

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

VOLUME ONE

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

VOLUME ONE

**EDITORS:
SARALA THULASI PALPANADAN
VENOSHA RAVANA**



© Penerbit UTHM
First Published 2024

Copyright reserved. Reproduction of any articles, illustrations and content of this book in any form be it electronic, mechanical photocopy, recording or any other form without any prior written permission from The Publisher's Office of Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, Parit Raja, Batu Pahat, Johor is prohibited. Any negotiations are subjected to calculations of royalty and honorarium.

Editors: Sarala Thulasi Palpanadan and Venosha Ravana

Published & Printed by:
Penerbit UTHM
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia
86400 Parit Raja,
Batu Pahat, Johor
Tel: 07-453 8529/8698
Fax: 07-453 6145

Website: <http://penerbit.uthm.edu.my>
E-mail: pt@uthm.edu.my
<http://e-bookstore.uthm.edu.my>
Penerbit UTHM is a member of
Majlis Penerbitan Ilmiah Malaysia
(MAPIM)



Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia

A catalogue record for this book is available
from the National Library of Malaysia

ISBN 978-629-490-113-1

CONTENT

Foreword		vii
Summary of Chapters		ix
CHAPTER 1	A Narrative of Persistence, Hope, and Devotion (PhD) <i>Baiti Shauki</i>	1
CHAPTER 2	From 4am to Fulfilment <i>Venosha Ravana</i>	11
CHAPTER 3	Embracing Embarrassment <i>Ghajendran Poovanandran</i>	17
CHAPTER 4	The Journey Begins <i>Sharmila Narayanasamy</i>	21
CHAPTER 5	An Interesting Incident: Tiny Fishes in Rice <i>Shazia Shah</i>	27
CHAPTER 6	The Unpredictable Journey <i>Heng Ee How</i>	29
CHAPTER 7	Turning the Tide: The Story of my Resilient Comeback <i>Jeremy Ivan Thambirajah</i>	35
CHAPTER 8	Put Through the Wringer <i>Shagufta Khurram</i>	41

CHAPTER 9	From Hurdles to Honors: A Decade of Academic Resilience <i>Kangathevi Ponnudorai</i>	45
CHAPTER 10	Midnight Epiphanies and Morning Caffeine: Navigating the Postgraduate Rollercoaster <i>Kristina Francis</i>	51
CHAPTER 11	Friends and Foes for Accomplishment <i>Sarala Thulasi Palpanadan</i>	57
Biography of Editors		lxi
Glossary of Terms		lxiii

FOREWORD

"From Dawn to Dusk: Stories of the Postgraduate Life" is a compelling collection of 11 personal narratives that delve into the daily lives of past and current postgraduate students. This book 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.

Sarala Thulasi Palpanadan
Venosha Ravana

SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

Chapter ONE describes Baiti Shauki's journey through a PhD program, emphasizing the challenges, loneliness, and sacrifices involved. She discusses the departure of friends, the difficulties with supervisors, and the balancing act of academic pursuits with family responsibilities. Despite these obstacles, Baiti Shauki perseveres, driven by personal motivations and the support of loved ones.

Chapter TWO describes the Venosha Ravana's journey as a PhD student and how she developed a routine of early mornings to manage her academic workload. The author emphasizes the importance of discipline and the benefits of starting her day early, which include increased productivity and a sense of peace.

Chapter THREE describes Ghajendran's journey to a PhD in pure mathematics as a challenging one, marked by initial struggles in understanding complex proofs. However, his supervisor's confrontation forced him to admit his weaknesses and seek help. With newfound determination, Ghajendran overcame his obstacles and eventually achieved success, publishing seven papers and earning his PhD.

Chapter FOUR narrates how Sharmila initially resisted the idea of pursuing a PhD but eventually decided to do so after being inspired by her partner and encouraged by colleagues. Despite feeling overwhelmed, she persevered and completed her first semester with support from her friends and colleagues. She is now eager to continue her studies and explore the world of data analysis.

In **Chapter FIVE**, Salma, a picky eater, was tricked by her friends into eating seafood at a restaurant. Despite her initial reluctance, she eventually tried the seafood and found it unpleasant. The prank ended with shared laughter and strengthened her friendships.

Chapter SIX narrates Heng Ee How's journey as a PhD student which was challenging, marked by juggling multiple responsibilities and meeting diverse expectations from supervisors. Despite facing setbacks and uncertainties, she developed adaptability and resilience, expanding her knowledge and building valuable connections. She learned to manage conflicting feedback, reconcile contradictory information, and balance personal commitments with academic demands.

Chapter SEVEN visits Jeremy's journey to a PhD in English Language studies which was marked by resilience and adaptation. After an initial failure, he persevered, shifted his approach, and completed his research at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Balancing his academic responsibilities with family life, he achieved success and became an advocate for students facing academic setbacks.

Chapter EIGHT narrates how Shagufta's journey to a PhD was challenging due to family struggles and financial difficulties. Despite these obstacles, her family's support and resilience helped her succeed. She learned valuable lessons about family bonds, flexibility, and perseverance, which will benefit her in the future.

Chapter NINE describes Kangathevi's journey to a PhD that was filled with challenges, including personal setbacks and academic hurdles. Despite these obstacles, she persevered,

driven by her passion and supported by her family and mentors. Her journey was a testament to resilience, determination, and the power of human spirit.

In **Chapter TEN**, Kristina reflects on her challenging PhD journey, balancing family and academic responsibilities. She emphasizes resilience, time management, support systems, and personal growth, ultimately finding success through realistic goals and open communication.

In **CHAPTER ELEVEN**, Sarala shares how a dream can come true through hardwork despite all the struggles in life. She shares how having good friends can be very helpful to motivate her whenever she was down. Meanwhile, some foes can be useful in creating the motive for achievements. So, at the end of the day, perseverance counts.

CHAPTER 1

A Narrative of Persistence, Hope, and Devotion (PhD)

Baiti Shauki

Department of Languages, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities,
Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology, Setapak, Kuala Lumpur,
53300 Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

As I reflect on my journey through the doctoral program, a myriad of emotions washes over me, each wave echoing the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of those years. Starting a PhD is a formidable challenge, but the road becomes even more arduous when you watch your family and friends, who embarked on this academic adventure with you, leave you one by one. The loneliness of this path often felt magnified in their absence, each departure a stark reminder of the daunting odds against finishing. My friend Liu, who started the journey with me from masters level to PhD, was the first to leave, leaving me to navigate the remaining obstacles alone. Liu had always been more than just a fellow PhD candidate; she was a confidant, a source of daily support and camaraderie in the often solitary grind of our doctoral studies. Yet, beneath her resilient exterior, Liu grappled with a torrent of academic and personal challenges that slowly eroded her initial enthusiasm for the research journey we had embarked on together.

From the outset, Liu's relationship with her first supervisor was fraught with tension. Divergent viewpoints on research methodologies and theoretical frameworks led to constant disagreements, making every meeting a battleground rather than a collaborative workspace. The strain of these encounters was palpable, and after months of fruitless debates and mounting frustration, Liu made the difficult decision to change her supervisor. This change, while a relief in some ways, came with its own set of complications. Her new supervisor, while more agreeable in temperament, challenged the very core of Liu's research interests. She was firmly asked to change her dissertation topic to something within the new supervisor's area of expertise—a directive that shook Liu to her core. Passionate about her original topic, Liu felt it was not only central to her academic identity but also crucial to addressing specific gaps she had identified in the field. Despite advice to the contrary, she decided to forge ahead with her chosen topic, dedicating countless hours to rewriting her proposal in line with her vision.

The day of her proposal defence was one she had approached with a mix of dread and determination. However, despite her preparations, the panel's feedback was disheartening. They criticized her approach, questioned her theoretical underpinnings, and concluded that her work, as presented, was not viable for proceeding. They asked her to rewrite her thesis entirely. Heartbroken, Liu called me that evening, her voice quivering with the weight of the decision she faced. As she recounted her ordeal through tears, her sense of defeat was palpable. This moment, she confessed, was her breaking point. The culmination of unyielding pressures, from supervisory conflicts to the devastating blow of the defence feedback, had extinguished her passion. She felt she could no longer continue, that her path in academia was irrevocably blocked.

As a friend, I felt her pain deeply. I offered words of comfort, attempting to remind her of her strengths and the original spark that drove her to begin this journey. But some decisions, I knew, needed to be respected, no matter how much they pained those who stood by her side. Liu's decision to leave the program was not made lightly; it was a choice for her well-being, a step back from an environment that no longer nurtured her growth or honoured her academic ambitions. Liu's departure from the program was a stark reminder of the personal and academic battles many of us silently face in the pursuit of our degrees. It underscored the profound impact that mentorship and institutional support—or the lack thereof—can have on our academic journeys. Her story, while uniquely her own, echoes in the experiences of many in academia, serving as a poignant testament to the challenges that can divert or completely halt even the most determined scholars' paths.

Balancing a rigorous academic schedule with personal life was another layer of complexity. Financial constraints were a constant worry. Scholarships and stipends are never guaranteed, even though I have filled out every form the bursary asked me to and went to every department they said I should go to. The tightrope walk of budget management became a daily routine, with every penny pinched to safeguard against potential financial emergencies. I used up all my pension savings to pay the tuition fee, knowing that investing in education was the best long-term decision. As the children are growing up, I want to leave them a legacy that puts education over everything else, even if it meant sacrificing my own financial security in the present. The hope is that they will see the value of education and continue to prioritise it in their own lives. To my three children, I just want to say, "I may not have much to leave you in terms of material wealth, but I hope I can be your greatest example of the importance of pursuing

education in ways that money cannot measure. Remember that knowledge is power, and it is something that no one can ever take away from you."

Balancing the demands of a PhD with the responsibilities of raising three small children was a challenge that required more than just time management—it demanded unwavering commitment, resilience, and a deep sense of purpose. My children, all under the age of seven, were at the heart of my life, their laughter and innocence a constant reminder of what truly mattered. As much as I was devoted to my academic journey, I knew that I could not let the pursuit of a PhD overshadow the precious moments of their childhood. I was determined to be there for them, to witness their growth, to celebrate their milestones, and to be the mother they needed, even as I worked tirelessly toward my academic goals. The workload of a PhD—analysing complex data, conducting rigorous research, and continually reviewing literature—required intense focus and dedication. Yet, this intellectual rigor had to be meticulously scheduled around the immutable priorities of family life. Mornings began with the gentle chaos of preparing breakfast, getting the children dressed, and ensuring they were ready for their day. Since I didn't send them to any nursery or playschool, the hours were punctuated with the demands of parenthood—doctor's appointments, playdates, cooking, endless diaper changes, and the countless small tasks that filled the spaces between my work.

Bedtime brought its own routines—reading stories, tucking them in, and staying with them until their breathing slowed and they drifted off to sleep. It was only after the house grew quiet, with the children peacefully asleep, that I could return to my academic work. These late-night hours became my refuge, the time when I could immerse myself in research, analyse data, and refine my writing. The exhaustion was real, and there were nights when the

weight of it all felt overwhelming, but the quiet determination to see both my children and my academic dreams flourish kept me going. I made a conscious choice to be fully present for my children, even if it meant stretching myself thin (on the contrary, I wasn't losing any weight yet keep gaining them). I didn't want to miss a single milestone—whether it was their first steps, their first words, or their first day at school. I knew that these moments were fleeting, and I refused to let them slip away unnoticed in the pursuit of academic success. Each smile, each hug, and each shared experience with my children was a reminder of why I was doing this—why I was pushing myself to achieve something that would not only make me proud but would also set an example for them.

There were sacrifices, of course. Sleep was often the first casualty, and personal time was a luxury I couldn't afford. Yet, the joy of being there for my children—of watching them grow, learn, and discover the world—was worth every sleepless night. Their milestones became my milestones, and their joy fuelled my determination. In the end, the PhD was not just an academic achievement; it was a testament to the delicate balance I had managed to maintain between my roles as a mother and a scholar. My children were a part of this journey, just as much as the research and the writing. They were my greatest motivation, and their presence made the success of the PhD all the more meaningful. We grew together during those years, and as I crossed the stage to receive my degree, I did so knowing that it was not just my achievement, but ours. It was a symbol of the love, the sacrifice, and the unbreakable bond that had carried us through.

Amid these swirling challenges, my grandmother, my rock and biggest cheerleader, stood as a beacon of encouragement and strength. Her unwavering belief in my abilities fuelled my

perseverance. She had a gentle yet persuasive way of reminding me of the power of education and the doors it could open—not just for me but for my children as well. Her support was a critical lifeline, especially on days when the end seemed nowhere in sight. I remember when we were in the kitchen when I was only in my early teenage years, she said, "You don't bother about cooking; continue your studies. Don't be like me. I didn't have the opportunity back then. You can always learn cooking later." True enough, she had never let me cook, regardless of she herself is an amazing cook. Our house was always full of people during the eve, waiting to be served with her Kerabu, Singgang, Nasi Lemak, and other Malaysian cuisines. Her words resonated deeply within me, motivating me to prioritise my education above all else. I carry her wisdom with me to this day, grateful for her guidance and unwavering belief in my potential.

Growing up under the nurturing care of my grandmother was a blessing that shaped the person I am today. From my earliest memories, she was a constant figure of love and guidance, instilling in me the values of hard work, patience, and the joy of living a simple life close to nature. Our small farm, tucked away in the lush countryside, was our haven and classroom, where life's most enduring lessons were imparted through the rhythm of the seasons and the growth of the crops we tended together. My grandmother's hands, weathered yet gentle, were my guide as I learnt to plant corn. She showed me how to press each seed into the cool earth, explaining why spacing them just so was crucial for their growth. The rows we planted together stretched like lines in a storybook, each one a narrative of nurturing and growth. The anticipation of watching the corn stalks reach towards the sky, their green leaves whispering secrets I imagined only farmers knew, was a magical part of my childhood.

But it was during the harvest seasons that the farm truly came alive with excitement and activity. My grandmother and I would wake early, the air still crisp and cool, to harvest durians and rambutans. The thud of durians falling to the ground marked our harvest time, and though their spiky husk was formidable, the rich, creamy fruit inside was a cherished reward for our labours. Rambutans, with their hairy red and green shells, hung like ornaments from the trees, and plucking them was like uncovering hidden treasures designed just for us. Each fruit had its story, its journey from flower to feast, and my grandmother narrated each one, weaving tales of past seasons and the ways the land had provided for our family through generations. These stories were lessons of resilience and gratitude, themes that resonated deeply within the fabric of our daily lives. The farm was more than just a place of work; it was where my grandmother and I shared countless hours of joy and toil, laughter and silence. The bond we formed there, amid the cornstalks and fruit trees, was rooted in the profound love we shared for the land and for each other. These memories are vividly etched in my mind, a cherished mosaic of moments that taught me more about life than any classroom ever could.

Then, just as I was approaching the culmination of my academic journey, I had to face another loss, this time much greater than any exam failure. My grandmother passed away, leaving a void that could never be filled. It happened right after my convocation—an event she had been eagerly looking forward to. Her absence was a profound loss, and until now I still could not believe she is no longer with me when she has been there since I cried my lungs out on the day I was born. The grief was overwhelming, and for a time, it cast a long shadow over my academic achievements. Every turn and corner of the road in Kota Bharu reminds me of her, as I was her personal chauffeur, personal shopper, and closest confidante. Her laughter, her wisdom, and her unwavering support

were constants in my life, and now that she is gone, I feel adrift in a sea of memories that both comfort and haunt me.

The journey to my convocation was filled with a mixture of nerves and excitement, a significant milestone in my life that I had fervently wished to share with my grandmother. She had been eagerly looking forward to seeing me with my doctoral scroll, her pride in my academic achievements a comforting constant in my life. As I left her that day, promising to return soon with stories and my scroll in hand, neither of us could have anticipated what was to come. The convocation ceremony itself was a blur of speeches, applause, and the rustle of academic robes. Throughout the event, my thoughts kept drifting back to my grandmother, imagining her smile and the warmth of her congratulatory embrace.

But that moment was stolen from us. Just after the night prayers, as I was counting days to meet her, my phone rang. It was my father, his voice strained and urgent, bearing the kind of news that instantly tightens one's chest in dread. My grandmother had passed away. With a heavy heart and a mind swirling with disbelief, I got into my car and drove as if on autopilot. The roads stretched out before me, and I pushed the limits, the journey that was supposed to take six to seven hours shortened by the urgency of my need to be home. I managed to arrive in just five hours, driven by a mix of desperation and fear, fear of facing the reality of her absence. That night, as I pulled into the familiar surroundings of our family home, a deep sense of loss enveloped me. I couldn't bring myself to see her right away. The finality of her passing was a truth I wasn't ready to face. I stayed outside for a long while, gathering the shards of my broken heart and bracing myself for the morning.

The next day dawned with a sombre air, the sunlight seeming to hesitate as it filtered through the heavy clouds. It was time for me

to give my grandmother her last bath, a final act of service and love for a woman who had shaped so much of my life. As I gently bathed her, my hands trembled with every pour of water, each ripple a reminder of the fleeting nature of our time here. Tears mingled with the bathwater, unspoken words of gratitude and sorrow flowing freely. I whispered to her, my voice breaking with emotion, "Please forgive me, ma. I love you so much. I hope to see you again in the hereafter." It was a prayer and a promise, a hopeful whisper across the threshold between this life and the next. This moment, painful yet filled with an intimate tenderness, was a profound goodbye to my dearest grandmother, sealing a chapter of cherished memories and leaving me with a legacy of resilience and love to carry forward into my future endeavours.

In hindsight, each hurdle and each setback during those PhD years taught me invaluable lessons about resilience, dedication, and the importance of support systems. My children's smiles became my respite; their growth and happiness provided daily motivation to push forward, embodying the promise of a brighter future that education could offer. My peers, though few remained, became closer than ever as we shared the unique challenges that marked our chosen paths. Moreover, the relationships cultivated during my PhD and beyond have played a crucial role in shaping my career trajectory. They have opened doors to myriad opportunities, from co-authoring papers to co-organizing international symposiums and being part of global research initiatives. Each collaboration has been a stepping stone, leading to further opportunities and fostering a sense of global community within my field. Now, as an established academician, I not only cherish the friendships and collaborations I've gained but also strive to mentor new PhD students, offering them the same support and guidance I once received. It's a way to give back to the academic community that has given me so much. These

interactions also keep me grounded and connected to the evolving trends and fresh perspectives within academia.

Completing the PhD was not just an academic victory; it was a testament to human endurance and the strength of the human spirit. It taught me that resilience is not just about the capacity to endure but also about finding ways to thrive in the face of adversity. Looking back, I see not only a journey filled with difficulties but also a remarkable tale of overcoming seemingly insurmountable challenges. This experience, hard-earned and deeply personal, remains a profound chapter of my life, a narrative of persistence, love, and undying hope.

CHAPTER 2

From 4am to Fulfilment

Venosha Ravana

Faculty of Social Science and Humanities,
Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and
Technology, Setapak, Kuala Lumpur,
53300 Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

As a young PhD student, I embarked on a journey at a prestigious public university in Malaysia, driven by a research grant that promised both challenge and opportunity. With a background in English and a minor in Computer Science, I had ventured into this new academic pursuit with a mix of curiosity and optimism. I agreed to pursue a PhD in a field that piqued my interest, but one in which I had little expertise. After all, how difficult could it be to master something that was not only fascinating but also brimming with future prospects?

It turns out, I had never been so mistaken.

My academic journey had previously taken me through a degree in English, enriched by the logical rigors of Computer Science, and then onto a Master's in English Studies, where I crafted a dissertation on designing an English course. When the chance to pursue a PhD in designing and developing teaching tools presented itself, I eagerly seized it. What I did not fully grasp at the time was that English and Education, though related, were more

like stepsisters than twins—connected, yet fundamentally different.

Soon into the program, it became painfully clear that my foundational knowledge was insufficient for the challenges ahead. Complicating matters was the nature of my funding, which left me with little room to learn at my own pace. Faced with the reality of this steep learning curve, I turned back to an old habit, one that had served me well during my undergraduate years when I juggled twice as many subjects as my peers to graduate a year early. But that story is for another day. In this chapter, we'll explore why and how I came to rely on the quiet, early mornings as my sanctuary and saviour during one of the most pivotal times in my life.

When I say "early morning," I'm talking about a modest 4 AM start—a time that's achievable for me because I can fall asleep by 9 PM and slip into a deep, uninterrupted slumber almost instantly. My sister, who shared a bed with me when we were young, often joked that not even an earthquake could wake me. Imagine a chaotic New Year's Eve, with every dog barking and home security alarm ringing as fireworks burst in the sky. I would sleep through the entire spectacle without the slightest disturbance. My husband now calls me one of the luckiest people in the world. I like to think of it as the result of inner peace.

Waking up at 4 AM, therefore, is never a struggle. I'm up at the first ring of the alarm, fully aware that every minute counts. My routine begins with making the bed and brushing my teeth, followed by some light stretching. Due to my gastritis, I cannot rely on coffee for that morning jolt, so I turn to exercise for a natural dopamine boost. This morning ritual takes about 30 minutes, just enough time to wake up fully before settling down with my laptop at 4:30 AM.

My most focused study hours are between 4:30 and 6 AM, and then from 7:30 to 11 AM. My philosophy is simple: if I can accomplish a solid four hours of work each day, I consider myself highly productive. Thanks to this morning routine, I often reach my productivity goals before most people have even arrived at their workplace. By the time the clock hits 11 AM, and I see that I have already crossed off a significant portion of my reading list, a deep sense of satisfaction sets in.

Afternoons and evenings are reserved for more routine academic tasks, allowing me to keep my weekends free from work. Weekends are sacred—time spent with family and friends, or simply lounging in bed with Netflix and takeout. Those are the moments that recharge me, ensuring I'm ready to tackle the week ahead.

I have to admit, my ability to maintain this routine was largely due to the fact that I was a single woman living alone, free from family obligations. I often found myself thinking about those who had to juggle work, academic life, and family commitments—especially single parents. I'd remind myself of this whenever I felt tempted to slack off on my early morning PhD readings. For others, it takes immense sacrifice; for me, it was simply a matter of discipline. That discipline carried me through to the finish line of my PhD and continues to guide me even now.

This early rising habit has become ingrained in me, something I cannot seem to shake, even during vacations. Much to my husband's dismay, I still wake up by 5 AM at the latest, looking for things to do—often waking him up in the process. He's grown accustomed to it, though he steadfastly refuses to start the day as early as I do. I suppose our habits, especially those cultivated during crucial years of our lives, shape our lifelong routines and

disciplines. He was a night owl during his university days, while I was always in bed by 9 PM and up by 5 AM. During exam seasons, I would even wake as early as 3 AM to get in some final revision, sometimes managing a quick nap before heading to my 9 AM exam. And hey, I was a Dean's List student all through my academic career, so do not tell me it does not work.

For me, early mornings are more than just a time to be productive—they are my sanctuary, my cherished me-time. These quiet hours before the world wakes up are when I find the clarity and focus needed to dive into my most stimulating work. Nowadays, I begin my day by tackling research and conference papers, immersing myself in the intellectual challenges that continue to fuel my passion for academia.

By 6 AM, I'm already in the kitchen, preparing meals for the day. The rhythmic process of cooking at dawn, when the air is still cool and the world is quiet, brings a sense of peace and accomplishment. There's something deeply satisfying about nourishing my body and mind so early in the day, setting a positive tone for whatever lies ahead. After cooking, I transition to my balcony for a brief but invigorating workout from 7 to 7:30 AM. It's here, surrounded by the beauty of my mini rose garden and bathed in the soft light of the sunrise, that I truly connect with myself. The combination of fresh air, physical activity, and nature's beauty revitalizes me, preparing both my body and mind for the rest of the day.

By the time the clock hits 7:30 AM, I've already accomplished three major tasks—research, cooking, and exercise—all before many people have even started their day. This early morning routine, rooted in the habits I cultivated during my PhD days, has become the cornerstone of my productivity and well-being. It's a testament

to the power of forming the right habits; once established, they set you on a path to lifelong success.

These early mornings are more than just a routine—they are a ritual, a daily reminder of the discipline and dedication that carried me through my academic journey and beyond. Whether it's the quiet solitude of research, the nurturing act of cooking, or the refreshing burst of energy from my morning workout, each task contributes to a sense of balance and fulfillment that carries me through the day.

Form the right habits, and you truly are set for life.

From Dawn to Dusk: Stories of the Postgraduate Life (VOL 1)
No. ISBN 978-629-490-113-1 | 2024

CHAPTER 3

Embracing Embarrassment

Ghajendran Poovanandran

School of Mathematical Sciences, Sunway University,
Bandar Sunway, 47500 Subang Jaya,
Selangor, Malaysia.

*“You don’t have to be great to start, but
you have to start to be great.”*

– Zig Zigler

Pursuing a PhD in pure mathematics is all about proposing new theorems (this is just a fancy term we mathematicians use to describe mathematical rules) and proving them. It is always fascinating to think that one can even come up with a new discovery in mathematics after all these years. Yet there I was, eight years ago, believing that I could.

It was not long after registering for my PhD studies when I was called by my supervisor to his office. My supervisor is the reincarnation of Albert Einstein who happens to be living his current life as a humble mathematician here in Malaysia. Mathematics just flows naturally to him, and his work ethic just made it exponentially better – pun intended. So, when he first handed to me a stack of articles relevant to the work that I would be pursuing, I knew that things were about to get real.

In the following days, as I tried to understand the articles given to me, I could not understand anything much apart from the introduction section. I reminded myself to trust the process, and that things would get better. It took me a few weeks, but I finally understood that I was going nowhere. I was lost and I felt stupid. To make things worse, every now and then, my supervisor would call me to his room to discuss my current progress and my next milestone.

I survived the first few weeks by telling him that I am in the middle of reading all the articles, and that I needed more time to wrap my head around all the information. As time went by, I had to change my narrative saying that some parts of the proofs felt confusing to me, so I was trying to understand the logic behind them. The truth was, I was just as lost as when I first started reading the articles, but I did not want to disappoint him by telling him that (or maybe I was ashamed, I cannot really recall the exact emotions, obviously).

I thought I was doing a good job hiding my incompetency, but clearly something gave it away. On an unsuspecting fine day, I was called by my supervisor – but this time to a classroom instead of his office. As I entered the classroom, he handed me a black Artline 500A and asked me to stand by the whiteboard. As I stood there in silence, six words came unforgivingly from his mouth: “Explain to me how this proof works”.

Flabbergasted, I looked into the proof that he was referring to and realized that it was among the ones that I could not wrap my head around no matter how much I tried. I desperately beat around the bush, but it only bought me time that did not mean anything in the grand scale of action and consequence. I peeked at him from time to time, hoping that he would give me a hint out of pity, but he was adamant. The hands of the clock decided in solidarity to move

extra slowly that day, and only God knew how long it felt for me – standing awkwardly, waiting for the moment to end. Finally, my supervisor stood up, took the marker from me, and explained the proof to me like teaching ABCs to a baby. After that, we both called it a day and returned to our respective routines.

That night, I could not close my eyes to sleep. Sure, the memory kept knocking on my brain from time to time, reminding me of the embarrassment I faced on that day – but it was not that which kept me awake. I could not sleep because I was shocked that I finally understood the proof when my supervisor taught me. The possibility of me understanding another person's write-up of a proof opened new doors for me. What once felt impossible now seems the other way around.

With the newfound hope, I started fresh and looked back at all the articles that once bullied me. The proofs were just as hard, but I grew more stubborn. I refused to stop until I at least understood part of the proofs. Many a mickle makes a muckle – as time went by, I began to understand more. Now and then, I did have my hiccups. There were times where I was stuck, and I had to rely on my supervisor to give me that shine of enlightenment – but I was not ashamed to ask for his help this time. Sometimes, the things that I asked were simple to him and I could see his face change to express a slight sigh. I did not care though; I was a newbie, and I was going to own that role.

Long story short, months flew by and before I knew it, I was printing and reading articles left and right. I even began to question others' proofs and theorems, making my own theorems, and proving them. Gone were the days where understanding a proof was an overwhelming scary task for me. By the time I submitted my PhD thesis, I already had seven papers published under my name,

each of them consisting of various new discoveries and proofs supporting them. Now, I am a proud PhD holder in pure mathematics, living my dream in academia.

Looking back, my road to success started when my supervisor confronted me on my facade. It turned out that my greatest obstacle was not my inability to understand complex write-ups, but my incapacity to admit my weakness and seek for help. In the end, one can only emerge victorious from the deep vault of uncertainty and embarrassment by embracing the struggle.

CHAPTER 4

The Journey Begins

Sharmila Narayanasamy

Faculty of Social Science and Humanities,
Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and
Technology, Setapak, Kuala Lumpur,
53300 Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

I had never planned on doing a Phd and most certainly never ever gave a thought to pursuing a doctorate (EdD). Many years ago, these were taboo words in my vocabulary! Yes, I had been asked numerous times – “When do you plan to do your PhD?”, “Are you planning to continue with your PhD?”. I would just smile and reply, “We’ll see...”. Then, it came to a point when these questions began to annoy me immensely. Others were more interested in me doing the coveted PhD than I actually was! No one should subtly push me around this way! This is just not done! Defiance walks in at precisely this moment. And, at this stage, I began using my favourite I-am-annoyed phrase – “Like, pray tell me, how does this affect your life?!” At the current moment, my life is peaceful and harmonious exactly the way it was. Serene. Relaxed with the usual amount of stress and ups-downs. Why change it?

Life changes though. ‘Someone’ happened. A 16-year friendship that eventually bloomed and changed into a beautiful, meaningful relationship. Both of us being educators, the topic of research and PhDs and EdDs was a natural part of our day-to-day

conversations. He was interested in pursuing his EdD. To my ultimate surprise and shock, I found myself supporting and encouraging his goals. I kept telling myself that although I am not doing this, it does not mean that I should not be supportive. He was having none of it though. He was clearly not going to do this alone, and in turn, began encouraging me, albeit subtly. Knowing me and the sword-like favourite phrase that I use at free-will, he was quite cautious, lest I unleash it on him! However, he wanted me to succeed too. So, soft nudges began to take shape, initially. "You know it's not all that bad." "You are smart. Give it a try." I even began receiving lessons on theoretical and conceptual frameworks, research design, literature review. Boy! No one has explained research to me like he did! Why didn't someone talk to me this way earlier? I wondered. Must be the favourite sword-like phrase (oops!) I decided that was the deterrent.

Life changed again, very quickly. He is not with me today. What happened? You might wonder. That, obviously, does not conform to the 'conceptual framework' of this story. It suffices to say that, regardless, the seed that was sowed remained etched in my memory. That was a shared dream. I felt a compelling need to keep my part of that dream alive. And, for some reason that I cannot explain to this day, that became a turning point of sorts in my life. My whole life took a sudden turn in a totally different direction, actually. Most unexpectedly, I saw the light at the end of the tunnel. It was not for a PhD though. That light torched its graceful beams on an EdD programme. It just happened! Miraculously! And, that too, just when I was thinking along the lines of, "How do I go about doing this??" The sudden loss of support. The absence of encouragement that once was. The overall sense of loss that I felt during that particular point in time. Overwhelming - would be an underrated word here. Wondering how I ended up in an EdD programme then?

Here goes! I walk into the office one day and a dear friend comes up to me and literally shoves a brochure in my face. He does not waste many words. Let's do this! No arguments! Those were his words. To make it even more delightful, two other colleagues joined us. It seemed like a good deal and it definitely is. I have no regrets being part of the team and the programme. Slowly but surely, my dream began to take form.

We were an excited bunch. We did everything we felt was a good move. Setting up a WA group and even a Google Classroom to meet our needs to interact and share information. The '4 Sekawan' as we call ourselves, used to joke about probably being the first to set-up a Google Classroom to facilitate our studies and meet-up when needed. We did everything together, right from enrolling, paying the fees and even meeting up before each of our EdD classes in our first semester. It turned out to be fun and family-like. Classes began. I was fully geared up, motivated, enthusiastic, the works. Finally, I have embarked on the EdD journey. I could hardly believe it. My mind raced back to the shared dreams and goals I once created with a certain particular person. I felt grateful that he had inspired me to do this. I would never have, otherwise. There was that brief moment where I wished I could tell him that I am finally doing my doctorate. Perhaps, he would come across this piece one day and know that I am at last on the road to be.

The time came for me to log in and join the class sessions along with my friends from my workplace. I instantly snapped out of my reverie. And, that is when reality hit me sort of really hard. I had left the field of study and being a student aeons ago. My head literally began to spin. In a fleeting moment of reflection, I realised that I had indeed lost touch, big time! Everything sounded a mix of French, German and Italian. All of a sudden, I felt like I was part of

a scene from 'Annabel'! Now, that seriously scared the living daylights out of me.

However, I am that one person who has this rather weird trait. When I have set my mind and made my decisions, I do not retract, no matter how challenging. This trait in me had put me in a lot of harrowing situations. Then again, it had also led me to some of the most beautiful moments of my life. Hence, I decided to bulldoze. If you do not know, find out...I told myself. Pulling myself together, I began to read. I learned from all possible platforms that I could. I visited my workplace library more often. I spoke to colleagues and they were more than helpful. Many held my hands. Many guided me. Some even took the trouble to provide research frameworks and guidelines and I want to thank them sincerely from the bottom of my heart. I had never seen people being so forthcoming and encouraging as my colleagues. I have read about guardian angels in novels. But, I had seen many in reality, in the form of my colleagues when my journey began, fluttering in and out, providing insights and much needed guidance. Thinesh, Harry and Fiona (names changed to protect privacy) – a big shout out to you for walking in at exactly the right moment to pull me and my team out of horrifying crisis moments!

These gestures of kindness, gave me the courage to move on. The knowledge that there are people out there who have my back. People whom I could turn to and walk up to at any time and ask for guidance. I am blessed indeed. I was never allowed to feel alone or lost throughout the semester. There was never a moment when I felt that I did not know what to do, for I knew that someone would appear to show me/us the way.

Today (22.08.2024), as I write this piece, my first semester is complete. I am waiting for my results with bated breath, keeping my fingers crossed. I never stopped collecting information even

though it is my study break period. My target being that I want to know as much as possible about research methods. So, I began asking questions. That is when she walked in. Venessa (name changed to protect privacy). She introduced me to data analysis systems such as ANACONDA and PYTHON. I remember thinking then, these are huge huge snakes! Since when did they turn into data analysis systems?! There was even a mention of something called RStudio. I have heard of jamming studios. What is RStudio? I wondered. It is all so new to me, but exciting. I most certainly intend to find out more and more. Make more exciting discoveries. Knowledge is akin to addiction, I suppose. Once you have tasted it, you never want to stop exploring. At least to me, that is what it is.

Right now, I am waiting for the next semester to begin. I know that I would not feel as overwhelmed as I was in my first semester. There is always a first time. No repetitions though. I am prepared. Above all, I know I have friends I/we can depend on. So, here I come...2nd semester! And the journey continues...

CHAPTER 5

An Interesting Incident: Tiny Fishes in Rice

Shazia Shah

Department of English,
Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University,
Lyari, Karachi, 75660 Sindh, Pakistan.

Salma, a PhD student from Pakistan, embarked on her doctoral journey at UTHM in Parit Raja, Johor, Malaysia, with boundless curiosity. It was a new chapter in her life, a new country, traditions, and unfamiliar food. Despite her adventurous spirit, Salma was a picky eater and hesitant to try new dishes.

Her friends at UTHM knew her well and often teased her about her reluctance to eat out. They couldn't resist playing a prank on her one day. Led by her mischievous friend, Asma, they conspired with their supervisor, who unwittingly became part of the plan.

Unbeknownst to Salma's supervisor, she was not just picky but a dedicated Carnitarian, avoiding seafood entirely. The supervisor, however, was a seafood enthusiast; a Pescetarian.

The opportunity for mischief arose when Salma's project received top marks, and the supervisor decided to treat her to a celebratory dinner at a renowned Malaysian seafood restaurant. Obligated to accept, Salma reluctantly agreed, unaware of what awaited her.

Upon arriving at the restaurant, Salma immediately sensed the pervasive aroma of seafood, which made her queasy. Determined not to eat, she excused herself to the restroom, hoping to avoid the meal entirely. However, her supervisor intercepted her, gently insisting that she join them and enjoy the evening.

Seated reluctantly at the table, Salma tried to focus on the vegetable rice that her supervisor assured her was delicious and seafood-free. Reluctantly, she took a spoonful, cautiously examining it. To her surprise, she discovered a tiny fish nestled among the rice grains.

"What is this?" she whispered in dismay.

"Oh, just onions and garlic," her supervisor replied nonchalantly, attempting to reassure her.

Salma hesitated, unsure of what to do next. Her friends, barely able to contain their amusement, watched eagerly as she reluctantly took a bite. The unfamiliar taste and aroma made her grimace, but she obediently continued under her supervisor's watchful eye, sipping water between bites to mask the flavor.

As she finally finished her meal, her friends erupted in laughter, thanking the supervisor for her unwitting participation in their prank. Salma couldn't help but laugh along, realizing she had been caught in their playful scheme.

The evening ended with shared laughter and a newfound camaraderie, reminding Salma that even in unfamiliar surroundings, friendships and good humor could make any challenge easier to bear.

CHAPTER 6

The Unpredictable Journey: A turbulent journey that I have embarked on without knowing what will lie ahead

Heng Ee How

Faculty of Social Science and Humanities,
Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and
Technology, Setapak, Kuala Lumpur,
53300 Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Getting around the postgraduate study environment is like going across an ever-changing landscape. A fresh opportunity or challenge may arise every day; these things frequently happen out of the blue. This is how I feel about studying for a PhD – a turbulent journey that I've embarked on without knowing what will lie ahead. A key component of academic success is relying on adaptability and skills of resolving uncertainties. What amazed me was how much I have grown thus far. As I witness my growth, I begin to envision what I will be like in the future. This book chapter delves into the investigation of exploring a postgraduate student's life and coping mechanisms for unforeseen events, including big setbacks, sudden opportunities, and the path to thriving in a hectic environment. It also emphasizes the resilience and adaptation needed to succeed in this changing environment.

Meeting Supervisors' Expectations

This is one of the most challenging aspects of postgraduate research – meeting not one supervisor but two supervisors, each with diverse expectations and substantial experience and expertise in their field. This adds pressure, as I need to understand and address two different sets of feedback and perspectives. Each supervisor brings their unique opinions with varied set of standards, preferences, and approaches to the table, leading to conflicting feedback and a seemingly endless cycle of revisions. Although this is expected, it is still an overwhelming process during the journey.

For a PhD student, this means that a piece of work which was previously deemed acceptable might require substantial changes based on new feedback. The frustration stemming from these revisions and feedbacks are compounded especially requiring more reading in something new that I've not ventured before. All of this leads to confusion about what exactly needs to be addressed and requires me to burn the midnight oil. Still, I cherish the moments spent and gained from both of my supervisors as a novice researcher.

I tried to navigate these shifting expectations by being agile. What surprised me was the constant need to come up with strategic approaches in presenting my work and answering their questions. It is like a piece of art, crafting the piece of writing by embellishing it with expression and ensuring the content contains the components that meet their expectations. Understanding the underlying meaning of what is an acceptable decent piece of work is indeed challenging. I often need to develop a deep understanding of my supervisor's subtle preferences and preferred communication style. This might involve actively seeking

clarification and being proactive in discussing potential problems and revisions before proceeding in making any changes. While these interactions can be demanding, they also offer valuable learning experiences and critical comments, with the aim of ensuring I am able to meet other examiners' needs and academic standards. The unwavering support and care that they give is precious and beneficial. At times, they also provide what is beyond the confines of academic research.

Reconciling the Contradicting Information

Often times, the research might seem to appear to be inherently complex when students encounter contradictory content. Inevitably, I am also facing similar situations and often do not know where I am heading. A research newbie like me found myself caught in the vicious cycle of working hard on aligning the content of all parts of the writing. Reconciling the contradicting findings and information of the past studies requires me to critically evaluate the differences before forming a coherent understanding. This process can be time-consuming as more information is needed when comprehending the inconsistent parts. In addition, frequent rewrites and fine-tuning of my dissertation happen when this occurs.

Despite all the hardship, I found myself becoming more adept at identifying diverse viewpoints while synthesizing the information in order to contribute meaningfully. It is through grappling with these contradictions that aids in developing a nuanced understanding of the field and enhances my critical thinking ability. A nuanced understanding of the core of my studies became clearer as I grappled with distinct contradictions. I found that the enhancement of my critical thinking skills proved useful in other areas, as well as in real-life situations, helping me reconcile differing opinions more

effectively. This contributed to a well-rounded understanding and allowed me to comprehend content faster, sharper, and more precisely.

Managing Varied Productivity Days

Writing productivity varies from day to day. For less productive days, progress may seem minimal, and it can be easy to feel disheartened. Some days, I might be spending primarily on reading and gathering relevant articles, with little tangible output or none can be added to my dissertation. Maybe I have little or no writing output on some days, but information gathering and understanding serve as the basis for my productive days. This lays the groundwork for more productive writing sessions, facilitating a more fruitful outcome. On more productive days, based on the content that has been gathered, I can easily write many parts and refine my writing. This cyclical process in searching, understanding, refining and writing contribute to a well-articulated final write-up.

Balancing Personal Responsibilities and Academic Demands

Balancing numerous personal commitments and academic demands amid whirlwind research life is challenging, which makes it harder to find time to unwind. A demanding schedule includes caring for a baby, meeting family and friends' needs, and dealing with household chores and finances. Each responsibility requires attentive planning to cope and fulfill all roles and tasks. The constant demands also include the dissertation writing which makes me find it hard to relax and unable to find time for myself to enjoy precious me-time moments. However, despite this seems impossible, I'm glad that as I'm getting used to the pace, I manage to alleviate the stress in small ways – making full use of fragmented time and making all tasks as efficient as possible.

Using fragmented time to chill and enjoy fleeting moments of joy and relaxation became a norm that I experience daily. Unexpectedly, I found myself gaining valuable soft skills by skillfully multitasking and being able to savour every fleeting moment of happiness. This indicates that even while I'm longing for a much-needed break, I'm able to fulfill all my duties and commitments with improved skills, without it taking a toll on me, as I juggle personal responsibilities and academic demands.

Expanding Broader Insights and Academic Community Networks
Other areas that emerged as pathways for expanding broader insights and academic community networks include academic conferences and workshops, to name a few. These arenas serve as valuable platforms where unexpected insights emerge, while also providing a sense of belonging among those who share common interests and struggles. Interacting with like-minded communities is often enlightening. Their shared experiences reinforce my understanding and ease my stress, as I realize I am not alone in confronting similar setbacks. Moreover, these platforms feature veterans who selflessly offer constructive feedback, helping to address some of my concerns.

All in all, the journey of studying PhD can be daunting but rewarding. Sometimes, I may not have the corresponding knowledge and skill sets for every task and duty. Contrary to my expectations, I've realized that this is okay at the beginning. What truly matters is acquiring and developing the ability to accomplish as I overcome each obstacle along the way. I look forward to the end of this journey and becoming an independent researcher equipped with a wide array of competencies to handle various situations without a hitch, including those unexpected ones. Lastly, I want to thank the people and the opportunities that enriched my life. Thank you.

CHAPTER 7

Turning the Tide: The Story of my Resilient Comeback

Jeremy Ivan Thambirajah

Faculty of Social Science and Humanities,
Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and
Technology, Setapak, Kuala Lumpur,
53300 Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

My journey to earning a PhD in English Language studies was far from conventional. My story is one of resilience, adaptation, and triumph over past setbacks. My academic path was marked by an initial failure, but with unwavering determination and a strategic shift, I completed my research in a remarkably short period at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM).

My academic career began with high hopes and great expectations. After completing my Master's degree with distinction at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), I continued to embark on a PhD program at the same university. Initially, everything seemed promising. I was passionate about the research topic—Lecturer's Feedback on Students Written assignment—and was eager to contribute to the field. However, the realities of academia soon proved challenging.

The rigorous demands of the program, coupled with personal challenges, began to weigh heavily on me. I struggled with the complexity of my research, faced repeated rejections of my

proposals, and found myself grappling with the high expectations set by the supervisors. Despite my efforts, progress was slow, and my confidence began to erode. After several years of hard work and mounting frustrations, I failed at Viva due to poor quality of supervision. I faced the painful reality that I cannot complete my PhD.

The failure was a significant blow to my aspirations and self-esteem. I took time to reflect on this experience, seeking solace in both personal and professional support. It was during this period of introspection that I realized that my approach needed to change. I needed a fresh start, a new environment, and perhaps a different perspective on my research journey.

I then decided to step away from the failed PhD attempt and explore other opportunities. Later after a few years, I reconnected with my academic network and began considering alternative PhD programs. My search led me to Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), a university known for its supportive academic environment and its strong emphasis on innovative research. The prospect of a new beginning at UKM was both daunting and exhilarating. Not to mention, the supervisor was very helpful and she motivated me to do my best. My parents were my strongest pillar which I could lean upon when I was down.

My life is a painstaking balancing act, a daily choreography of work, family, and self-care. As a postgraduate student in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) pursuing a doctoral degree in English Language studies while juggling the responsibilities of a university lecturer and a dedicated family man, I engraved a unique rhythm to my life. My weekends, often the core of this balancing act, offer a glimpse into the demanding yet rewarding nature of my existence.

The alarm clock buzzes at 4:30am sharp. My day begins with a quiet ritual—a moment of peace before the whirlwind. I awake with a sense of purpose, knowing that my weekends are a blend of academic obligations and precious family time. My two young children, Yadheena and Jayden, are still asleep. In the dim light of dawn, I prepare a cup of coffee and sit down at my desk, already piled with Research Methodology textbooks, research papers, and student assignments. My research is in the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), a subject I am deeply passionate about, but it demands meticulous attention and long hours. A solid 2 hours of reading and writing my draft with in between breaks for mental rejuvenation. This includes engaging in different activities during breaks, such as walking, and relaxing, as this keeps my mind engaged and refreshed for the next study session.

By 7:00 AM, I transition from my solitary morning routine to a family-centered one. The aroma of food fills the kitchen as I cook breakfast for my kids. Yadheena and Jayden bounce into the kitchen, their energy a stark contrast to the quiet of my early work. Breakfast is a time for laughter and connection, a brief but cherished moment of respite from the rigors of academic life. The family chat about the plans for the day while I carefully navigates the conversation, my mind still partly occupied with the research I need to finalise.

As the day progresses, I head to my work place for my weekend work. My role as a lecturer involves not only delivering lectures but also mentoring students, grading assignments, and participating in departmental meetings. Saturdays are dedicated to this side of my professional life. I am known for my engaging lectures and my approachable demeanour. My students appreciate my dedication and my wittiness, and the feedback I receive often fuels my passion for teaching. Yet, behind the scenes, my weekends are

filled with meticulous preparation and grading that extend long into the afternoon.

In the late afternoon, I return home, where the kids eagerly await me. They have planned an outing—a trip to the park, a movie night, or simply a game of soccer in the backyard. These moments are always precious to me. I know that the joy of spending quality time with the children is what makes my relentless work schedule worthwhile. Even during these outings, I occasionally check my phone for urgent emails or messages from students, but I try to limit these interruptions to ensure I am fully present with my loved ones.

By evening, as the children wind down for bed, I sneak back into my study. The house is quiet, and this is my time to dive into my research again. I review data, write papers, and prepare for upcoming lectures. The work is intense, but I find solace in the quiet and the focus it demands. My children's sleeping hours offer a window of uninterrupted time where I can immerse myself fully in my research without the usual distractions.

Balancing these facets of my life is not without its challenges. My weekends are often filled with the duality of professional responsibilities and personal commitments, each demanding my attention and energy. However, I approach this juggling act with a sense of fulfillment. The key to my balance lies in my ability to compartmentalize my time—dedicating certain hours to work and others to my children, while ensuring that each aspect of my life gets the attention it deserves.

In moments of reflection, I acknowledge the sacrifices and the compromises required to maintain this balance. Late nights, early mornings, and weekends spent working are part of my reality.

Today, I am not only a successful researcher but also an advocate for students facing academic setbacks. I frequently share my story to inspire others who may be struggling with their own challenges, emphasising that failure is not the end but rather a stepping stone toward greater achievements. My journey from failure to success serves as a powerful reminder that with determination, support, and a willingness to adapt, even the most daunting obstacles can be overcome.

From Dawn to Dusk: Stories of the Postgraduate Life (VOL 1)
No. ISBN 978-629-490-113-1 | 2024

CHAPTER 8

Put Through the Wringer

Shagufta Khurram
Department of English,
Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University,
Lyari, Karachi, 75660 Sindh, Pakistan.

Starting my Ph.D. journey was a dream come true. My studies at the Center for Language Studies (CLS), University Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) were stimulating and fulfilling. But for every success story, there's usually a family facing struggles, and my family's struggle and support were unforgettable. While pursuing my Ph.D. at the University Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM), my family and I faced several obstacles. Although moving to Malaysia was meant to be a new beginning, it soon became apparent that we were in for a challenging ride.

Despite our best efforts and wishes, my three children, Soha Khurram, Muhammad Shahzain and Haadiya Khurram, could not be admitted to local schools in Malaysia. There were changes to the school system and language barriers, making the enrolling procedure a full-time job in and of itself. International school fees were impossible to afford for me. I was forced to choose between researching and ensuring my children attended school. Our sole choice left us with no choice except to homeschool, which took more time and effort than I could spare.

My spouse, Muhammad Khurram, had his challenges in the interim. He was unable to work lawfully in Malaysia while on a dependent visa. Our money ran out more quickly than planned, so this restriction burdened our finances. Khurram is a talented professional who found it annoying that he couldn't make a financial contribution and was neglected in his work. Both of us experienced stress as I balanced the demands of my research with my household responsibilities. We encountered one obstacle after another and were put through our paces. But during it all, Khurram supported our children's schooling and ran the family while I concentrated on my research studies. The resiliency of our children and his continuous support got me through the hardest times. There were benefits despite the challenges. We became more assertive as a family, relying on one another and celebrating even the little triumphs. The children gained essential life lessons about flexibility and resiliency, and Khurram and I strengthened our relationship by experiencing similar hardships.

In retrospect, I see that obtaining my Ph.D. involved more familial support and perseverance than it did academic success. Despite going through a lot together, we all grew more substantial and cohesive. My degree will be proof of my diligence and my family's fantastic support and tenacity. We shall never forget the lessons we learned throughout this time. We discovered the genuine meaning of flexibility and resilience as we worked together to solve challenges. Khurram's ability to take care of the household duties freed me up to concentrate on my studies without worrying about our children's schooling or welfare all the time. Our children, in turn, showed remarkable maturity and understanding, adapting to a new way of learning and thriving under their father's guidance.

As I think back on the journey of my Ph.D, I'm thankful for the love and strength that bonded us. The sacrifices made by my family have not been in vain; instead, they have strengthened our bond

as a family. Every obstacle we overcame helped us to appreciate and understand one another better. My degree will represent my family's combined efforts and unshakable dedication more than my accomplishments. Despite the challenges, we demonstrated that we were a resilient team that could succeed. We now have a stronger sense of purpose and a greater appreciation for one another because of experience. I am confident that, with the lessons we have gained thus far, we will overcome any obstacles that may arise in the future.

CHAPTER 9

From Hurdles to Honors: A Decade of Academic Resilience

Kangathevi Ponnudorai

Faculty of Social Science and Humanities,
Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and
Technology, Setapak, Kuala Lumpur,
53300 Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

A Decade of Determination

In 2007, at just 24 years old, I embarked on a journey that would shape the next decade of my life. Enrolling in the Master's program for English as a Second Language at the University of Malaya (UM), I was full of youthful enthusiasm and determination. The road ahead seemed clear, and I was eager to dive into the world of academic research, unafraid of the challenges that lay before me.

The beginning of my journey was promising. I audited six subjects, carefully selecting each to align with my research interests, and found a supervisor whose expertise resonated with my academic goals. My proposal defence was a significant milestone, and to my delight, I passed it on the first attempt. Everything seemed to be falling into place.

However, as I delved deeper into my research, the path became increasingly unclear. The initial clarity and confidence that had

guided me began to wane, replaced by uncertainty and frustration. My progress slowed as I struggled to meet my supervisor's expectations and grasp the core of my research. The journey that had started with such promise was now fraught with doubt and delay.

Years passed, and my life outside academia continued to evolve. I got married, and soon after, my husband and I were blessed with two beautiful children, born in consecutive years. As a new mother, I was juggling the demands of parenthood with my academic responsibilities. Despite the challenges, I was determined to complete my studies, and during my second pregnancy, I made a renewed commitment to finish what I had started.

But life, with its unpredictable twists, had other plans. Emotional challenges arose, and my progress was once again delayed. Yet, I persevered, and eventually, I completed my final draft. I gave birth to my daughter, and during my maternity leave, I focused on refining my work. It was a hectic time, filled with the demands of a new-born and the pressures of academia, but I was driven by the desire to see my journey through.

Finally, just two weeks after my daughter's birth, I was ready to submit my dissertation. But when I approached my supervisor, I learned that she had gone on sabbatical leave. To my dismay, she refused to send my dissertation for examination, citing her lack of review as the reason. Her refusal was a devastating blow, and I felt my hard work slipping away.

In desperation, I decided to retrieve all five drafts of my dissertation from the faculty office. As I stood there, an office clerk offered a lifeline, whispering that I should talk to the Deputy Dean. Clinging to this glimmer of hope, I reached out to the Deputy Dean, who

invited me to her office. There, I poured out my story—the delays, the rejection, the doubts.

To my surprise, the Deputy Dean expressed her trust in me. Despite my supervisor’s reservations, she believed in my work. “I’ll sign on behalf of your supervisor,” she said, “and you can submit your dissertation.” Her support was a turning point, and with her help, I submitted my dissertation.

When the results finally came, I learned that I had passed with minor corrections. It was a hard-earned victory, a testament to the resilience that had carried me through the shadows of doubt and despair. This chapter of my life was more than just earning a degree; it was about learning to rise above challenges and believing in myself even when the path was unclear.

PhD Chronicles - A Journey Beyond Expectations

After the triumph of completing my master’s, the taste of victory lingered, but a new hunger soon emerged. I wanted to push myself further, to go beyond the expectation’s others had set for me. In 2016, with my master’s degree freshly minted and a sense of renewed purpose, I began exploring the possibility of pursuing a PhD. By 2017, I had taken the plunge, registering as a postgraduate student in the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences at the International Islamic University Malaysia (UIA) in Gombak.

The faculty welcomed me with open arms, though I quickly realized I was the only Indian student in the department. It was a unique experience, being both an insider and an outsider—immersed in academic life yet aware of my distinct position within it. I wasn’t just pursuing a degree; I was breaking ground in my own way.

I was assigned to Dr. Selvarajah, a respected expert in language policies, as my supervisor. With my proposal draft approved and a research team in place, things seemed to be off to a strong start. Dr. Delva led the research team, and my co-supervisors, Dr. Ainul and Dr. Maimunah, were always there to provide guidance and support. I was passionate about my research, focusing on the Dual Language Program (DLP) in its early stages.

But just as I began to gather momentum, life threw another curveball my way. My father, a pillar of strength and support, fell seriously ill. His passing was a profound loss, one that left me reeling. My PhD seemed inconsequential in the face of such grief, and I decided to defer a semester to mourn and regroup.

When I returned to my studies, I learned that my supervisor, Dr. Selvarajah, was battling a serious lung disease. His illness was another blow, and when he passed away a few months later, I was once again plunged into sorrow. Yet, through it all, I refused to give up. The faculty reassigned Dr. Ainul, one of my co-supervisors, as my main supervisor.

Dr. Ainul became more than just a supervisor—she was like a sisterly figure to me, guiding me with care and understanding. Her steady support was invaluable, and I knew I could count on her for honest feedback and encouragement. On the other hand, Dr. Maimunah, my co-supervisor, was a motherly presence, always offering kind words and reassurance. When I was preparing for my PhD viva, she was in Makkah for Hajj, and she even took the time to pray for my success. Knowing that these two remarkable women were in my corner made all the difference.

My PhD journey was markedly different from my master's experience. I was an independent researcher, driven by a deep passion for my work. I poured over drafts, revised tirelessly, and

gathered data with an intensity I hadn't known before. Both Dr. Ainul and Dr. Maimunah praised my diligence, which only fuelled my determination to succeed.

Throughout this journey, I was never alone. My husband, Kanniegeswaran, and our two children, Kanniesh Theeran and Kanniesh Shaindavy, were my pillars of strength. They encouraged me at every step, reminding me that I had come too far to turn back now. Their unwavering support kept me grounded and focused, even when the road seemed endless.

Four years later, in 2021, I completed my dissertation. It was a moment of triumph, but the journey wasn't over yet. The examination process was rigorous, and it took another year before I finally received the results. In 2023, I passed with minor corrections, officially earning my PhD.

This wasn't just an academic achievement—it was a testament to resilience, perseverance, and the power of support from those who believe in you. The journey was long and filled with challenges, but each obstacle made the final victory that much sweeter.

As I reflect on this decade-long journey, I am filled with gratitude. Gratitude for the guidance of mentors like Dr. Ainul and Dr. Maimunah, for the love and encouragement of my family, and for the strength that carried me through the darkest times. There's a saying, "It takes a village to raise a child," and I believe the same applies to earning a PhD. It took a community of support, love, and belief in my potential to reach this milestone.

And so, as I stand at the end of this chapter, I am reminded of a quote by Maya Angelou: "You may encounter many defeats, but

you must not be defeated.” This journey has taught me that no matter how many times life knocks you down, what matters most is the courage to get back up and keep moving forward.

CHAPTER 10

Midnight Epiphanies and Morning Caffeine: Navigating the Postgraduate Rollercoaster

Kristina Francis

Department of Modern Languages, Faculty of Creative Industries
(FCI), Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR)
Bandar Sungai Long, Cheras 43000, Kajang,
Selangor, Malaysia

Doing a PhD is quite challenging, in particular when one has to balance family duties. It just adds on an extra layer of complexity which only people who have had this experience can appreciate. My journey was not just a test of my intellectual capacity but also my emotional resiliency, time management and personal sacrifice. I will be discussing the experiences that I had while doing my Ph.D. and completing it alongside having a family indicating some of the challenges, approaches and eventual successes that marked this period in my life.

Getting Started: Juggling Dreams & Reality

At the point when I chose to go for a doctorate degree, I already knew that it would be a demanding effort. However, I believed that with careful planning and determination, I could manage both my

academic goals and my family responsibilities. We deliberated extensively with my spouse about what consequences this decision would have on our lives. We understood that it would mean long hours of work lost family occasions as well as changes to how we run our day-to-day activities. But despite all odds we remained together knowing full well that we are choosing the best path for our future lives.

I tried to make a routine for myself at the beginning with which I could spend time on my research and still take care of my family. In most cases, I chose specific times when I could write and study, usually in the early morning once the children had not gotten up or late evening by which time they had gone to sleep. This arrangement permitted me to have enough time during day with my relatives as well as undertaking my PhD. Nevertheless, like any other PhD student would tell you, work began piling up until it was no longer possible to see where one thing ended.

Struggling: The roles

As I went on with my research, this turned out to be more challenging in terms of what it demanded from me timewise. There are days when I feel as if everyone is tugging at me at once; while trying to make progress on my dissertation that irritated advisor can't wait forever because his own kids want him around, let alone his wife who has her own responsibilities too. Being everything for everybody sometimes weighed down heavily upon me. There were occasions when I questioned whether or not there was something else that could have been done since maybe at the end of it all am giving away so much of myself.

One of the most difficult parts was about dealing with the feeling of guilt that came from being not fully present in either one. I felt guilty when I wasn't spending enough time with my family and

instead working on my dissertation, while at times when I took leave so that I can be with my loved ones, I feared that my research would suffer. This constant tug-of-war affected me both mentally and emotionally. It made me realize that in order to get through this phase, I had to find new ways of managing my time and expectations.

Strategies: Re-creating a new balance

The most important thing which happened during this period is learning how to set realistic goals. At first, I had high hopes of finishing up with my dissertation within a given period but as the burden of family life became heavier on me, I had no choice but to lower them. I started breaking down my research into smaller manageable tasks that could be done within short-time spans. Ultimately, it did not only make the work less intimidating but also gave me satisfaction thus keeping me going forward.

One of the toughest parts was feeling bad for not being totally there for both my kids and my job. When I was busy with my thesis, I felt bad for not hanging out with my loved ones. On the flip side, when I took a break to hang out with my fam, I was stressed about losing ground in my work. This constant stress hurt my mind and feelings. I figured out that to get through this tough time, I had to learn new ways to handle my schedule and what I thought was possible.

The Strategies: Getting a Better Mix

The big trick was talking things out. My spouse and I set up regular talks to share how we're handling our duties. These talks were super important for keeping our teamwork solid. They helped us spot when someone was stressed and needed a helping hand. We

also got our kids to talk about my job, so they'd get why I had to be out or all about my studies. Being open about things made me feel less guilty and made them feel part of the deal.

I asked for help from my classmates and teachers. I got lucky to have a boss who got me when things got tough and was cool with pushing back deadlines if needed. I chatted with other PhD parents and we set up a group to swap stories, problems, and ways to deal with stuff. Feeling that I wasn't the only one going through this tough time was a huge comfort.

The Win: Crossing the Finish Line.

The last bit of my PhD was super tough. As the due date for my big paper got closer, I was burning the midnight oil, usually when the rest of the house was quiet. There were moments when I was totally wiped out, and I started to doubt if I'd ever finish this trip. But every little bit I moved forward got me closer to what I wanted, and I kept telling myself that what I was giving up was just for a short while.

When I finally finished my big project and nailed the presentation, I felt like I hit the jackpot. It wasn't just the end of a long study, but also proof of how tough and strong my family and I were during this whole trip. The tough times we went through together made winning feel even sweeter. My family was my rock, and this win was just as much theirs as it was mine.

Reflection: Outcomes and Lessons Learned

Looking back, I feel that the PhD experience with family taught me valuable lessons in time management, endurance, and support. Although it was not an easy journey, it made me a more resilient and compassionate person. I have learned to be grateful for small

moments of happiness amid all the mayhem and to go a little easy on myself when everything didn't go exactly according to plan.

Most importantly, this experience instilled in me something: the fact that one can chase their dreams and raise a family, albeit with flexibility, communication, and undying belief in the worth of both. My PhD journey has been just as much a person-centred growth experience as it is an academic milestone; its lessons shall thus remain with me for a lifetime.

CHAPTER 11

Friends and Foes for Accomplishment

Sarala Thulasi Palpanadan

Centre of Language Study, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia,
86400 Parit Raja, Johor, Malaysia

It has always been a dream to do PhD and work in a university as a lecturer and embark myself into research and publication journey. I used to tell my friends in my primary schools to address me as “Prof”. And my poor, loyal friends did. I was happy. But deep down, I know it is never going to materialize. I don’t know why but I just knew it. Something told me that I am very far from achieving this dream. So, I gladly entertained my dream till my secondary school and stopped this game after that as I started to pay more attention in school lessons.

When I finished secondary school, I followed some friends and applied Teachers’ Training College and became an English teacher. Then, I followed some good friends to pursue my degree in one the most prestigious universities in Malaysia (which was also one of my dreams). There were a lot of challenges as I was juggling with family and studies with some financial crisis. But there were some good friends who were always there to motivate me whenever I was down. I was just waiting to finish the degree and leave home for good. Finally, when I finished the program, a good friend came with an application form in his hand (as there

was no online application then), a master's degree application form. Suddenly, my inner quest for further studies was awakened again. I thought for the last time, I would sign up and that's it!

Then, the semester started. Now, the challenge doubled as I was juggling between family, work, and part-time studies. I used to cry on the bus all the way (from the south to the capital city). I used to joke with my friends now that all the trees by the side of the highway were watered by my tears those days!!! Regrets after regrets for signing up for the program. But once I landed on the university compound my friends motivated me again to finish what I had started. They never gave up on me. God bless them... I completed my Master's in TESL successfully. Then, gladly, I started working as a teacher again, this time in a secondary school. My financial status improved as well.

One day, a new principal came to the school. He was very much loved by all the teachers there. He kept advising me to upgrade myself professionally. I managed to get a place in a Teacher's Training College. Now, as a lecturer, not in the university (as I dreamt) but in the Teacher Education Institute (TEI) which was very fine to me. Then, one fine day, with the help of some good friends, I applied for a scholarship to pursue my PhD. To my least expectation, I clinched the offer!!! I could not believe that I was nearing my childhood dream, to have a PhD degree.

I was overzealous. This time, I went on all self-motivated with full enthusiasm to embark on the journey. I planned to work on my PhD from 8am to 5pm so that I can graduate on time. Little did I know that there was not one but several challenges awaiting me. My lackadaisical attitude in selecting the right supervisor was my first mistake. I thought everything was based on mere hardwork but I learnt that working smart with profound consciousness was

more important. Later, with the help of some friends, I managed to find suitable supervisors for my study.

When I started collecting data, I came across many types of human characteristics among my so-called friends or 'former friends'. Some people can stoop so low to influence my study respondents not to cooperate. I was devastated as time was ticking. I was given a timeframe to complete the study. I was working under time constraint as I had to start fresh with the new supervisors. What kept me going was the advice from a prominent staff of the TEI who reminded constantly that what come may, I had to return with an accomplished PhD, not unfinished or half finished. These were the gem of people in my life who opened my eyes and due to the respect, I had for them, I didn't give up but continued to pursue the tough journey.

When I approached several friends to cooperate for data collection, I was surprised to see the other (darker) side of them. Some refused to pick up my calls, some didn't reply to my messages, some told me right away that they didn't want to be involved, and many other excuses. I was confused whether they were my friends or foes? Meanwhile, my best friend told me that it was just mere jealousy. Oh my God... Luckily, the information somehow reached the top management, and they supported me and did justice to my data collection as the research was important for the betterment of the institution. What a relief it was.

Again, I was working under time constraint. I had to rush into data analysis. My main supervisor was a great lady who was very helpful but critical as well. Drafts after drafts, I prepared which didn't satisfy her. But my good friends kept me going. I started my day earlier than usual (as early as 5am) and kept working till late at night. No happy weekends, no holidays. I was just holding on

the advice that no matter what, I had to complete this journey before going back to the institution. Thank God, after loads of hardwork, my main and co supervisors approved my work. Then, I defended and passed. I even clinched the Best Student Award that year!!! After that, I went back to the institution with full pride as a PhD holder.

I learnt that everything happens for a reason. If it was not because of my good friends, I might not have survived the journey. Meanwhile, if it was not because of my 'foes', I might not have finished the study on time and reaped the award as they kept me focused on my task. So, life can be very tricky at times. What matters is perseverance. Now, I am no more in the same institution as I have moved to a university as an Associate Professor. Perhaps, the professor title (that was in my dream) can be actually achieved now, God-willing...

Biography of Editors



Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sarala is an English language lecturer. Her areas of expertise include TESL, writing instructions, mixed-method research, teacher education, and teaching literature. She has vast experience in teaching English at primary and secondary schools as well as tertiary level including Teacher Education Institute and Public University. She is also involved in module and program development for schools and university students. She has conducted several courses and delivered talks to teachers and lecturers with regard to enhancing English language proficiency and research activities.

Thus far, Dr. Sarala has graduated more than four PhD students and is currently supervising several post graduate candidates. She has done more than a hundred publications including books, book chapters, indexed and non-indexed journals, newspaper articles, and university news articles. She has clinched many awards including best speaker award, best presenter award, best book award, best paper award and excellent service awards.

In her current role as the Deputy Dean of Research and Innovation at Centre of Language Studies at University Tun Hussein Onn, she is actively involved in research activities not only within her own interests but also in enhancing her centre's publication and innovation activities. She loves being an educator, trainer, researcher, and writer.

Sarala Thulasi Palpanadan

Centre of Language Studies, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn
Malaysia, 86400 Parit Raja, Batu Pahat, Johor, Malaysia

sarala@uthm.edu.my



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 from Universiti Sains Malaysia.

Venosha is an expert in design and developmental research, particularly in instructional design and technology. She has published over 10 peer-reviewed journal articles and 2 books in this field. In her role as course leader, she manages course coordinators while also teaching diploma and bachelor-level courses.

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.

Venosha Ravana
Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology
Setapak, Kuala Lumpur,
53300 Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
venosha@tarc.edu.my

Glossary of Terms

A

Adaptability (Chapter 6): The ability to adjust to new conditions, especially in academic or personal contexts.

Achievement (Chapter 3, 11): The accomplishment of goals, often through perseverance in the face of challenges.

B

Balancing act (Chapter 1, 10): The ability to manage multiple responsibilities, such as family and academic work.

Breakthrough (Chapter 3, 7): A significant advancement or discovery in one's academic journey.

C

Challenges (Chapter 1, 6, 9): Difficulties or obstacles faced during the academic journey.

Commitment (Chapter 9, 10): Dedication to a task or purpose, such as pursuing a PhD despite obstacles.

D

Determination (Chapter 3, 9): Firmness of purpose in achieving one's goals despite difficulties.

Dream (Chapter 11): A strongly desired goal or aspiration, especially in the context of higher education.

E

Expectations (Chapter 6): The hopes or demands placed on someone, especially by supervisors or academic institutions.

Exploration (Chapter 4): The act of investigating new fields or ideas, often in academic research.

F

Flexibility (Chapter 8): The capacity to adapt to changing circumstances or challenges, particularly in balancing family and academic life.

Friendships (Chapter 5, 11): Social relationships that provide support and motivation, often crucial during difficult times.

G

Goals (Chapter 10): The objectives one sets out to achieve, especially in academic contexts.

Growth (Chapter 10): Personal development achieved through overcoming challenges.

Guidance (Chapter 3): Support or advice, particularly from mentors or supervisors.

H

Hope (Chapter 9): The optimistic belief in a positive outcome, despite challenges.

L

Loneliness (Chapter 1): The feeling of isolation experienced during intense academic work.

Learning (Chapter 6, 8): The acquisition of knowledge, skills, or attitudes, often through overcoming challenges.

M

Motivation (Chapter 1, 11): The internal or external drive that propels individuals to continue their efforts despite difficulties.

Morning routine (Chapter 2): The practice of starting the day early to increase productivity and maintain focus.

P

Perseverance (Chapter 1, 3, 9, 11): Persistence in achieving academic and personal goals despite difficulties.

Productivity (Chapter 2): The efficiency and output resulting from disciplined work habits.

R

Resilience (Chapter 6, 7, 10): The ability to recover from setbacks or adversity in both academic and personal contexts.

Routine (Chapter 2): A structured schedule that helps maintain discipline and focus in academic pursuits.

Research (Chapter 3, 7): Systematic investigation into a subject, often resulting in academic publications.

S

Sacrifices (Chapter 1): Things given up, such as personal time or relationships, in pursuit of academic goals.

Support systems (Chapter 10): Networks of people or resources that provide help and encouragement.

T

Tension (Chapter 6): The stress caused by conflicting expectations or feedback during academic work.

Teamwork (Chapter 4): Collaboration with peers to complete academic tasks.

U

Uncertainty (Chapter 6): The state of being unsure about outcomes, often experienced in the PhD process.

University (Chapter 7): The institution where higher education is pursued, playing a central role in the academic journey.