Working Life

By Juliana Souza

Do not panic! You will survive! A little dramatic? Sure! But that is what I was telling myself after my advisor told me that I would have a 7 days field trip to collect samples and get to know better two professors and other three incoming students that would be joining the same Masters's program that I was that Fall. For the majority of people this trip would not be a big deal, but for me, a foreign student, with no real practice of my English speaking skills for the past 8 years, crossing the East coast of Canada inside a minivan with other five Americans, was a little bit terrifying.

That field trip started with us all flying from the USA to a tinny distant town called Goose Bay. It took us 2 flights and several landover hours to get there. By the end of the day, some of my nonsense fears had passed. I was more confident about my English and could see how amazing my tripmates were, as persons and as professionals. That brought to my attention more serious insecurities. I has just finished my undergraduate in Geology a month ago. Am I prepared? Will I be a good enough Geologist? Will my cultural and overseas academic background be limiting for me in this new research environment? Do I know enough? So much to think about, so much to be afraid of! I was sure about only one thing: if I was chosen for this program along with their other outstanding girls, they must have seen something about me, and maybe this trip will help me figure out what it is.

The second day was our first day of collecting samples. The first one was pretty easy, we had good discussions, and I was surprised that I knew most of what was being talked about. That made me feel better. Ten minutes later we got to the second sampling location.

We were supposed to collect samples from some sandy point bars beside a river. We parked the van on the side of the road and started to enter what, at first glance, looked like a few trees that we would have to cross to get to the river. Those few trees became a mess of all-sized trees, bushes, roots, branches, moss, rain, and everything that could possibly difficult to get to the other side. The professor and my other colleagues were starting to look not sure if we could reach this sample. It seems so close, but so far away at the same time. Suddenly something changed inside of me!

As the rain was dropping through my face, I closed my eyes and started thinking about all the field experiences and training I had in my school in Brazil, how much I learned, and how much all of the hard times I had were just preparing myself for that moment! When I opened my eyes again and looked at that greenish mess, I knew I could do it. I could find our way to that important sample. I choose a straight line, and just started walking as determined as I could, bushwacking everything that would hit me without stopping or thinking about it! I was just feeling so powerful, so prepared, and most of all, I was really having fun! A few minutes later, we reached the river, and my colleagues and I were laughing so hard and so proud of ourselves. All of us knew something special and different had just happened.

When I found that river, I did not only find the sample but also found myself and my value as the professional I worked hard to be. I could start seeing some of my qualities that might be the reason I was chosen for that program. I am a Geologist, I don’t know all of the things, and that's ok, we are all here to learn. But I do know something, I do have skills, and I can help my colleagues to make the best research we possibly can!

I am grateful for that trip, for that sample, and for those trees. They changed my life helping me acknowledge my own value. I couldn’t imagine a better way of starting my Master's degree!