

Where am I now?

By Sarah Munday FGAA

I come from a scientific family background - my father is a geologist, and my mother a biologist. My childhood was full of a great sense of interest in natural history and the physical world - glued to David Attenborough documentaries, my parents teaching me the names of many animals and plant species, gemstones and minerals. I took my early gemmological knowledge for granted, a natural and obvious interest.

In 2009 I graduated from Curtin University in Perth, with a bachelor degree in Jewellery & 3D design. I heard about the GAA diploma course from a fellow jewellery graduate who was studying gemmology. I was immediately interested. The diploma course seemed a great way to gain skills by studying something I already had an interest and grounding in, whilst also giving me a little more time to work out where my jewellery career might go. I began the diploma in February 2010.

It was tricky to re-adapt to scientific education after the looser structure of arts. The course was fascinating, though I did struggle with some of the theoretical concepts (such as exactly what happens inside the refractometer)! Some of the lab equipment was also difficult to get used to, but my teachers were very patient with my tendency towards frustration when I cannot master skills immediately. I did develop a deep delight with particular techniques, namely testing with UV light (pretty colours!) and examining the tiny frozen worlds revealed by the microscope. I developed close friendships with my lab classmates, Lyn, Maria and Emma, and we started holding tea-and-study sessions, which made revising enjoyable and effective, if calorific. We all completed first year successfully.

After my first year, external life intervened. I deferred my second year of the diploma and moved to London in March 2011. Whilst in the UK, I examined closely the gem and mineral collections in the V&A and Natural History museums, but I didn't keep up much revision, and I returned to Perth in January 2012 with feelings of trepidation about returning to the demanding second year of the course.

Despite feeling in the first few months like I was scrabbling to catch up, my confidence with theory and with the refractometer and spectroscope slowly increased. I was working two jobs for part of

this time and further tested my long-suffering teachers' patience by often falling asleep in lectures... the source of much teasing from everybody for some time now!

My classmates and I made it through our final exams and were thrilled with our positive results. I was amazed to learn that I had managed to scrape the highest final marks in the state for our year, and at our graduation I was awarded the F M Mandiros Prize for 2012.

What is next? I am very proud to now be able to call myself a gemmologist. I intend to stay a Fellow of the GAA for as long as possible. Since graduating I have been setting up my new little jewellery business, Sleepless Nights Design, and working on my first production range.

I didn't want to lose my gemmology knowledge when I stopped studying, and investigated the possibility of assisting with lab classes in 2013. I was asked instead if I would deliver some lectures to the first year class. I accepted, rather terrified, but the 2013 student group are lovely and put me at ease. I enjoyed the experience much more than I could have imagined.

My love of gems and my training have enriched my life and work and I want to continue introducing fellow jewellers to this realm and teaching gem students (if they'll have me) for as long as possible. My deep thanks go to all those involved in my learning at GAA WA.