

The Scenic Route: Reflections on an unconventional PhD journey

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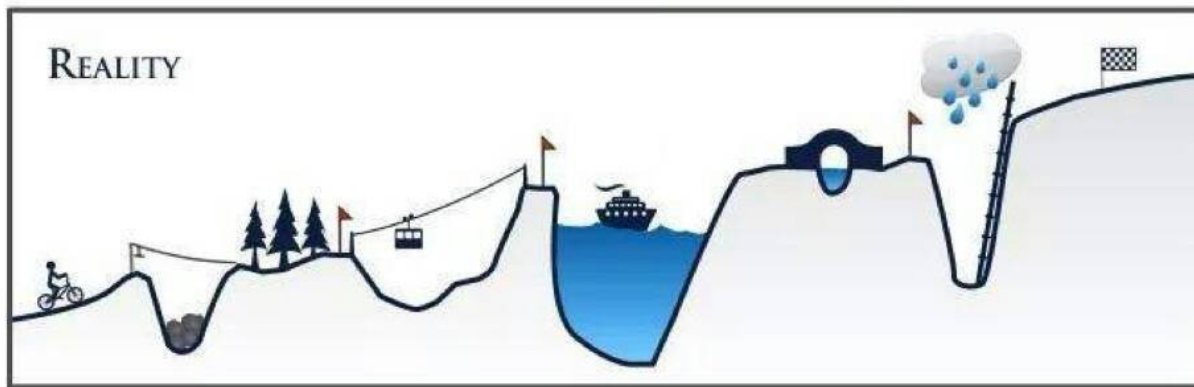
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My research

- The experience of community gardening for people with dementia
- Collaborative, participatory approach
- Findings: identity, agency, resistance, social interaction, sanctuary

The PhD journey



My PhD by numbers



3 departments

1 successful study

2 universities

2 publications

2 countries

9 conferences and workshops

9 supervisors

1 grant

5 house moves

3 fantastic supervisors

3 bereavements

1 very-nearly-finished thesis!

Survival Strategies

Treat it like a job

- Set working hours, and stick to them
- Weekends are sacred
- Use your annual leave!
- There's no such thing as a PhD emergency

Read, read, read

- [Thesiswhisperer.com](https://www.thesiswhisperer.com)
- [DrofWhat.com](https://www.drofwhat.com)
- [How to Write a Thesis](#)
- [Other theses](#)

Write, write, write

- Keep writing every day, even if it's only one sentence
- Establish daily targets
- Set micro-tasks: responding to an email, editing a paragraph, addressing supervisor comments

Silence your inner imposter

Neil Gaiman on Imposter Syndrome, which we all suffer from.

"... Some years ago, I was lucky enough invited to a gathering of great and good people: artists and scientists, writers and discoverers of things. And I felt that at any moment they would realise that I didn't qualify to be there, among these people who had really done things.

On my second or third night there, I was standing at the back of the hall, while a musical entertainment happened, and I started talking to a very nice, polite, elderly gentleman about several things, including our shared first name. And then he pointed to the hall of people, and said words to the effect of, "I just look at all these people, and I think, what the heck am I doing here? They've made amazing things. I just went where I was sent."

And I said, "Yes. But you were the first man on the moon. I think that counts for something."

And I felt a bit better. Because if Neil Armstrong felt like an imposter, maybe everyone did. Maybe there weren't any grown-ups, only people who had worked hard and also got lucky and were slightly out of their depth, all of us doing the best job we could, which is all we can really hope for."

Build a support system

- Coffee breaks
- Social events
- Distance students:
 - Skype
 - Facebook: PostgRAD Study Gang
 - Twitter: #phdchat and #demphtd
- Find the right supervisors

Use your voice

- You're no longer an undergrad- your supervisors are your peers, and you have control over your academic development
- If you're not happy with something, change it
- If you're struggling, ask for help
- Remember – your supervisors have all been there!

Embrace professional networks

- INTERDEM Academy
 - Summerschool
 - Publication
 - Masterclasses

Final thoughts

- Remember why you started
- Your PhD is just the beginning- you're laying the foundations for your career, not building the whole house
- You're not alone!