

**My trajectory in science**-from developing an interest to acquiring the position you hold today.

“History is more than the path left by the past, it influences the present and can shape the future”- John Burcow, MP, British parliament. As the woman scientist Marie Curie said, “Nothing in life is to be feared; it is only to be understood”. Fear: this emotion I have had throughout my life also empowered me to grow and strive ahead. I grew up in India of 90s in a big traditional household where men hold the prominent roles. Women are expected to get married and move away to fulfil the new obligations towards in-laws, while taking care of the husband, home and kids. Although my parents are ardent supporters of education, growing up, I constantly feared that I would be pulled into getting married early if I did not study and work hard, so my dream of a career would not be fulfilled.

Gradually, the knowledge I gained through books enriched me, and I wanted to share that knowledge. So, I started to tutor my fellow students when I was 15, and I have never felt bored for a single day since. The wisdom gained through sharing knowledge gave me the confidence to do I felt was best for me and the power to fight the fear. This wisdom helped me fight the Indian patriarchal system learning for myself that women are not inferior and can fulfil their career aspirations.

In 2009, I became a gold medalist in my master’s degree at the University of Delhi. In the same year, I begin working as an Assistant Professor in Chemistry at the University of Delhi, India. It felt like my dream come true. I remember when I entered the staff room on my first day, and I realized most of my colleagues were upset about my hiring as I was so young. It was the head of the institution which believed in me, seeing my drive and commitment. One of my male colleagues said you are not here to work but to find a good match for yourself which was ridiculous. But after about only a month, as I was preparing lectures in the library; some of the young women students, approached me to say how a young woman teacher inspired them and we began to discuss their own career aspirations. A few asked how to follow in my footsteps. This made my day, and over time some of those students pursued PhD in physics and chemistry in and out of India, and now have great jobs. Long after I had left Delhi I was invited back to the University to talk about the “Career prospects in Chemistry” attended by many women students, showing perhaps I had help to push my traditional department to start thinking in new ways.

# Prove yourself to earn respect

In Dec 2013, I resigned from my job and moved to the US as Jasneet my husband and partner worked there. It was a difficult decision leaving a place that I felt safe and where I was doing good work. But I also wanted to pursue a PhD. Luckily Jasneet supported my career aspirations helping me understand what the US universities look for in the application. I got many rejections before I finally got admitted to the PhD program in Chemistry at The City University of New York with the needed scholarship. It was a memorable day. I learned not to listen to rejections and to keep to your path.

# family support, perseverance, willingness to take risks

Of course, pursuing a PhD was a difficult journey: moving to a new country meeting new science and living with my husband for the first time; I was lucky. I had terrific mentors who supported and guided me. My PhD supervisor Marilyn Gunner is a woman who taught me how to be an independent thinker, and that helped me in shaping my career. One crucial skill I learned in pursuing a PhD is never to be afraid to ask questions. Due to unforeseen circumstances, Jasneet had to leave US and move to Montreal, then to Toronto due to his work. So, I finished my PhD. First alone in NYC and then commuting back to NY from Montreal where he had moved. Trust me, this was not easy. After graduation, I was lucky to get a one-year postdoc at Brock in St Catherine's Canada. Professor Art van der Est was another great mentor. Within a year, I aced another interview and became the faculty in the Department of Chemistry at Brock University.

#ask questions

Today, I am a working scientist- using computers to study nature's complex reaction of photosynthesis, and an educator- trying to guide and mentor students, a woman faculty in the STEM field, a new mother of a 8-month-old daughter Jasnaaz who I will raise to be an independent woman. Every story is worth celebrating, success & failure are the different sides of the same coin. I say if you don't like the outcome, flip the coin. Thank you very much.