admit that I was unhappy

due to the buildup of stress and anxiety over writing my project paper proposal. Despite starting work on it before the semester began, I constantly felt like I did not have enough time to complete it. I found myself trapped in a cycle of reading, writing, and rewriting because I never felt satisfied with what I had written. My perfectionist tendencies made things worse.

Even though the past year and a half has not been smooth sailing, I am grateful for all the challenges I have faced because they have provided opportunities for me to grow and become a better version of myself. These challenges also opened my eyes to many new things.

Throughout this journey, I can confidently say that it has expanded my comfort zone and improved my ability to tolerate and manage stress. I know this sounds cliché, but it's the truth. I have come to terms with the fact that stress is an inevitable part of this learning journey. Therefore, I always remind myself that stress is a sign that you are pushing your boundaries and growing. It is also a force that drives you to become a better person. The demands of work, study, and life can become overwhelming at times. This is due to the fact that my 'me' time for relaxation and stress relief has become very limited. Additionally, as my lifestyle and demands have changed, what worked for me before no longer does. Previously, I enjoyed watching short videos on social media or "healing" videos—just cute animals, really—to destress. But these no longer worked when I entered the third semester. Fortunately, I discovered that building mini-block figures helps me calm down when things become overwhelming. In short, I have learned that when old ways don't work, it's essential to be creative and explore new alternatives.

Beyond personal coping strategies, I truly believe in the importance of surrounding yourself with the right people, as their

presence and support make a huge difference during tough times. I still remember when coursework was becoming increasingly stressful, and my mother, who noticed that I wasn't coping well, stepped in and made me realize that I needed to change, or things would start to go south. It was because of her encouragement that I began exploring different ways to destress and eventually found that building mini-block figures helped to calm my nerves. Consequently, I built many block figures and placed them around the house. My mother has never once complained, knowing that these help me to unwind.

In addition to my mother, another key person who has supported me throughout this journey is my manager. She is also the one who extended the invitation to join her in pursuing a master's degree. Even before I started studying, she encouraged me and gave me that little push to begin. As I have been studying, she has helped me navigate rough patches. Many of my classmates are working adults with much more experience than I have, and in group assignments, my lack of experience sometimes left me feeling unable to contribute as much as I wanted to. Yet, my manager was patient, teaching and guiding me without judgment. At the start of the last semester, I encountered issues when looking for a supervisor for my project paper. For context, I had to change supervisors and finalize a topic so that I could start writing my proposal—it was already close to mid-semester and this added to the stress. At that time, I felt helpless, unsure of what to do next. My manager offered valuable advice on how to approach the situation professionally and make decisions. It was because of her support that I was able to resolve this issue. Moreover, I'm deeply grateful to the many other individuals who have helped me along this journey. My friends, in particular, have provided unwavering

support, always ready to lend a listening ear when I needed to pour my heart out. Their encouragement and understanding have been invaluable, reminding me that I'm not alone in this journey.

Although I have yet to graduate, when I look back at the past one and a half years, I can confidently say that this period has been one of the most important and transformative times in my life. In this relatively short span of time, I've learned many valuable life lessons. Juggling work and study is no easy task, but these experiences have taught me resilience and helped me gain a deeper understanding of myself. These lessons will undoubtedly serve me well, not just in life but also as I work my way up the corporate ladder. I'm particularly grateful for the people around me who have offered their unwavering support and encouragement—whether through their words, actions or simply their presence—helping me navigate the tough times and keep moving forward.

With just one semester left until graduation, I find myself in the final stretch of this journey. I'm filled with anticipation as I look forward to the day when I will stand on that stage, dressed in my graduation robe and mortarboard, proudly receiving my graduation scroll. This moment will not only mark the culmination of my academic efforts but also serve as a testament to the personal growth and resilience I have developed along the way.

## CHAPTER 3

# A Tale of Two Cities (Kuala Lumpur and Selangor)

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Life is a grand voyage filled with surprises and suspense. Whether life gives us sunshine and rainbows, or storm and tempest, they are all but a test intricately designed to mould us into the people we are meant to become. The tests come into us in various forms and sizes, but they have one goal in common; to uproot us from our comfort zone so that we emerge as a better version of ourselves one day. It is often said that birds of a feather flock together, but my story is one in which 'misery loves company' and 'great minds think alike' converge. The story that took place in two cities of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor between 2017-2022. In retrospect, those five years were a time of learning and unlearning, feeling both the best and worst of life, and experiencing both my most productive and most unproductive periods. There are indeed many anecdotes that anyone can read with respect to the theme 'postgraduate study'. Here is one that captures the mental struggle that I went through while pursuing a PhD in English literature. As a literature scholar, I feel compelled to allude to one of the most

iconic opening paragraphs of all time in English literature. If you recognise these lines by the great Charles Dickens, I hope you are not offended by me putting my own twist and turn into re-interpretating them. If everything sounds non-sensical to you, it is certainly because of the PERMANENT HEAD DAMAGE that I have accumulated along the way.

### **It was the best of times, it was the worst of times**

With 11 years of teaching experience under my belt behind me by 2017, it was undoubtedly the best time for me to move on to the next phase of my life, the very phase where I would be pursuing a degree hailed as the pinnacle of all education degrees. Taking the plunge to get started came with some mini hurdles. With my fairly limited knowledge about the perplexing world of scholarly research, I had to admit that I overestimated myself. The ideas that I thought were brilliant turned out to be juvenile, and the timeline that I had chartered appeared to be highly unrealistic. The first semester was chaotic but rewarding, at the same time having to juggle between being a full-time educator and a part-time PhD candidate. When my proposal defence was well-received after putting in weeks into modifying and restructuring my ideas, I was on cloud nine and admittedly, 2017 had been kind to me.

When the whole world was shaken by the invasion of the coronavirus in 2020, everything came to a complete halt, including my PhD progress. Henceforth, the worst of times had really begun. With my few initial chapters beginning to see the light of day, I had to brace myself for the darkness ahead. With the lockdown in full swing, all face-to-face communication with my supervisor had to be stopped. With two compulsory publications and one conference presentation yet to be materialised, the unexpected lockdown forced me into the path of regression. Days blurred into weeks, and weeks stretched into months; there was nothing to do but to

continue writing both purposefully and meaninglessly. It was like a never-ending cold winter that sucked out all the joy that life had to offer. Progress was non-existent until zoom and Google meet sessions were normalised. It really took a while before a new ray of hope emerged.

### **It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness**

To finally be able to call myself a PhD candidate was surely a form of intellectual upgrade. All of a sudden, I found myself drawn to places brimming with intellectual vibes such as libraries and book stores, even when I was travelling during the pre-covid years. Intellectually, I started to be more inquisitive, leaving no stone unturned to find the most brilliant ideas for my PhD research. I was not planning to win a Nobel prize but I guess I was close to winning one. It was also an age where I wanted to talk to smart souls, those who could give me great ideas through brilliant conversations. In fact, my dedication to the path of being a consummate intellect was so intense that I began to distance myself from content that I once enjoyed like reality shows and chick lit. Oh yes, that very phase when I thought wisdom was well within my reach and being smart was what I was destined to become. Oh, silly me!

Nevertheless, life has its way to wake us up from our imagination. As the excitement waned, I was only left with a sense of foolishness. I thought I was doing well at juggling between a PhD and work but reality had never been more brutal. Soon enough, anxiety attack paid me a visit and it was then I knew I overrated by own abilities. The so-called brilliant ideas that I once had were all nothing but juvenile notions and drafts that I was very sure would impress my supervisors came back with comments that would

render me sleepless for nights upon reading. Once the initial thrill wore off, I began to see firsthand just how naïve and foolish I had been. Oh yes, hitting rock bottom was the new norm to me!

### **It was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity**

It was not too long ago when my mind constantly fluctuated between the realms of belief and incredulity. While pursuing my PhD, there were times that I truly believed that I could be the top 5% who could successfully complete my PhD in 3 years. I wanted to prove to the world that I was a rare specimen who could beat the odds and emerged as the winner. I believed that hard work would pay off and those who keep grinding would eventually see the light at the end of the tunnel way earlier than those who kept procrastinating. Hence, I kept reading, writing, revising and most importantly believing that my PhD would material in 3 years' time. Then, I was harshly reminded by the circumstances around me that the membership of the believers' club came with an unknown expiration date. No one could notify you when the membership expires but you will eventually realise it when you just stop believing in all the things that you used to.

The next phase known as incredulity started as soon as I entered year 2 semester 2. They say that the first withered leaf often signals the start of autumn, meanwhile, the phase of incredulity starts with multiple rejections from academic journals and research supervisors. In this phase, we would stop writing and begin to master a new craft that enables us to do a disappearing act skilfully. This is also when we start to realise how fleeting one unproductive semester can be. We refuse to believe that we have wasted one semester on doing nothing. Guilt gnaws at us for wasting a semester's worth of fees, but the real torment lies in the self-directed anger, the frustration of feeling utterly useless, so

very freaking useless that we begin to question the meaning of our worthless existence!!!

**It was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of Hope, it was the winter of Despair.**

Embarking on a PhD journey is no easy feat. In fact, some have even theorised that it is meant to be pursued on a fulltime basis as it requires undivided attention and commitment. Given the similarities of these two lines, the next part of my narration will be anchored upon them. Despite the demands, the PhD journey can be one of light and hope, not only enhancing our intellect, but also building patience, integrity, and perseverance. Pursuing a PhD is akin to playing a game that needs skilful strategising. In order to make it to the final level, we need to march forward, defend, attack, plan, hide, and most importantly wait. For every hurdle that we manage to cross each semester, there is light and hope awaits. However, these moments of light and hope are often short-lived and the fight is not over until the final senate letter is issued.

To be honest, a huge chunk of the PhD journey is teeming with darkness and despair even for a self-proclaimed optimist like me. Throughout the stint of the PhD candidature, we get to experience first-hand just how annoying it can be to get asked the lethal question 'When are you finishing your PhD'? This is the very question that takes any PhD candidate straight from Disneyland to catacombs, both literally and metaphorically. The feelings of despair and darkness would never leave us, just like the hungry vultures hovering above us, they wait until it is the right time and then the start attacking us mercilessly. Of course, each merciless assault leaves us with scars and wounds, but also makes us

stronger. Many PhD students may end up losing themselves as they navigate aimlessly through the seemingly endless tunnel of darkness and despair. However, there are always bright lights shining at the end of the tunnel but only those who persevere eventually reach the bright light at the end, where they can finally enjoy the magical view.

### **[I] had everything before [me], [I] had nothing before [me],**

Finally and just as importantly, another paradoxical situation that PhD students go through is feeling as if they have everything and nothing concurrently. While help and resources abound, none seem to fill the void that troubles us. Despite having access to countless journals, we often find that the critical articles we need are locked behind paywalls, requiring exorbitant payments. There will also be many PhD who can offer us their advice on how they made it to the finish line. While their stories are inspiring, we soon find that everyone has their own tailor-made PhD journey. Thus, their advice can feel both highly relevant and surprisingly irrelevant.

Of course, earning the PhD and the title 'Dr.' feels like reaching the pinnacle of academic success, yet paradoxically, it marks only the beginning of new challenges. You will find yourself being a complete novice struggling once again in the domains of scholarly publication, research grants, and postgraduate supervision. Academia is filled with challenges and uncertainties, but a PhD can sweeten the process. At least, it is a form of solid recognition that elevates your reputation and puts you on par with the intellectual elite. Better yet, this hard-earned recognition comes with a lifetime validity.

My short reflective piece, humbly titled "A Tale of Two Cities," is one of the many stories you will read in this anthology. While all of

the stories here have their distinct plots and themes, we all share a common thread: those who choose not to rest on their laurels will eventually experience a new dawn, filled with the beautiful chorus of a new beginning.

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## CHAPTER 4

### Hang on, you are almost there!

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#### **Prologue:**

“I’m not sure if I’ve made the right decision. I don’t think I can complete my PhD!” After discussing my data analysis with my supervisor, I felt terrible and told my family I wanted to quit. It was not my first time having these negative thoughts about my thesis. Being surrounded by other competitive PhD mates, I felt that I had nothing to offer to my supervisor and that my thesis was not something I could be proud of. Additionally, as an Asian-background postgraduate student living and studying in an English-speaking country, I did not expect the supervision approach to differ from what I wanted. I understand that this PhD journey demands unwavering dedication and resilience, but there were times when the challenges led to self-doubt, anxiety and regrets.

#### **Colliding expectations.**

When I started my PhD journey, I was excited and motivated to contribute something meaningful to the field of education. I knew I was stepping into a world of academic rigour, but I was eager to

work with my supervisor, a well-respected scholar whom I deeply admired. However, as I went along the journey, I realised that his expectations were far more demanding than I had anticipated. From our very first individual meeting, it was clear that my supervisor valued independence. “You’re in charge of your research,” he told me. “I’m here to guide you, but the direction and progress are entirely up to you.” He even asked me about my expectations of the meetings and the research plan. Although he mentioned that his door was always open for me to walk in and talk to him, I assumed he expected me to approach him only when I had something substantial to discuss. To me, the autonomy given was quite daunting as I had imagined more regular check-ins and maybe a bit more hand-holding, but I soon understood this was a test of my self-motivation.

As I delved deeper into my research, I encountered the inevitable roadblocks, such as literature that seemed contradictory and unclear research path. I would prepare for the meetings, hoping for clear answers to my questions, only to stumble upon another challenge. “You need to think critically”, he would say. “What do you make of these results? There is a lack of philosophical stance on this issue”, he added. I realised that my supervisor did not expect me to only provide answers to my research questions but the ability to analyse the situation from multiple perspectives and ask the right questions. His expectations have definitely pushed me to think critically and develop my problem-solving skills, even though it often felt like I was navigating a maze with no clear end. Sometimes, I wished to become invisible so my supervisor would not see me walk past his office.

Therefore, our meetings were infrequent but intense. I learned that my supervisor expected regular progress reports even if he didn’t directly ask for them. I also found that producing high-quality work was among the most challenging aspects of my journey. My

supervisor was meticulous! He saw the slightest error and pointed out areas I had missed. The bar was set high, and I often found myself revising the drafts multiple times before they were considered acceptable. This process taught me the value of precision and thoroughness in my work. He pushed me to write concisely and with 'authority'- which was entirely foreign for an Asian student like me. Getting out of my cocoon or comfort zone was hard, especially when my supervisor encouraged me to submit my work to journals, present at conferences and engage with the broader academic community. The idea of putting my work out there for people to critique was terrifying, but over time, I saw it as an essential aspect of academic life.

Despite emphasising my capacity and independence, my supervisor also expected me to work collaboratively with other researchers and seek feedback from my PhD colleagues. I remembered my supervisor's initiative to create a group meeting with all his supervisees on the first day I registered. Although I appreciate the cross-cultural differences that we had in the group, as students came from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam, there are a few things that I hadn't fully anticipated. From the beginning, I found that my cohort was a group of high achievers. They actively published papers in prestigious journals, presented at international conferences, and won grants. At first, I didn't see it as an environment that could foster a spirit of excellence, as the meeting created an undercurrent of competition that sometimes overwhelmed me.

There were moments when the pressure to keep up with my peers led to feelings of inadequacy, especially when I hit roadblocks in my research. The competitive environment also influenced the

team's social dynamics as every research progress discussion often turned into subtle comparisons, where the unspoken question lingered: "Who is ahead?" The sense that others were progressing faster and achieving more heightened my self-doubt and anxiety, and I did not feel that my supervisor offered any help except advice on how to do better! Fortunately, over time, I learned to navigate this competitive landscape into something that was constructive. I started viewing my peers as sources of inspiration and learning instead of rivals that can trigger self-doubt. I also realised that I managed to mitigate the adverse effects of competition after focusing on my progress and defining my success goals. I eventually found the value of collaboration by reaching out to my batchmates for advice and sharing resources as well as moral support during challenging times.

### **Epilogue:**

PhD research is a marathon, not a sprint. You must be in it for the long haul, ready to face setbacks with determination. You can take a break but not to quit. Reflecting on my experience, I realised my supervisor's expectations were not just about producing a good thesis. His high standards prepared me not just for the completion of my research but also for a future in academia where these lessons would continue to guide me.

## CHAPTER 5

# The Personal and Professional Transformation Through a PhD

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I remembered precisely the moment that I decided to pursue my PhD studies. It was the day when I received the details in relation to my upcoming Masters convocation ceremony. Back then, I knew that I wanted more for myself. Getting my Masters degree was not sufficient for me as I felt that many people I knew had Masters degrees too, so in my view, it was not such a big deal. I felt that it would be a challenge for me to obtain a PhD for my career advancement and personal satisfaction. At that point of my life, I was also working as a full-time lecturer. Since I was already familiar with the University's administration system, I knew that I could easily fulfill its academic requirements and be accepted as a PhD candidate at that university. Therefore, I felt that I should just continue to pursue my PhD studies immediately, and if I waited any longer, I will lose my passion and momentum.

Another reason why I wanted to pursue my PhD was because I was really close with one of the lecturers who taught me during my

Masters education and I thought that he would be a great PhD supervisor for me since we had a good rapport with each other. However, things did not go as I planned. He left unexpectedly and shortly after I enrolled as a PhD student. As he was a lecturer from a foreign country, he was not obligated to stay on. I had to adjust myself with the idea of another lecturer as my main supervisor. My appointed supervisor was not someone I was really close with, moreover, I was still saddened with the fact that my favourite lecturer left for good. I believed that I also pursued my PhD studies because I wanted to make my favourite lecturer proud of me. Soon, I lost contact with my favourite lecturer. He was a totally different person in his correspondence with me after that. He barely remembered me and I felt like I was all alone in my pursuit of excellence.

My new supervisor was exceptional but I felt that I was not his best student, or his favourite, so I had lots of hiccups in my journey. But I kept on, because I hated to quit halfway. I will not quit, as it was not my nature, so I quietly continued my PhD journey. I made some good friends along the way, they were my PhD classmates and we became really close. I turned to them for emotional support. They also helped me in my journey and we motivated each other. Overall, I would say that I had an incredible journey, it was a lot of hard work but nevertheless, it was also emotionally satisfying.

I spent hours in the university library and I even went as far as to get a room on campus for a few semesters. I needed a place for my numerous books and clothes. I remembered that I got a warning letter once from the university for having a messy room but at that time I was so busy with work and my studies that I could not keep up with housekeeping. I was also in a state of emotional mess. I had some relationship problems as I was too engrossed in my PhD studies and deliberately neglected my close friends. I chose my studies of course, all the time. I could feel that I will be

successful in my studies, so something had to give. I would say I was not a good friend back then, but I do not have any regrets though.

During my PhD journey, my mother was then diagnosed with breast cancer, fortunately she was only at Stage 2. She immediately went for her surgery to remove her cancer followed with chemotherapy and radiotherapy as well. As she stayed with me, her condition affected me. I was really sad when she lost her hair due to chemotherapy. I was devastated with the situation at that time but then I knew I just had to complete my studies. I had to attend some classes as well as my PhD mode of study was coursework and research but it was hard as I was also working full-time, so most of the time, I ended my days feeling exhausted and depleted. But since I was a part-time student, the lecturers were understanding with my situation.

There was one incident that was strange in my opinion and some sort of a miracle to me. I ordered a book that was important for my research from the USA via University Malaya's book store and I thought that the book, which was rare and highly unlikely to arrive on time in Malaysia, will ever be in my hands. I was thinking that it will take months, but it did arrive shortly and I felt like that was a sign from the Universe for me to complete my PhD. I also felt that I had invested so much money and time towards my studies that if I were to quit, I will have nothing to show to the world. All my blood, tears and sweat needed to be rewarded. So, I self-soothed myself and convinced myself that having a PhD would help me immensely in my career and my personal life.

As I was just staying nearby my university campus, I was shocked that my classmates who stayed in other states but commuted when necessary graduated earlier than me. I think their commutes motivated them to complete their studies earlier. So, I did not graduate with some of my classmates, but rather with others who were also working around my pace. I did waste one semester doing nothing much as I was indecisive in my direction of writing. Finally, I settled on Indian diaspora and I felt that the area was closest to me as my elder sister is married to a second generation British-Indian and she has been abroad for 20 plus years. Her children, my nieces and nephew also belong in the Indian diaspora category so I felt that I was actually doing research that revolved around my own family members. Although I was not dealing directly with British-Indian writers like Hanif Kureshi or Monica Ali, I gravitated towards the 1st generation and 2nd generation Indian-American writers. I selected works by writers such as Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri. The writers were from different generations and their selected works reflected that.

I would say that my PhD journey was very personal as I did not really need to do it but I wanted to do it for myself. I think I wanted to prove to myself that I could do it. I obtained my PhD in English Literary Studies in 2012 and it has been some time now. I would revisit my work occasionally knowing that the writers whom I wrote about would have written more works and they would have evolved themselves, both in their personal lives and in their works. One of the writers, Bharati Mukherjee sadly died at the age of 76 in 2017.

I really felt that throughout my PhD journey, I learned a lot about myself. I learned that I needed people in order to achieve my goals. Besides my supervisor, the librarians and my editor/proof reader helped me tremendously. Staying on the university campus

too and surrounding myself with other students helped me to remind myself that I was a university student. I needed the pressure to complete my studies as doing my PhD did cost me a lot of money. I had to pay my own tuition fees via my EPF funds, pay for my room on campus and other necessary expenses. So, I should aim to complete my PhD studies as soon as I could.

On the viva defense day itself, I was a nervous wreck. But I told myself that I had to see myself as a PhD holder already, equal to the examiners. I also did read many books in order to prep myself for the session. I have to believe that I am worthy of the doctorate before I deserve to be a PhD scholar. So that was how I did it. Although I had to do minor corrections, the outcome was positive as they were not major corrections. So, I was extremely happy that my viva defense session was a success.

After my PhD journey, I felt that I have changed as a person. I lost out on some things in life, but then it was my choice and to end my PhD studies when things got rough was not an option. I felt that if I quit, I would never forgive myself. It was the longest marathon of my life and it was also a bittersweet moment for me. Would I do it all over again? I think I will not because it took away a huge chunk of my life and since education is dynamic it is hard to catch up with the abundant research and knowledge out there. I was much younger then so I felt that I was much more focused and stronger physically and mentally. I also had the energy to move a lot, from work to campus. Meeting with my supervisor and going through the writing drafts took a lot of my energy and time. Therefore, one has to be emotionally, mentally and physically ready. One's personality also plays a part as one has to be in solitude most of the time; reading and writing on one's own. You have to know what

you are doing and you need to motivate yourself at all times because no one else is going to be your cheerleader. It is after all, your own personal journey.

## CHAPTER 6

### Learning To Rest, Not Quit

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I had just finished a 6 consecutive class teaching diploma and degree student at the university. Finishing up the day, I return home with to my family with my wife and my two small children. From 6 to 10 I spend these 4 hours with them, doing things such as having dinner, playing, and teaching the eldest math or reading. These 4 hours are also used to catch up with my wife about other things in our live. It ranges from everyday gossip to money and the children's activity. These routines help me to maintain my work life balance because after 10 pm, I will be back in front of my computer continuing my work for my PhD. For the next 4 hours, I will be trying to complete my weekly task that I or my supervisor has set for me to complete. There are days where I just stare blankly on to the monitor trying to figure out what to write and what to do. There are also times that I will be so tired that I fell asleep in front of the computer.

There are also days where the work become so demanding with all the task such as marking and doing the documentation that it

takes a toll on my mental state. I notice that I become easily irritated and can easily go off on even the smallest thing. I try to control this, but it is difficult when you have so many things on the back of your head. Juggling work, family and study is not easy. I realized why so many of my colleague and friend did not finish their study. The turning point for me is when I got angry at my children for something they did. This is when I know that I needed a break. I am lucky that I have a very understanding wife that allows me to be me once in a while. Whenever I feel overwhelmed with work, I usually turn to two things to unwind, football and fishing. It does not matter if it is on a field with 22 other guys on a Sunday night or a Saturday evening, or casting for a Toman at Lake Klau in Raub, Pahang. These are the times where I can completely forget all of my duty and responsibility for a while before I start again the next day, and it does help me to maintain a healthy work life balance.

To me, studying is not that hard, sure it is a lot of work but never that hard. The challenges come when you have other responsibilities beside studying. Every milestone should be celebrated in the manner that benefit the individual the most. To me that is being allowed to do the thing that I am passionate about. It helps me to become myself again. I cannot stress how lucky I am to have a wife that understand these needs.

After finalizing my title for my PhD, I worked tirelessly for 3 months to finish my proposal. I remember staying up late until 4 am everyday trying to complete my proposal. It takes a toll on me; I suffered from panic attack and develop several other health issues such as chest pain and backache. Bear in mind that I am also teaching full time at my university and on average every day I have to teach at least 5 to 6 class. The burden of work, family and studying prove to be too much to my body. I remember going to see a doctor and he advised me to take a break. My supervisor also scolded me for neglecting my health. He said; "I will not press

you to complete this in 3 years, that is entirely on you whether you finish or not, my job is to help and guide you but please do not harm yourself". That really suck a cord in me and make me realize the importance of caring for myself.

After colloquium, my supervisor asks me to join him for a drink at a restaurant. There, we just hang out and relax. He said to me that the first part is done, now take a break and start the next stage when you are ready. This make me realize that I should not be too hard on myself. This journey is entirely chartered by me, I am the only who set the pace and the one who going to decide whether to finish or not. I think that those who want to pursuit a PhD should be determined enough to make sure that they finished the study but at the same time are also aware that they need to take care of themselves too. Neglecting one aspect of our life for the sake of the end goal of finishing our study are one of the factors that cause people not able to finish their study.

Self-care starts with the simplest act such as talking with people that you care the most, playing a video game or just taking a small break. Most people did not realize that these small things are going to help you finished your study. Some days are going to be tough, but you start again the next day. These are the things that keep me going during my PhD journey.



## CHAPTER 7

# A Tough Mama's Morning Routines During Her Dissertation Journey

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In 2019, I was granted a paid study leave by Mindanao State University-Main Campus to pursue my doctorate degree in English major in Language at the University of San Jose-Recoletos, Cebu City. We had face-to-face classes for three trimesters, and it was a refreshing and great learning experience to study in a different school in a different city. I met classmates from different parts of the country, and I marveled at the facilities of my new school. The early mornings when I had to pack my bags, ride a plane, and stay in Cebu City for a few days monthly and the excitement of going to class will always be fond memories. Of course, my children were often eagerly waiting for me to come home because they knew I would be bringing some food, toys, or clothes for them.

Then the pandemic struck. We shifted to online classes, and the major hurdles of pursuing graduate studies were all online: comprehensive examination, dissertation proposal defense, and dissertation proper defense. Fortunately, though, we graduate students had to select sources of data for our study online, as travelling was restricted. In my case, I chose to do a Systemic

Functional Linguistics and Model Framing analysis of Facebook memes that both praised and criticized former President Rodrigo Duterte and the officials under his administration. Why memes? Since communication was practically online during that time, and I often checked my social media account, I found memes really amusing. My brothers would often chat and joke about the issues surfacing from the government's handling of the pandemic, and they were the ones who suggested that I study about memes. The idea finally came to being as a course paper topic in one of my major subjects, and one of the panel members during the defense of that paper suggested a more suitable theory for the analysis. So, it was the start of my dissertation journey.

Looking back, I realized that sleeping early and waking up at three in the morning were the best I could do to accomplish what I needed for my study. There was no need for an alarm clock because my problems simply woke me up. I had just given birth to my fourth child, and I had two older children who had online classes four times a week. They had to be up at 6 a.m. and eat their meals before their online classes. My third child was not yet enrolled in any school at that time, but I had to keep him occupied by letting him play with toys or giving him tracing and coloring activities. Moreover, my husband and I had a conflict over finances that greatly impacted our family life--- and my mental health. Because he was in the military, he would be away from home for two to three months, and his absence from the home while we had a problem was something hard to bear emotionally. I would start many of my mornings crying, then I would pray intensely, determined to finish my dissertation despite everything. The children were asleep during those early hours of the morning, so I took advantage of those and did all the encoding and editing of my paper, all the while fueled by anger and determination.

I applied for an extension of my study leave for one more semester so I could focus more on polishing my paper, and fortunately my application was granted. The pandemic had finally ended, and my children had face-to-face classes again. It was another challenge, as my helper and I had to get them ready early in the morning. When they were out in school, I was back to working on my paper and constantly consulting my dissertation adviser, in preparation for my final defense.

My dissertation defense was still held online, and since one of the panel members during the proposal defense was absent due to sickness, a new member of the panel was added--- and so were more revisions on the statement of the problem, which changed the structure of the presentation of my data entirely. Finally, after much revising, then submitting my paper to the editor, I finally got an email from my school saying that I could now apply for graduation. Finances were tight, but my parents let me borrow money for expenses not covered by the scholarship from my university: defense fee, graduation fee, toga, printing and binding costs, shipping of my dissertation bound copies, etc.

Finally, after all the sleepless nights and early morning physical and mental work, my family, our helper, and I flew to Cebu City for my graduation on December 20, 2022. We arrived three days earlier, with my family spending most for our hotel stay and side-trips, with the trip to Snow World and Cebu Ocean Park the most unforgettable. It was Christmas season, and we savored breakfasts at the hotel amidst the lovely Christmas tree, lights, and music.

Though my husband was not with us during my graduation, I am happy to say that we now have resolved the problem that tested the strength of our marriage. I still wake up early now that I am back to teaching and I must prepare my kids for school, but my mornings are now peaceful despite the stresses that come with my job as well as that of motherhood--- thanks to the discipline I acquired as a graduate student, my love for my family, and my gratefulness to God for sustaining me through it all.

## CHAPTER 8

### Build Bridges Not Walls

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After completing undergraduate studies, the usual pattern for an individual in Malaysia will be to kickstart with their working career. As for myself I was part of this cycle until my friend from university decided to pursue postgraduate studies and just randomly called me to give him company. In all honesty I tagged along not knowing for what I initially signed up for. It was during the first day of class that I realised that the decision that I made was actually a blessing in disguise. I met so many people from various backgrounds and field. While my field relates to marketing and communications, but I was fortunate enough to meet individuals from the various fields such as with banking and finance, healthcare, engineering, economics, law enforcement and many more. Whether you choose to take courses online or in person, your classmates will come from diverse industries and backgrounds. As a graduate student, you'll be connected with numerous professionals, many of whom have achieved significant career success. You'll learn from professors who are industry leaders, offering both practical knowledge and valuable networking opportunities. Frequently,

you'll be offered opportunities to attend industry conferences, workshops, and networking events. These events provide a platform to meet professionals, recruiters, and potential employers, helping you to establish connections that may be beneficial for your career. The academic environment in postgraduate studies often fosters mentor-mentee relationships, both with faculty and with more experienced peers. These relationships can provide guidance, support, and connections that are crucial for career advancement.

Besides, the beauty of postgraduate studies is that the abundance of knowledge that one brings to the table from different perspectives and viewpoints based on the respective field of expertise. Sometimes it is important to embrace differences in terms of viewpoints and opinions as it benefits the majority when you look at a subject matter from a broader picture. I was always thinking from the marketing side of matters but the collaboration with individuals from different fields gave me an in-depth understanding on what is at stake with other implications such as with the social, economic, sustainability and many various other aspects to look into when developing a new project. Another perk of pursuing postgraduate studies is also on building your networks. It might be cliché to say that but personally I had benefited a whole lot from the contacts that I met during my journey. In addition to helping one another with assignments, the contacts will certainly come in handy when you go outside of the classroom. When you're at work seeking vendors or consultants, you know whom to call. From business collaborations to an extent where I've even witnessed individuals getting to know their life partner there. It is certainly an interesting avenue to build professional relationships where one can leverage with other individuals' set of expertise and experience. Moreover, many postgraduate programs attract international students, allowing you to build a global network. This can be particularly beneficial if you are interested in working in a

different country or in an international context you can build and go even further. I was lucky to meet individuals with brilliant minds coming from Africa, Europe, America, Asian regions with a diverse set of cultural backgrounds. The extension of understanding people from different cultural backgrounds is not only bound to local but become global and trust me, it'll definitely open up your mind on an array of topics especially on politics, social order, law and policies that surrounds with people well at least in the field that I studied in which is with Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC). Thanks to social media platforms such as with Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and many more keeping in touch had never been easier and efficient. Your contact is just a single click away to put into context when you need a favour or a request.

In addition to individual assignments and tasks, there will also be group projects that will require you to team up with classmates that you're not close with. Having said that sometimes, we will also be having conflicting ideas and opinions based of our own experiences that we have gained in our working career and also with the school of thought with different institutions during undergraduate studies. This is where often times the professors will play the mediating role to assess and evaluate the different suggestions and proposals that comes from the students. It will be very different compared to undergraduate level as you will be sitting down with individuals with a wide range of age gap, roles from executive up to high managerial positions and this will be the place where one's ego and character will be tested. It will certainly will not be smooth sailing experience especially when you feel that you lack working experience and when you start feeling inferior compared to the rest. Whenever you begin to feel this way, I would like to reiterate and remind you that every individual especially

while pursuing postgraduate studies is there for a reason. Whether it is to seek a promotion at work, for personal development, improve salary prospects, enhance employability, upskill yourself or even to elevate your professional status, it does not really matter. Never feel inferior and always confidently express your ideas because at this level it is no longer about merely following someone but to start taking the lead. Let it be from an academic or practical lessons, your character will be tested with projects, presentations, examinations and other assignments. For as long as you're convinced with the point that you're outlining to the rest with proper research and justifications then there is nothing to worry about. Many universities have strong alumni networks, particularly at the postgraduate level. As a postgraduate student, you gain access to this network, which can be a valuable resource for mentorship, job leads, and professional advice. Hence, you will be learning from the best of best and people whom had gone through the very same journey that you are pursuing right now. Be open with them on ideas and learn from them as well.

In summary, postgraduate studies offer a unique environment where you can build and strengthen your professional network, gain access to influential individuals, and create opportunities for career growth. Never had I thought that I'll come to realisation of the networking possibilities that came along with the pursuit of postgraduate studies and I'm utterly grateful to my friend whom had called me to tag along and of course I'm still in touch with him. That's the beauty of having good friends and likewise I hope you kickstart your postgraduate journey and have a beautiful one. Enjoy every single step and build bridges not walls.

## CHAPTER 9

# The Wind Beneath My Wings

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The journey ahead of me appeared thrilling and daunting when I started my Ph.D at the Center for Language Studies (CLS), University Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM). I had been dreaming about this day for years, imagining the excitement of delving deeply into my field's research, discovering new information, and contributing significantly. But as the Ph.D. process became more genuine, so did the anxiety. The road ahead was unknown, and I felt overpowered by the problems that awaited me. I was nervous about meeting with my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Sarala@ Thulasi A/P Palpanadan, for the first time. Would she be cold and unfriendly? Could I live up to her expectations? With her direction, could I manage this challenging journey?

When I first entered Dr. Sarala's office, I still remember my heart thumping in my chest. She had bookshelves lining the walls, each bearing witness to her wealth of knowledge and experience. Taking a deep breath as I walked in, I prepared myself for the conversation that was about to begin. However, as soon as we started conversing, my worries faded. Dr. Sarala smiled warmly,

and her eyes sparkled with compassion and understanding. She genuinely inquired about my goals, interests, and problems, immediately making me comfortable.

Right away in that first encounter, I saw that Dr. Sarala was a titan of academia and a mentor who genuinely cared about her students. She listened carefully to what I had to say and provided comfort and wise counsel. She recognized me as more than simply another student under her guidance; she saw me as a distinct person with goals, shortcomings, and capabilities. Her strategy was to support me in finding and developing my voice as a researcher rather than trying to make me into a replica of herself. I realized at that very instant that I was in capable hands, and here I could get the shoulder to lean on.

As the months passed, my early apprehensions gave way to a profound respect and adoration for Dr. Sarala. She became my compass, helping me to navigate the highs and lows of pursuing my doctorate. Dr. Sarala was always there to offer her steadfast support when I ran into problems, whether it was a challenging component of my research, a moment of self-doubt, or the inevitable failure of such an arduous process. She encouraged me to think critically and, on my whole, not only gave me the information I needed.

There were moments when it appeared like there was an impossible hill ahead. I remember one particularly trying time when I was not getting the desired results from my research. I was feeling a lot of disappointment and frustration, and I wasn't sure if I was meant for this road. I would try to hide my discomfort from Dr. Sarala during our meetings, but she always seemed to know. She would gently elicit information from me by asking probing questions that allowed me to voice my worries. Her compassion

and care were like a comforting salve, giving me back my perspective and self-assurance.

Support from Dr. Sarala went beyond the boundaries of the classroom. She realized that obtaining a Ph.D. is not just an intellectual but also an emotional and psychological task. She urged me to prioritize my health, maintain a healthy balance in my life, and learn to accept myself when things didn't go as expected. Her advice frequently reverberated in my head throughout the more trying times, as a helpful reminder that persistence is essential and that setbacks are a normal part of the process.

One of the most significant lessons I've learned from Dr. Sarala is the importance of resilience. The value of resilience is among the most important things Dr. Sarala has taught me. She made me realize that research is not a straight line but has many curves, twists, and unanticipated detours. But every obstacle presents a chance for improvement. She demonstrated that as long as I keep going, it's acceptable to stumble. Even at moments when I doubted myself, her faith in me never faltered. She reassured me that I could succeed, that I had the resources and the drive to do so, and that she would be there to assist me at every turn.

I am incredibly grateful to Dr. Sarala for her outstanding mentorship as I continue my doctoral journey. She has supported my development as a scholar and a person and guided me through research challenges. Her influence on my life goes far beyond my academic successes; she has molded me into who I am today.

Looking back, I can see how much I've changed since our initial visit to her office. My mind is no longer clouded by dread and uncertainty; I have confidence and a sense of purpose. I know

there will still be difficulties, but I know I can get through them if Dr. Sarala is on my side. She has been the wind beneath my wings, carrying me to heights I never imagined. I will apply the skills I've learned from Dr. Sarala to my academic and professional endeavors in the future. Her generosity, guidance, and unfailing support have made a lasting impression. She has demonstrated that genuine mentoring involves empowering others to realize their full potential and dispensing knowledge. For that, I will always be appreciative and grateful to her.

## CHAPTER 10

### Road to Enlightenment

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It was a decade and eight years ago, in 2006, when I was at the threshold of my quest for further knowledge. That year was my seventh year of full-time teaching at the English Department of the College of Social Sciences and Humanities in Mindanao State University (MSU), Marawi City, Philippines. I received a scholarship from the Commission on Higher Education-Higher Education Development Program-Faculty Development Program (CHED HEDP-FDP), which granted me passage through a milestone in my professional career. The scholarship paved the way for me to study my program of choice—Master of Arts in English major in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) at Silliman University in Dumaguete, Philippines.

My interest in MA in English (TESOL) sprang from the fact that students at MSU (Marawi Campus) are multicultural and multilingual and speak English as a Second Language (ESL). How these students learn English and how they overcome the challenges in learning the language have always fascinated me.

Therefore, with these fascinations in mind, I embarked on a quest for the best way to teach English to these learners.

Years of graduate study taught me that there is no best way to teach English. There is only an eclectic way to do it. Learners are at the heart of teaching, and diverse as they are, it is essential for teachers to cater to their differentiated learning as well as their experiential learning. Learners feel that they are valued and that learning is fun when they get to put their knowledge into practice, that is, in tasks that they can relate to and do with their peers.

Among other things, studying pragmatics and sociolinguistics broadened my perspective in teaching ESL learners. I learned that linguistic interpretation is context-specific and various contexts influence language use. Regardless of ethnicity, social status, and gender, learners adjust their speech with different situations and the people they encounter.

I also discovered that language testing does not only involve the observance of test construction guidelines in tests, the reliability and validity of tests, the statistics involved in evaluating test items, etc. More than anything, it stresses the relevance of positive and negative washback on teaching and learning. For instance, an essay-writing test, which intends to evaluate the writing skill of learners, will most likely generate a positive washback, while a multiple-choice test that is used to test the same skill will certainly produce a negative washback. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to align their tests with the objectives of the course.

In my quest to understand the ESL learners in MSU (Marawi Campus) more, I studied the verbal and nonverbal turn-taking cues of six pairs of learners from the two major tribes—Maranao and Visayan—in dyadic communication. The data were gathered using video recordings which were transcribed using Gail

Jefferson's Transcript Notation. The transcription process was painstakingly done as it involved the mastery of the transcript notation and the use of correct notations to identify the cues. Each video recording was replayed numerous times.

In the study, I found that while both Maranao learners and Visayan learners exhibited the same types of cues, the Maranao learners used more types than their Visayan counterparts. Moreover, the former used the types called turn-maintaining, turn-yielding, repair, turn-acceptance, and post-sequence more often, while the latter exhibited back-channel, adjacency pairs, assent, turn-requesting, and insertion sequence cues more frequently. Every type of cue was exhibited through verbal and/or nonverbal cues which had specific intentions. In multicultural settings like MSU (Marawi Campus), it is crucial for teachers to examine their learners' cues and their uses. This may be a daunting task for teachers, but its rewards are fulfilling. It will facilitate better understanding of the learners; greatly inform teaching and learning; and guide teachers in designing tasks and activities and in planning lessons that would better cater to the learners' needs.



## CHAPTER 11

### Sacrifice vs. Success

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In life, we might have one aim or more. Some people might have plans or timely schedule for executing the plan or plans. But most of the time, it is not as easy as we think it is. As the saying goes, man proposes and God disposes, we can plan wonderfully and then, something comes up and everything including the success plan or schedule shatteres completely. This is where sacrifice comes into the play.

When I got my offer letter to pursue my PhD, which was a dream since young, I was very excited to start. What more, when the PhD came with a full scholarship! With great plans and full of energy, I started my journey enthusiastically. I had a small team where we used to discuss our topics and research. We used to brainstorm together. There were about 5 of us. One of them was (and still is) my best friend, Jia. The other three friends were Mia, Zoya, and Kyza. Only, Jia and I were enrolled in the same university. Mia, Zoya, and Kyza enrolled in three other local universities, but we always kept in touch.

The first semester started. We started our race from the same starting point. We discussed our research topics seriously. Then, as time went by, we started discussing our challenges with regard to our studies. Some of us seriously addressed our challenges. However, there were others who gave opinions that it was just the first year and semester one, and it was supposed to be 'Honeymoon' year for candidates. Some went for 'justified' holidays. Some claimed to use the study-leave wisely by utilizing them effectively and earning side-income to cover the fees (as some candidates did not get full scholarship).

By the time we know it, semester one ended and we had to submit our progress reports. Jia submitted on time and quickly reminded me to do so as well. Despite my issues of topic with my former supervisor, I submitted. Mia, Zoya, and Kyza also submitted after being constantly reminded. Second semester started, Mia and Zoya were busy with family matters. Kyza shared with me that she was juggling with part-time job and family matters that she was running short of time to do her research work. She had valid reason to work part-time, I thought. And all of us thought it was just our second semester and we still had ample of time except for Jia. Jia was all set to run her marathon (with regard to her research work) and getting ready to defend her proposal. I was a bit panic as my work was not progressing as hers. Meanwhile, Kyza told me she was offered more part-time job which means more income. She changed her old car to a new one, which signalled her stable financial status. One day, she asked me if I was interested in taking up some part-time job as well. I was very tempted to accept. However, I discussed this matter with Jia, thinking that she might want to join as well. But she was totally against it. Instead, she advised me not to do so but stay focused on the PhD research work. Although I was not very convinced with Jia, somehow, something deep in me told that she was right. So, I declined Kyza's offer and continued to find ways to solve my research problems

and thank God I was given a main supervisor and co-supervisor of my discipline. I waited no more. I ran my marathon. Luckily, my supervisors were very supportive and understanding. They also ran my race.

Jia defended her proposal in her second semester, and I did mine at the beginning of my third semester. I managed to drag Mia and Zoya to start working seriously as well. Mia and Zoya were not very close with Jia, so I had to be the only one to motivate Mia and Zoya who were also very concerned about my progress. Only, Kyza was out of our reach as she was always busy with work and family. I thought she was mature enough to strike a balance between work and study and other also matters.

Time flew and soon we were in our final year. Jia successfully completed her studies before time and managed to get her name enlisted in that year's convocation. So, she joined work earlier than the given duration. Kudos to her!!! Although she had completed, she did not stop motivating me who was preparing for my viva at that time. Thank God, I passed my viva and completed my study on time and even clinched the Best Student Award that year. Thus, Jia and I celebrated our success happily and rejoined work gracefully. Mia and Zoya also joined work, but their studies were still in progress. I never stopped motivating them and they happily completed their PhD's after extending about a year more. It's ok. They completed. That's the most important thing. We all attended their graduation to celebrate together. We were happy at that time but deep down we were hiding our sadness for the incomplete mission to graduate together (as a team of five) as Kyza could not progress. She was involved in part-time too much at the expense of her study. She joined work as well.

Recently, after many years, I met Kyza at an event, and she told me she still has not completed. Her main regret was involving too much in part-time job. At that point, I was very thankful to God as I met and discussed this idea with Jia where she discouraged me from doing so. Luckily, I sacrificed the idea of making some extra cash at that time otherwise I might not have completed my study or completed late which might have caused a disaster at that time due to my challenging former department then. So, I realized that due sacrifice is very crucial for timely success. Thanks to Jia and all my other friends for their kind guidance. God bless all...

## BIOGRAPHY OF EDITORS



Venosha Ravana is a lecturer at the Department of Languages, Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology, where she also serves as a course leader. She completed her PhD in 2024 from the University of Malaya, following a master's from the same institution and a bachelor's in English for Professionals with a minor in computer science from Universiti Sains Malaysia.

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Her interests extend to creative writing, for which she won awards during her high school days writing for the *New Straits Times*. Now, she enjoys researching on model development and gardening in her spare time.

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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### A

**Anxiety** (Chapter 4): Feelings of worry or fear, often experienced during stressful academic challenges.

**Activity** (Chapter 1): Physical actions, such as exercise, that help maintain mental clarity and well-being.

### B

**Balance** (Chapter 1, 2, 5, 6, 7): The act of managing multiple responsibilities, such as studies, work, and personal life.

**Burnout** (Chapter 6): A state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by prolonged stress, particularly during postgraduate studies.

### C

**Collaboration** (Chapter 4, 8): The act of working together with others, especially for academic or professional growth.

**Clarity** (Chapter 4): The state of being clear in thought or understanding, often achieved after overcoming self-doubt.

**Connections** (Chapter 8): Professional or personal networks that provide opportunities for career advancement and learning.

## D

**Determination** (Chapter 7): Firmness of purpose in pursuing academic and personal goals despite difficulties.

**Discipline** (Chapter 7): The ability to control one's behavior and maintain focus on academic tasks, even in challenging circumstances.

## E

**Exercise** (Chapter 1): Physical activity, such as sports, which supports mental well-being during academic studies.

## F

**Faith** (Chapter 7): A strong belief in oneself or a higher power, providing motivation and hope during difficult times.

**Family support** (Chapter 2, 5, 6, 7): The encouragement and help provided by family members, crucial for managing academic pressures.

## G

**Growth** (Chapter 2, 3, 4, 5, 8): Personal or professional development achieved through overcoming academic challenges.

**Guidance** (Chapter 9): Advice or direction, often from a mentor, that helps one navigate academic challenges.

**Global connections** (Chapter 8): Professional relationships that span different countries and cultures, contributing to career development.

## H

**High expectations** (Chapter 4): The demanding standards set by supervisors or academic institutions that can create pressure but also drive success.

**Happiness** (Chapter 11): A sense of fulfillment or joy, often achieved through success after hard work and sacrifice.

## L

**Lifelong learning** (Chapter 8): The continuous pursuit of knowledge and self-improvement throughout one's career and life.

**Leadership** (Chapter 9): The guidance provided by a mentor or supervisor, helping students to succeed.

## **M**

**Mentorship** (Chapter 9): The relationship between a more experienced individual and a student, offering guidance and support for success.

**Motivation** (Chapter 5, 11): The internal drive to achieve goals, despite personal or academic challenges.

## **N**

**Networks** (Chapter 8): Professional or academic relationships that provide support, opportunities, and collaboration.

## **P**

**Perseverance** (Chapter 3, 4, 5, 7, 9): Continued effort and determination in overcoming obstacles to achieve success.

## R

**Rest** (Chapter 1): Taking breaks to recharge physically and mentally, crucial for maintaining productivity during academic work.

**Routine** (Chapter 2): A structured schedule that helps balance work, studies, and personal life.

## S

**Self-care** (Chapter 6): The practice of taking action to preserve or improve one's own health, especially while balancing work and studies.

**Scholarship** (Chapter 10): Financial support for education, such as the CHED scholarship, which helped Rosemarie pursue her MA in TESOL.

## T

**TESOL** (Chapter 10): Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, a specialized field of language education.

**Transformation** (Chapter 5, 10): Significant change in one's perspective, skills, or personal development through the postgraduate journey.

## U

**Uncertainty** (Chapter 3, 4): The feeling of not knowing what the outcome will be, common in academic research or studies.

## V

**Values** (Chapter 8, 9): Principles or standards of behavior that guide one's actions, such as the importance of collaboration and resilience in academic settings.

**Vision** (Chapter 9): A long-term goal or aspiration that guides one's academic and personal journey.

## W

**Well-being** (Chapter 1, 6): The state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy, particularly through balancing rest, physical activity, and academic work.

**Work-life balance** (Chapter 2, 6): The equilibrium between professional responsibilities and personal life, crucial for maintaining health and productivity.