

Three cameos

Hannah, research professional	Charles, professional	KS, researcher
<p><u>Hannah</u> (S, then SS), UK, raised a family while a healthcare professional and did a local PhD to avoid upset for her family. She was interested in research related to her practice, imagining her future combining clinical practice and research. Unfortunately, the support she received from her PhD co-supervisors was sometimes uneven and their advice and feedback sometimes contradicted one another. Finally she realized they were ‘just very busy people’ and she took more control over her research and its progress and this built her confidence. She presented a number of times, though didn’t publish since she wanted to finish her thesis. Near the end of her PhD, she started job-hunting, but knew there were few positions locally. Fortunately and to her surprise, she found a job in a healthcare non-profit where her responsibilities were split 50-50 between building research capacity and doing her own research. She began building a publication record so she could seek research funding. Feeling isolated as the ‘lone researcher,’ she got an adjunct post at a local university, but she still wanted a post with a stronger research focus. Through networking, she found a job in a university-affiliated healthcare institution. The job allowed her to do the research she enjoyed (she obtained funding) and build research capacity amongst her colleagues. Still, since ‘life just doesn’t happen around work,’ she ensured time with her family. She now aspires to employment further afield given her children are grown, but first she needs to monitor the gaps in her CV.</p>	<p><u>Charles</u> (SS), Canada, was a professional before beginning a local PhD to remain near his elderly parents and partner. He imagined a research-teaching position. He enjoyed interactions with his PhD supervisor and the rest of the team. He presented conference papers during his degree, but did not publish, feeling really injured by his one attempt. Near the end of his PhD, he applied for the three local research-teaching positions on offer. He got ‘absolutely no response’ –a personal ‘blow’ given his investment in the applications. The experience reinforced a growing negative view of academia that he described as ‘all-encompassing ...involving a lot of rejection and impossible goals.’ About this time, a researcher contract came up locally, so he took it. The contrast in his PhD work environment was stark; he had little independence and did a lot of menial work. The experience made him even more disenchanted with academia. So, he treated the job as a 9-5 responsibility which allowed him time to publish two articles from his PhD, this time a more positive process. Near the end of the contract, friends reminded him that he had lost touch with his interest in social justice issues. As well, he had concluded that academic life is ‘not really what I had expected it to be.’ So, he entertained being a professional again, either self-employed or in a public/private agency. He volunteered in several community organizations before applying for and obtaining a full-time professional position in a private foundation. He saw this post as a way of bringing together his academic training and interest in social justice.</p>	<p><u>KS</u> (SS), worked as a professional outside Europe before moving to the UK for a Master’s degree. She then got a researcher position at another university, enjoying the ‘luxury’ of focusing on a project with an engaged PI. As her contract ended, the PI helped her get PhD funding and became her supervisor. KS intended a research-teaching post. Her PhD work was very different from her research work where she had to ‘jump in the deep end’ to achieve the project goal. Now she needed a high level broad grasp of theoretical ideas before moving forward. Another surprise was that her supervisor was much more ‘remote,’ but over time she became reconciled to this. The following year, she returned home on a six-month leave due to family illness. She felt destabilized there. So it was ‘a relief to take up my own life again’ upon her return. She now knew the difficulties of getting a research-teaching position, so ‘I’m trying not to set my heart on one.’ She also hoped sometime to find a partner and have a baby. The next year, KS taught and did editorial work which she enjoyed while writing her thesis, exploring a new relationship and ‘mildly panicking’ about the few jobs and high competition. She knew the value of publishing, but had not been successful. On finishing, she informally accepted a researcher post near her hometown. When the post fell through she went ‘into a tailspin’ as she had turned down two jobs in the UK. Still, she returned home, began networking, and relatively quickly was offered a 1-year research contract. With this financial stability her partner could join her, since he could not get a work visa. In the short term, she had ‘reconcile[d] ‘my career plans with my personal life ...that makes me very happy.’</p>

Some references

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