



Don's diary: Novice to grandmaster in two short years

11 July 2003

Glenn Williams

June 2001

They are interviewing me for the position of lecturer: "So, when are you intending to submit your PhD thesis?" I shuffle uneasily in my seat before replying: "Erm, sometime in September." Another interviewer retorts:

"I think what we mean is when do you really think you'll finish?" My blood runs cold.

Surprisingly, they offer me the job.

September 2001

One week into my new job and I am brimming with enthusiasm. A colleague (someone who once managed to juggle a job and PhD study) advises me to use my allocated research day every week, but also to recognise that I am going to have to devote a lot of time to lesson preparation. This reminds me of Estelle M. Phillips and Derek S. Pugh's *How to Get a PhD*. In a chapter titled "How NOT to get a PhD", they clearly warn against taking on a new job.

December 2001

It's the end of term and I have just finished delivering an array of lectures. On the PhD front, I am struggling with my first empirical chapter on organisational differences in work stress. The last time I sent off a chapter to my supervisor was six months ago. I need to do something meaningful over the holiday period.

April 2002

The chapter on work stress has still not been sent off for comments. I have been giving my supervisor weekly progress reports to help manage feelings of guilt about a job not done.

I gaze broodingly at the picture of a contemporary from my undergraduate days studying psychology at Leicester University. His Australian university webpage shows he has been PhD qualified for ages - look at that list of publications. In comparison, I feel like an academic embryo, still waiting to be born. Oh, to give up the loneliness of the long-distance writer.

December 2002

I take the train down to London to hand in the whole draft of the soft-bound thesis to my supervisor. What a "present" to burden him with. For me, at least, this will be one PhD-free Christmas period.

June 2003

Today is my interview for that prized PhD in psychology qualification. Looking intently at the face asking me the first question, I am given a carte blanche to talk at length about what I did, why I did it and what I found. I defend some of the core arguments of my thesis: that personality can influence how employees see sources of stress and how they react to them; and that there are two major sources of stress in the National Health Service, which are organisationally or occupationally linked.

After a while, I lose track of time. Chapter after chapter, my thesis is dissected; yet I do not feel like an insect "pinned and wriggling on the wall" (apologies to T. S. Eliot). Instead, I am a chess grandmaster pre-empting my

opponent's next moves. Before long, I shake hands with the examiners - a worthy draw.

I receive a thoughtful gift from a dear friend. It is a book, *Everest: Reflections from the Top*. I have reached the summit after a change in supervisor, umpteen address changes, two new jobs, several failed relationships and marriage after a three-month engagement.

I thought I had reached the pinnacle. It is just so dizzying seeing the mountains left to climb.

Glenn Williams is lecturer in behavioural science, School of Nursing, University of Nottingham.