

KS took her first degree in North America, and then worked for several years in different professional capacities. Wanting something new and challenging, she moved to the UK, leaving a close-knit family, to do her MSc and then changed universities to take a one-year research position after graduating. She joined the UK study in 2008 shortly afterwards. The following year she began her PhD, imagining a research-teaching position as her future, and graduated when she was 35. What struck us about KS' story was:

Family illness and hoping for parenthood (personal) Dealing with rejection and the solitary nature of writing during degree (work experience) Concern about lack of research-teaching positions during degree and networking to find work (career thinking)

Year	Personal	Work experience	Career Thinking
Pre-PhD Year 1	Personal life on hold	Enjoyed collaborative team. PI/ supervisor suggested PhD; helped get funding; pragmatic decision since research area not deep interest.	Inspired, exhilarated by research; growing UK network but losing North American one; 'undercover' as a researcher without PhD.
PhD Year 1	Saw doing PhD as decision to develop social and academic UK networks. Critical illness in family; took leave and returned home for 6 months.	Started PhD; working alone. Needed more comprehensive grasp of literature than as researcher; backpedalling to catch up theoretically. PI/ supervisor more distant; was PhD the right decision? Very destabilised; lost momentum.	Possibly researcher or research- teaching position in North America.
PhD Year 2	Return to UK was a relief; affirmed decision to be there; longest had lived anywhere since a child. Hoping for a husband and maybe a baby (biological imperative).	Regained momentum; concerned re supervisors' lack of involvement; planned field work in North America. PhD meant participating in 'the industry' of producing textalso finding a path though readings.	Recognised challenge of finding research-teaching position; trying not to set heart on it; still thinking of North America.
PhD Year 3	Further family illness while doing field work in US; was able to continue work while supporting family. Gave up on finding a partner; hoping to adopt once in a job.	Field work in North America; extremely complicated to arrange; very isolating; cut off from academic context. Returned to UK; big shift from solitary deskbased work; thriving as enjoyed teaching (way to have legitimacy). Supervisors still distant but prompt written response and encouragement to network.	Increasingly saw self as an academic; finishing will be a watershed. Now prepared to go where the job is.
Post-PhD Year 4	Met partner which affected job thinking; he was from the UK but prepared to re-locate.	Finished 2nd field work in UK; writing, writing, writing; concerned about quality of her research. Finishing while reading UK and North American job descriptions (universities, governments); anticipated rejections. Learning to enjoy autonomy given by supervisors.	Applied for two jobs; had one interview; mildly panicked since meeting job descriptions expectations seemed inconceivable.
PhD Year 5 Post-PhD Year 1	Returned to home town; happy to be closer to family; partner to follow but not able to work.	Had viva; concerned about quality, but passed with no corrections; another step on learning journey, BUT also a sense of cliff edge as to future.	Turned down 2 UK offers since informally offered North American research contract; it suddenly fell through, so in a tailspin. Upon return to US, started networking madly; offered research position in her hometown.
Post-PhD Year 2	Partner followed; felt she had reconciled short-term career plans with personal life and family. Very happy BUT unsure how a baby would fit in since she was the only earner (given immigration constraints). Also not sure which side of the Atlantic they would both be happiest.	Started postdoc; grateful for a job connected to PhD; still learning, meeting other researchers and seeing where she might fit best.	Concerned about putting all her eggs in the American academic basket (given what she had seen of the competitive environment, incredibly high expectations, and limited work-life balance for academics there).
What struck us	Family illness. Hoping for parenthood.	Dealing with rejection and the solitary nature of writing.	Concern about lack of research positions. Networking.
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