

As a second-year graduate student, I had just completed my first full year of research in my thesis lab. At the time, I was elbow-deep in a project that was *supposed* to be simple and straightforward, but was actually turning out to be a challenge at every possible juncture, from experimental design right through to data analysis. Having entered graduate school with prior lab experience, I knew this was often the case in research, but I was still feeling rather frustrated and discouraged. It was in this mindset that I got on a plane for Seattle, Washington to attend RNA 2006, the 11th annual meeting of the RNA Society.

The RNA Society in general, and its annual meeting in particular, provide a unique forum to bring together scientists working in ever-diversifying fields of RNA research. Conference attendees represented every type of RNA research imaginable, from purely computational to biochemical to systems biology. I perused posters that highlighted groundbreaking work being done on pathways with which I was intimately familiar. I attended talks discussing research into roles for RNA that I hadn't known *existed* just days earlier. I could be in territory as familiar or unfamiliar as I wanted, simply by walking across the room. As a relative "newbie" to RNA, I could not have asked for a better place to adventure, explore and expand my RNA horizons.

Additionally, I had the opportunity to present a plenary talk on work that was being done by several members of my lab and our collaborators. First, I should be clear: I love talking about science. So while it was exciting to stand in front of an audience and describe the lab's work, by far the *best* part of the experience was the discussion prompted by my talk. In the following days, I spoke with other students, post-doctoral associates, and even faculty members to clarify and answer questions about the research we do, as well as to discuss their suggestions and ideas. This give-and-take of ideas, this debate and discussion of hypotheses, techniques and theories – *this* is what I love about the scientific community. And for five days straight, I was immersed in it.

However, beyond the educational aspects, beyond the conversations among incredibly smart people about incredibly cool things, beyond the dynamic idea exchange – for me, there was yet another lesson to be learned. I saw posters and talks by countless graduate students, many of whom were presenting completed or nearly completed projects, the culmination of five or six years of graduate work. As each of their stories unfolded, I was struck by one idea: If they can do it, so can I. I have no doubt that each, at some point in time, faced what I was facing back in my lab – a seemingly endless project with a heap of unexpected difficulties. And yet, in the end, each had a worthy scientific story to share – and so could I. As I boarded the plane to return to Rochester, I was thankful for so many things about the trip, but in particular, for the reminder to remain positive. The reminder that my experience is by no means unique, and with perseverance and creativity, my project, too, will come to fruition.

I have many to thank for making this trip a reality, but I am particularly appreciative of Dr. Maquat, my lab mates, and our collaborators at the University of Montreal, for all of their scientific contributions; and of Graduate Women in Science for providing monetary assistance to make my trip possible.