

MURMUR

ALUMNI MAGAZINE • SPRING 2023



Five alumni
at one zoo

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MURMUR

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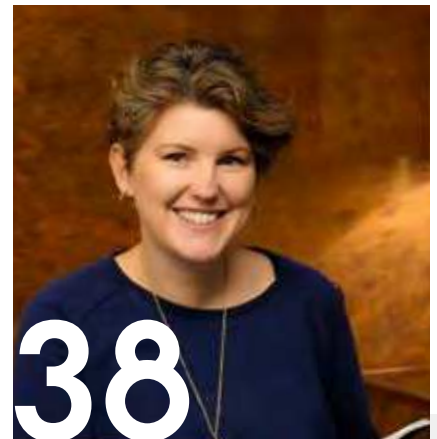
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Zoo Vets share Murdoch heritage

All roads lead to Mandai. Five veterinary alumni now working together at Singapore Zoo.



Q&A on UX

Everything you ever needed to know about UX with alumnus Danielle McDonald.



Vice Chancellor's Column

Alumni address from Professor Andrew J Deeks.



Matters of the heart

"People don't come up to you and talk about the risqué bits." Author Mireille Parker candidly charts her internal world.



Precious

Murdoch University spearheading a broad campaign to save the iconic black cockatoo.



From the sky

A slice of the campus 35 years ago.

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Acknowledgement of Country

Murdoch University acknowledges the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation as the traditional custodians of this country and its waters and that Murdoch University stands on Noongar Country.

Murdoch University pays its respects to Noongar elders past and present and acknowledges their wisdom and advice in teaching and cultural knowledge activities.

From the editor

Crossroads. Decisions. Making big calls. It always makes for a gripping story when we have the information to easily put ourselves in another's shoes and try and ascertain what we believe we might do given the exact same dilemma. This was a thought that crossed my mind mid interview with alumnus and writer Mireille Parker. Mireille was married, living in Switzerland and had a well-paid job as a teacher at an international school. But a few things were amiss. With limited Swiss German, she was missing conversations of depth. A long way from her family and friends, but with a husband she loved, Mireille was considering becoming a coach, having children and cementing in a future life in Europe. It was big decision time. You will have to read her memoir *Love Queen* to get more background, but in the meantime, you can enjoy a frank and open conversation with Mireille in the Q&A on page 12. With relationship minutiae, brain surgery, longing and the quest for fulfillment just as the starters, the interview with the twice-published writer turned out to be as engaging and honest as her prose.

Have you ever seen a pangolin? I want to. Five Murdoch veterinary alumni, all graduating at different times, found themselves working alongside each other and among these fascinating nocturnal creatures at Singapore Zoo. With various current responsibilities including managing the guest experience, pathology, conservation work, avian research, autopsies and case assessment to name just a few, the five alumni interviewed inside show just how far a Murdoch veterinary qualification can take you beyond the world of the domestic pet.

The five alumni's zoological journeys are echoed in the story of alumnus Dr Kris Warren, whose resume includes a stint at Perth Zoo, immersion with orangutans in the jungles

of Indonesia, before she ultimately settled under the gum trees of the Murdoch campus to study the beloved black cockatoo. Dr Warren and her research team are spearheading a campaign to save this endangered bird that is threatened largely due to loss of habitat for nesting sites and food and conflict with human land uses. But it is not too late, and in our Murmur main feature you can find out how you can get involved and make a difference in the quest to save the Ngoolarks from extinction.

Finally in this issue we catch up with alumnus and UX researcher Danielle McDonald, a poster girl for the possibilities found within a STEM career. Danielle's current employer became so big so quickly that it ultimately joined the ranks of corporations whose products have become generic terms in the dictionary. At the end of that sentence many of our boomer alumni probably thought of Hoover, the English alum may have landed on Sellotape, but full marks if you guessed one of the more obscure corporate dictionary fillers that include Taser, Chapstick, Thermos, Frisbee and Band-Aid. If you want the rest of the list, or remain slightly unsure of what exactly UX is, you best open another window and refer to Danielle's employer.

Enjoy.

Michael Sampson
Editor



Postscript: I am very sorry to share that the very same day this edition of Murmur was first distributed to Murdoch alumni worldwide, alumnus Mireille Parker, featured inside, passed away in Perth. The University passes its condolences to Mireille's family and friends. Mireille was a brave and insightful reporter of the 'human experience' and will be sorely missed.

A message from the **Vice Chancellor**



**“Boola Katitjin,
or *“lots of learning”* in
the Noongar language,
is the largest Mass
Engineered Timber
building in Western
Australia”**

Dear Alumni,

Murdoch University is synonymous with its beautiful natural surrounds – the tall native trees of Bush Court, majestic views east to the Darling Scarp, and wetlands of the Beeliar Regional Park.

The University’s original buildings were designed to sit quietly in this landscape. As Professor Geoffrey Bolton noted in his history of Murdoch’s early development: “Instead of the Victorian sham-Gothic or modern international-glasshouse, they constitute that rare achievement among Australian university buildings of sustaining an authentically Australian idiom.”

Earlier this year, a new piece of architecture which references the design of these early buildings opened to much acclaim.

Boola Katitjin, or “lots of learning” in the Noongar language, is the largest Mass Engineered Timber building in Western Australia and a powerful reminder of Murdoch’s foundational commitment to the environment and conservation. Timber, as we know, is the ultimate renewable building material. We also know that biophilic buildings – those that seek to connect occupants closer to nature – enhance the well-being and productivity of the people that use them. The response of our students and staff to Boola Katitjin is a testament to the attraction of these kinds of spaces.



Boola Katitjin

Murdoch South St is also a campus on Country – the traditional lands of the Whadjuk people – and Boola Katitjin connects strongly with its surrounds through its design, extensive use of native plantings, and in the digital art and installations that reference the Noongar seasons, flora and fauna, and local stories.

In a short period, Boola Katitjin has become a new focal point for the University community. Its tech-enabled learning spaces are among the most advanced in the country, and its expansive public spaces have hosted Yes23 events to engage people on the Indigenous Voice to Parliament, graduation ceremonies and other events.

The opening of Boola Katitjin also coincided with the implementation of our new Strategy – Ngala Kwop Biddi Building a brighter future, together – with its focus on the three themes of Sustainability; Equity, Diversity and Inclusion; and First Nations. This return to Murdoch’s original ethos and restatement of our purpose and values comes at a time where they are more relevant to society than ever.

Finally, Boola Katitjin will be an important venue for events and activities to commemorate Murdoch’s 50th anniversary from September 2024. The Office of Advancement is focused on strengthening our engagement with you – our 100,000+ global alumni community – in preparation for these events.

This landmark anniversary is a time for Murdoch to stop, reflect on and celebrate the contributions our researchers, academic staff and alumni have made to our local and global society over half a century. It will also be a time to look to the future and consider how Murdoch will shape the future over the next 50 years.

Kind regards,

Professor Andrew J Deeks
Vice Chancellor & President



Dr Jessica Lee
(Head of Avian Species Programmes & Partnerships at Mandai Nature)

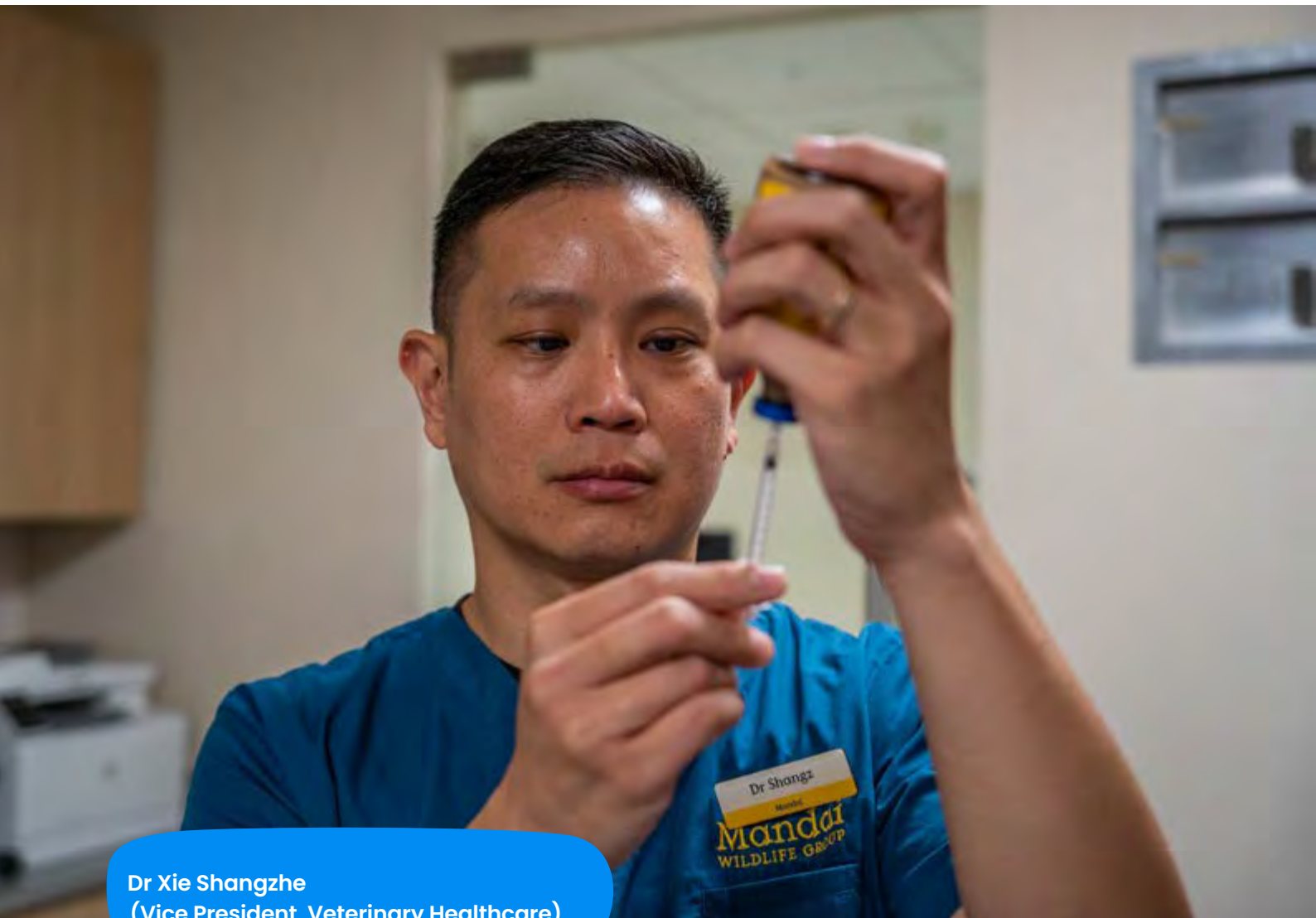


ZOO VETS SHARE MURDOCH HERITAGE

Singapore Zoo celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. The zoo is managed by Mandai Wildlife Group which is the steward of the precinct, Mandai Wildlife Reserve, an integrated nature and wildlife destination. Singapore Zoo sits alongside existing zoological parks, Night Safari, River Wonders, the new Bird Paradise and the upcoming Rainforest Wild. More than 21,000 animals from across 1,000 species call its current four wildlife parks home.

The zoo alone attracts over 2 million visitors a year. What we have also discovered is that it attracts Murdoch University veterinary alumni!

We recently discovered that five staff members working in various roles at Mandai Wildlife Group shared a common educational heritage 4000 kms away back at Murdoch's Perth campus. To lift the lid on their varied career paths and veterinary responsibilities, Murdoch's Kase Tan caught up with the following five alumni for a zoological flavoured Q&A.



Dr Xie Shangzhe
(Vice President, Veterinary Healthcare)

Are there any vivid memories of your time studying in Murdoch?

Dr Cheng:

I have only gone to one university which is Murdoch. I didn't enjoy my time in primary school and secondary school, but when I got into university, I thoroughly enjoyed it.

I did not know whether at the end of my course it was going to be hard to get a job and decided I would just learn and absorb and enjoy the time at university.

In my class there was 32 students. They set aside two places for students from overseas. Many students were complaining, saying 'Oh, it is so hard, or why are we are studying this?' But I just enjoyed it thinking 'Oh Anatomy is fun', and 'Physiology is fun'.

It is interesting, that out of that small core group of students, only one of them, ended up still in private practice. I'm still in the wildlife world I believe that I'm still using my training even though I don't do hands-on treatment of animals at all, but I think all the skills that I learn from studying to become a vet I apply in my work. Problem definition, problem solving etc. These skills learnt in the course still serve me very well.

Dr Lee:

I studied really hard and guess I did quite well and won a few awards at Murdoch while I was there. I think what I really liked about Murdoch the most when I when I swapped over to conservation, and the broader life sciences.

What I liked about the life sciences was that we had opportunities to go and help out on

a few separate programs. I remember being connected to a fertility clinic, a human fertility clinic, which was an eye-opening experience and got you doing things you never thought you would actually do. It was really cool, that bridging, and gave you a whole wealth of experience.

I actually went through via the Aussie high school process (i.e. TEE). So, a lot of my colleagues or my friends at the time were not the Singaporean, Malaysian students because I was in a different orientation. Eventually we connected and we're still friends today and at the same time, I have friends in my conservation biology field, we also still keep in touch. So, when I go out to Perth, I do catch up with them. The friends you make at university tend to stick with you throughout life.

Dr Xie:

My vivid memories are to do with the grass patch right outside the Vet building. Not just a place where we sat to eat, but also I remember an unusual annual contest. It was a big thing, once a year they do the cow pat bottle which is where they bring a cow in, and they draw a noughts and crosses on the grass patch. They numbered it one to nine and you put bets on the number. So whichever number the cow poops on first is the winner. There was a lot of shouting, but you couldn't physically touch the cow. That was fun. Plus of course looking back I met my wife at the Vet School which was pretty special, and we even took some wedding photos on that very grass patch!

Below: A Cow on the Perth campus farm



Dr Chong:

It is the beautiful and life-long friendships that I've been blessed with from studying at Murdoch that I'm most grateful for. That aside, I also have very vivid memories of sitting at the lawns of Bush Court or the Veterinary Hospital with friends, coffee hunting at Sir Walters restaurant, the animal farm, long and formative years at the hospital and living at the Student Village.

Dr Yeong:

Watching the black cockatoos and looking for bobtails, quendas and other wildlife on campus, which were much appreciated breaks from studying.

“There was a lot of shouting but you couldn't physically touch the cow”

- Dr Xie



Below: A Quenda on campus



What do you think are the elements that make Singapore Zoo a very special and critically acclaimed zoo?

Dr Cheng:

Singapore Zoo has always presented very well. There is a wealth of experience in terms of presenting our animals in a very naturalistic way as compared to some of the more functional ways of caring for animals. Zoos need to reflect scientific principles – e.g., this animal needs shade, needs to climb etc. but they also have to facilitate a connection with people, with the guests, who need to be able to see and feel that the animal is having a good life.

Singapore Zoo and all our parks are like that, very large, very green. We've always done that very well and from the very beginning have been good at engaging the guests.

But over the last ten years we have become more scientific as well, very strongly involved in doing conservation work and protecting the animals in their native habitats as well. We have the facilities and amenities for Singaporeans and have always wanted to be very high class and have parks that Singaporeans can be very proud of. I think we have achieved that and over the years we want to make sure that not only we continue to deliver a great wealth of experiences to our visitors but really ensure that we take good care of our animals and also protect the ones that are threatened in the wild as well.

Dr Lee:

Maybe to just add to what Dr Cheng said, it is about extending beyond Singapore and servicing the region of South-East Asia region. Bringing this core value of what we call ex situ conservation – to protect the animals outside their native habitat, for example in a zoo. Taking the value of that and putting it with future conservation in a very holistic, comprehensive approach. This is what Mandai is really about.

In the Southeast Asian context again it's about servicing the region financially through conservation support. We are probably one of the bigger contributors in South-East Asia, protecting species and habitats across the region financially. Mandai Nature is also the first Asia focused conservation organisation that is also based in Asia, rather than having a head office elsewhere.

We work in the region that we are also very familiar with. It is also our backyard, as it were, that we are trying to preserve.

Dr Xie:

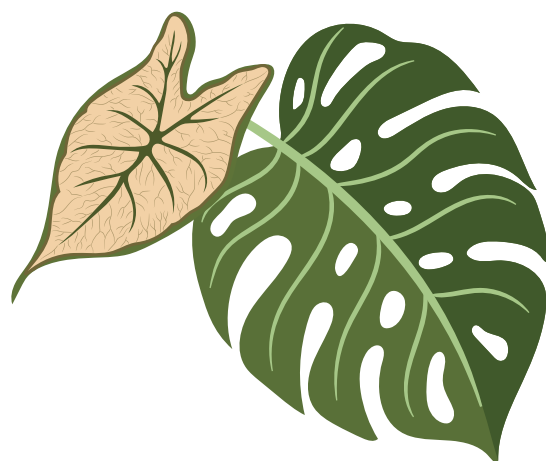
Just going further than just South-East Asia, we are increasing our standing in the wider scientific community. We have always been well known amongst visitors, tourists to Singapore, but actually not as well known amongst the zoo scientific community. However, in recent years we are publishing a lot and we are giving a lot of conference presentations and getting quite well known in that area too. Ten years ago, for example when I started going to the zoo vet conference, I didn't meet any vets from Singapore. But now, every year we don't just attend, we present at least one or two speakers at each of those conferences.

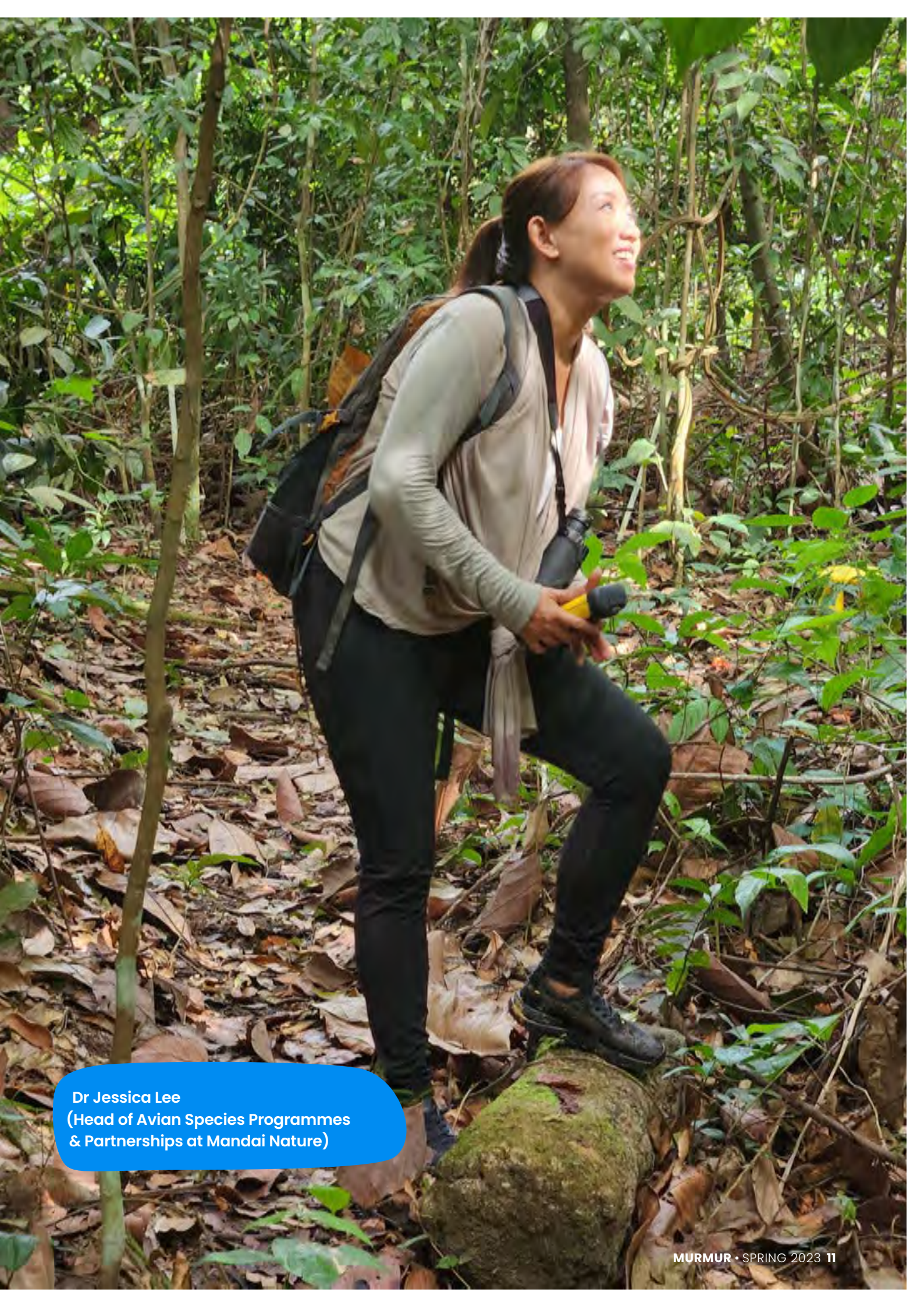
Dr Chong:

I think the zoo's experience programmes for guests (e.g., animal presentations, keepers' chats, feeding sessions, behind the scenes tours etc.) make a very engaging visit for guests of different demographics. We also have beautiful grounds and open concept exhibits that allow our animals to exhibit well.

Dr Yeong:

We have a beautiful physical environment. We are situated in the north of Singapore, next to the Upper Seletar Reservoir, and our parks are well-vegetated, beautifully landscaped, and well looked after. Our local and international conservation commitments, and education and outreach programmes, are closely tied with our species. From a veterinary point of view, our resources and expertise available for the animals directly under our care can be extended to the wider community, including rescued native wildlife, and partners in the region.





Dr Jessica Lee
(Head of Avian Species Programmes
& Partnerships at Mandai Nature)



Dr Chong Shin Min (Senior Pathologist)

“It is the beautiful and life-long friendships that I’ve been blessed with from studying at Murdoch that I’m most grateful for.”

– Dr Chong



Above: A Slow Loris



What is a typical day like for you?

Dr Cheng:

To me, it is going from one meeting to another. The highlights are when I go in and walk around the park, visit zoos/animals, take photographs, and interact with visitors. I also enjoy when staff show me new things, new back of house areas and so on.

Dr Chong:

I check my email once I reach work, then the entire veterinary team has morning rounds at 9.00am where we discuss the cases seen the day before, and the schedule for the day. After which, I check my pathology case load/schedule and proceed with the autopsies or lab work to process biopsy samples. After lunch, I continue with my pathology cases and reports, and try to read my emails before the day ends. Sometimes we have department meetings or discussions with other departments on animal health matters.

Dr Lee:

Also, a lot of meetings! A lot of virtual calls with partners in regions, different time zones and all that. The role is largely project management that is based in Singapore, but the team also goes out to help facilitate conservation work in the region. This involves going out and travelling right across all of South-East Asia to visit our project sites and spend time with our partners on the ground, going into the jungle, swimming in the sea, whatever it means to go and assess the projects and programmes we are financing and supporting both in kind and financially.

Dr Yeong:

Mornings are usually busy with planned procedures, usually those that involve anaesthesia. These may include health checks and treatment of animals presenting unwell, routine checks for geriatric animals, reproductive assessments and artificial insemination, and so on. Case reviews, assessments of new cases, and records and other paperwork usually fill up the afternoons. I'm also involved in various engagements with internal Mandai working groups and other conservation groups based nationally or internationally.

What do you find rewarding about your current role?

Dr Cheng:

I think that the reward comes from the difference I can make. Overall, I'm in charge of the welfare of all the animals in our care and it is down to me to try and ensure they all have a good life.

My other main responsibility is to make sure that all the visitors coming to our park have a rewarding, enriching experience and have a good time. This is necessary if they are going to develop a greater appreciation of wildlife. It is part of my responsibility to make that happen and achieving this with the help of all these teams of very passionate people doing it because of what they believe in.

Dr Lee:

So, what I think is rewarding for me is the impact that we have as an organisation which we don't always articulate well. Working with guests and taking on students and mentoring them hopefully to inspire them to become the next generation of conservationists. Ultimately, you pass the baton on to them. So, I think personally for me it is all the students that I work with and hopefully inspiring to continue along this line of work into the future.

Also, the partners that we work with in the region, and seeing them have the capacity to build, perhaps because we have trained them or supported them. It is great to see them grow as conservationists in their regions, in their countries, and in saving their species.

Ultimately, it's also this great idea and aim of having habitats and species protected in the regions. It is not something you see overnight, but Mandai is committed to the long-term support and hopefully 10 years from now we see species recovery. We already have with some animals, but there is a lot more that needs to be seen in the region.





“I think that the reward comes from the difference I can make. Overall, I’m in charge of the welfare of all the animals in our care and it is down to me to try and ensure they all have a good life.”

– Dr Cheng



Dr Chong:

My role as a pathologist means that I see death most of the time, but investigating disease outbreaks, why and how an animal died, or fell sick, really helps to inform the veterinary team, and this in turn can help to improve husbandry, diagnostics or treatment where applicable. For very complex or challenging cases, having a final diagnosis via autopsy can help provide closure to the veterinary and animal care teams.

Dr Yeong:

Working with a strong, innovative, supportive and fun team, while contributing towards wildlife conservation.



Dr Cheng Wen-Haur
(Chief Life Sciences Officer and Deputy CEO)



An Electric Eel

I believe you have piranhas here?

Dr Cheng:

Yes. They are actually quite boring as far as fish goes. I think their reputation or notoriety precedes them. Most of the time we don't feed them that frequently, as they can get too fat. Most people do not know they have walked past them. They are found not far from the electric eels which are far more interesting I feel.

Please tell us more about the eels

Dr Cheng:

All living things generate electricity. It's essentially how life works – electro chemical reaction. But these eels can actually pack their muscle fibres in such a way that they become a living battery. They can give up to 600 volts to stun and capture prey.

But I think the most interesting part is how they use electricity to hunt. Firstly, they can detect living things just by the electric wave that all living things give out. They can't see them.

So, all these little shrimps or fish might be hiding under fallen leaves etc. Once they detect them, they will actually give out a certain type of electricity, just the right dose, to make you twitch involuntarily. So, when you twitch, you expose

yourself. Then they will stun you. They can actually train the amount of electricity firstly to detect you, and secondly to make you twitch involuntarily so that you give out your location. Then if they need to, they can give you a higher dosage to immobilise you so that they can eat you. That is their hunting strategy. But also, when they feel threatened, they can go on the offensive. They can stun even really large animals. I think how they use electricity in such a finely tuned way is quite amazing.

Below: A Binturong



“I think the one species that people should definitely come to night safari to experience would be the Sunda Pangolin.”

- Dr Cheng



A Sunda Pangolin

What are some of the stand-out animals in Night Safari?

Dr Cheng:

The bulk of the visitors who come to Night Safari want to go on the tram for psychological reasons. They often think that ‘I don’t want to walk around the Walking Trail’, so they do the tram. With the tram, by virtue of the design, we have to put fairly big animals out there. Usually there are herd forming animals, the herbivores, the deer, the antelope etc. But I guess it is usually the carnivores that are interesting to people, the lions and tigers. Night Safari was the world’s first nocturnal wildlife park when it opened in 1994. So, it is true nocturnal animals that you will see. I think the one species that people should definitely come to night safari to experience would be the Sunda Pangolin.



Above: A Tasmanian Devil

Dr Chong:

Night Safari is one of the rare institutions in the world that have Sunda pangolins on exhibit so I would recommend a trip just to take a look at them! We also have a decent collection of Southeast Asian small mammals (e.g., Asian small-clawed otters, various civets, fishing cats, leopard cats, slow lorises, binturongs etc.) that is important in raising awareness of local/regional wildlife and conservation efforts. We also recently brought in four Tasmanian Devils, and they are having a great time in their spacious exhibits.



“Sunda colugos, which are frequently rescued and admitted to us, are a sensitive species with a specialised diet.”

- Dr Yeong

What have been some of the most impressive veterinary operations or procedures that you have been involved in?

Dr Chong:

Many of the memorable procedures are almost always very challenging (good and bad), logistically speaking or from a medicine point of view. We had a giraffe with dystocia (difficulties giving birth) back in 2019 over the Lunar new year period, which was very challenging, both physically and mentally. Unfortunately, the giraffe died due to complications during the birthing. In 2020 just right in the middle of COVID, we had to arrange for an emergency cataract surgery for one of our sealions which was a success. Last year, we successfully removed an eye cancer from one of our Sumatran elephants – that was a mammoth (no pun intended) task involving weeks of careful planning by both the veterinary and animal care teams.

Dr Yeong:

All procedures are special, because each case involves the opportunity to make a difference to that individual animal, that species, or to conservation. However, our investigations into the health status and contribution towards



Above: A Sunda Colugo mother with its baby

rescue and rehabilitation of our native wildlife are particularly special to me. This is important as wildlife are increasingly impacted by urbanisation, not just in Singapore, but globally. We are working towards establishing normal health parameters and veterinary procedures of Sunda pangolins, which are globally critically endangered, but little is known about them. Sunda colugos, which are frequently rescued and admitted to us, are a sensitive species with a specialised diet. We have developed techniques to ward and treat them, with the aim of eventually releasing them back to the wild.

Dr Xie:

The most memorable one for me was Jary the hornbill. You can see the amazing full story here: <https://www.mandai.com/en/the-wild-scoop/jary-the-great-hornbill.html>





Dr Charlene Yeong
(Manager, Wildlife Health)

MATTERS
OF THE
Heart





Seven years ago, alumna Mireille Parker was not in a great space. She was recovering from brain surgery, exhausted and depressed. Her mum suggested that she perhaps try and write a book about her own personal story. Seeking some sort of structure, Mireille began writing, which eventually turned into *Love Queen : The Making of a Master*, her second published work. The book charts a decade of her life from the ages of 28 to 38. In terms of the essence of the work, there is no better summation than the novel's dust jacket:

It is 2016 and washed-up life-coach, Mireille Parker, aged 37, is grounded at home in Perth, West Australia, the most isolated city in the world. She can't date or travel, she can't escape! For the first time in her life, she just has to BE. HERE. NOW. What follows is the best year of her life. But first, there is work to do.

How do we create joy with limited funds? How do we stay present when we feel that life was so much better before? Writing herself back into being is something she can do. Through her relationships, breast cancer and journal entries, we receive true insight.

Drawing on journal entries, inner dialogue and personal experiences from around the globe, Mireille does not shrink from the truth when placing a lens over her adult life. An admirable approach that extended well into the depths of our recent interview, where we unpacked some of the lessons learned over the last fifteen years...

When did you start your first book, *Wonderlust*?

In 2008. I had moved to Switzerland and couldn't work and that's when I started writing the book that became *Wonderlust*. At the beginning, I was writing about my relationship and then decided to make it into a novel and, ultimately, organically found the story. I finished it in 2014.

Initially I took it to a writers festival where you could submit the first ten pages to a publisher, and they would give you immediate feedback. I was excited. She said, "I hated the main character, I didn't care about her at all." I was so crushed having worked on it for three years. But I woke up the next morning and thought – well I'm not going to stop now, I'm just going to make it better.

What's your writing process like?

I don't read anything until I have finished the first draft. Each day I sit down and I'm just in the flow of whatever's coming. The first day is hard, and then it gets easier as I go along. At the end, I have a little break and start the second draft. I find in the second draft the subconscious mind takes over and it becomes clear how the sentences could be better.

Writing *Wonderlust* was harder because it was fiction. Sometimes things appear on the page and they are from a dream, or from a conversation I heard, something I experienced maybe years ago becomes mixed with fantasy. With *Love Queen*, I felt more like an abstract artist and worked intuitively, not thinking too much about it. It's like being an open tap and you don't want your logical mind to get in the way too much. The journal parts are from my actual journal. I selected parts which fit.

You went to university?

Yes, I did a BA at UWA, with Psychology and English Literature as my majors. I did creative writing there too. The writers Gail Jones and Brenda Walker were a lecturer and tutor respectively. One day I saw *Henry and June* on TV, a film which documents the life of Anais Nin and her affair with Henry Miller and decided I wanted to live through the eyes of a writer. I took a unit in creative writing but I didn't realise the importance of the editing process.

Interesting that it was a movie that was a catalyst for you becoming a writer?

Yes, after I saw it, I went to the university library and got out some of Anais Nin's journals. Then I read her erotic short stories which I feel is her

best writing. I also read her letters to Henry – then I read Miller himself. When I wrote my first book, I wanted it to be a bit like Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, set in Lucerne, Switzerland, rather than Paris.

How did you come to do the Murdoch professional writing course?

I took a trip to India and started to write there before I went to New York and attended hip hop dance school. In 2007 I was back in Perth and decided I was going to study either photography or creative writing. I chose the Grad Cert in Professional Writing at Murdoch. It was two units of creative writing and one unit of public relations. I had one day a week off my job as an ESL teacher to do it. My tutor was Deborah Robertson, who was nominated for the Miles Franklin award that year.




What did you do on the Murdoch course?

We analysed different short stories and presented tutorials on them. We had to keep a journal as part of our assessment, and we had to write short stories and read them out to the class. Not even at the final draft stage! My final piece was called 'The Last Kiss' – it was bad when I read the first draft out, but the process helps you to get over yourself and improve. It teaches you to accept constructive criticism.

What was the process like in writing your first book?

Essentially the process was – These are the emotions I'm feeling. What story can I make of them? How can I express these emotions in a story that is not my story. I went to another writers festival and all the speakers said they really planned out the whole story before they wrote. I tried to do that, but it didn't work. With me it is like a sculpture, a big lump of clay, where I have no idea what I'm going to make. In the end I'm like, "Oh that looks good!"

When I finished *Wonderlust*, I became a coach and never wanted to write another book. My creativity went into all the marketing aspects of being a coach.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a bright red long-sleeved top with a keyhole cutout and a light blue and white plaid skirt, is standing in a library aisle. She is holding an open red book and looking down at it. The library shelves are filled with books, and the floor is carpeted. The lighting is soft and even.

“I was so crushed having worked on it for three years. But I woke up the next morning and thought – well I’m not going to stop now, I’m just going to make it better.”

So how did you get back to writing and complete a second work?

I had brain surgery and afterwards was really down and depressed and my mum said, "Why don't you write your story?" I was resistant at first but started to write initially just to give myself structure, as not much was going on in my life at the time.

Your marriage makes up half the book. Do you see the other male characters in *Love Queen* as a part of your personal evolution?

Like a lot of people, I've always loved that kind of crazy love where you want to feel that mad passion, so often I fall for people before I actually know them. There is a quote I found in a book once – "love is blind, but only for six months or so," which pretty much explains all my relationships!

We often have these childhood patterns and wounds, and we meet certain people and I think they are there to help you heal from those patterns and wounds, but if you are not careful, they can also perpetuate those wounds. For me, when someone has a good story, that's what often attracts me initially. I get hooked on them for their history, their story. 'What can I learn from this person?' is also in the mix too. This all tends to take over the rational mind at that early stage.

In the book you talk about being in Lucerne with a lovely husband, good income, friends etc. but you felt unfulfilled and only realised it was good on reflection and in the latter stages of the book when you were broke, living with your parents, very sick and unable to travel. What do you conclude from those experiences?

It's a hard question. I do believe that the grass is greener where you water it. Everywhere has good and bad points. Lucerne had good and

bad points. Australia as well. But I'm here and I decided to be here, so I want to appreciate here. That's how I feel about it. At the same time, I am happy to be in Perth. It was a big decision I had to make – whether to have kids and live in Europe for the rest of my life or come back and be with my friends and family here. If I had decided to live there, perhaps I would have been happy there, but I decided to live here and I'm happy here. I don't know what the better decision was because you don't know. Being in that language bubble where Swiss German was spoken all around me, I couldn't be involved in deep conversations, so my interactions were surface level. Looking back, that was certainly an element

that made me feel unfulfilled.

I could have had the brain tumour over there and been without friends and family. Maybe I had to go through that to truly appreciate what I had.

I think Love Queen may be about love for some, but for me it was about bravery. Following your heart, moving right across the globe, to a different culture that was unfamiliar, a language you didn't speak, handling surgery and serious illness etc. Most people are frightened of such things.

That's why I wanted to share some of the things I learnt along the way. I believe people are motivated by comfort, security, power or experience mainly, and mine is experience. Others have different priorities. For me, my security was my parents. I knew I could always go back if anything happened. Whereas when my mum grew up, she didn't have security. Her father died when she was 12 and they had to make their own way. My dad had to make it on his own too, so they were both motivated by security. So, I don't think it's bravery per se.





You say following brain surgery was the best year of your life because your mind was no longer split. Can you elaborate on what you mean by that?

When I had an epiphany – Nov 14, 2016, to be precise, it was after my brain surgery. I had the realisation that for years my mind had been split. I was there, but I thought I should be here, I was with that person, but thought maybe I should be with this person. I'm working at a school, but I want to be a writer, but also considering maybe I should be a coach. I was never truly present, and my mind was split in many different places at the one time, second-guessing my decisions from one day to the next. As you can see from the journal parts of *Love Queen* when I lived in Lucerne especially.

Also, in Human Design, my profile is to 'learn through trial and error'. I do things, often without thinking them through thoroughly, and reflect afterwards e.g. I am going to go and live in Switzerland! Other people have to know or study things first, before they make a decision. We are all different.

Was it scary sharing your inner private thoughts and feelings in this book?

A book, unlike a social media post or blog, is a commitment and so the deal is that I am going to reveal a lot to you if we go on this journey together. Even so, it was scary when it came up to publishing time. Knowing my uncles are going to read this and I am going to see them at family gatherings! But I cared more about the 'art'. I wanted it to be what I wanted to express and during composition didn't worry about people reading it. Anyway, people don't come up to you and talk about the risqué bits ha-ha. In all seriousness, I don't feel shame about any of it. I look back and laugh and cry at various bits of the book, but I'm not ashamed of it.





So, when you got back to Australia you became present?

After the epiphany, I realised I could not have a split mind anymore so that's what I started to work on. I started meditating. I started to feel joy for no reason, and really started to enjoy the present moment. Even though I didn't have a job, I still had a roof over my head, and I still had money. I began enjoying what was in front of me in the moment, whether it was putting up a Christmas tree, going to aerobics, or being with friends – whatever it was.

I realised that I could have desires again. Maybe it wasn't the grandiose desires that I had wanted in the past, such as having a 'work from anywhere' coaching business, but I realised that what made me happy was actually writing my book and having adventures, and just being able to support myself again. Healing the split mind was about discovering I could be happy in the present moment with simple desires.

Are you getting better at it?

Yes, even now, having chemo, I am happy in my present life. Even though I'm currently at my parents' house, I'm happy. Even publishing my second book is more satisfying than the first one. I don't have a big goal that I need to happen in order to be happy. I am happy. I learnt that you have to feel your emotions to be happy. Before, I was trying to feel positive all the time and hide the negative emotions, but you have to feel the feelings and release them in order to be happy.

So, go into feelings and then let them go?

Firstly, I would journal to discover what I felt. I would write about it and put it into words. Writing out repetitive thinking in a journal allows me (and others I presume) to leave it there. You feel a lot clearer afterwards. Often emotion that we feel is some future projection that may happen or may not, or something from the past. We can have emotions stuck in the body from our childhood. You just have to feel it in your body where it is.

“Firstly, I would journal to discover what I felt. I would write about it and put it into words. Writing out repetitive thinking in a journal allows me (and others I presume) to leave it there.”

This was part of what I taught as a coach. Feel where it is in your body – just keep feeling it and it passes. If you really need help to get it out, you can punch a pillow or do some physical thing to help release it. I am not saying I am present now all the time but I don't experience the mind being so unsettled as I once did. There's a free guide on how to process emotion here (mireilleparker.com/emotion).

So, tell me about the documentary that was made about you?

I did a post on Facebook at the end of January 2023 about how I was going back to ballet after a gap of about 28 years. Then I received an email from SAE Creative Media Institute students saying they wanted to make me the subject of their short documentary. The film was to be about 'pursuing artistic expression despite serious setbacks.' When we initially met, I said I didn't really consider dancing as my artistic pursuit because I'm not a choreographer. It is more of a passion and writing is my artistic pursuit. So they decided to make it more about me and my writing and also going back to ballet because that was about the limitations on my body. I was feeling well when they contacted me but when it came to the filming, I was in such a different place and in a bad state. I hadn't slept the night before filming as I was suffering serious side effects of liver and lumbar spinal tumours.

I'm glad I did it, but it was filmed at a terrible time for me. I looked awful. But like with my books, I wanted it to be honest. People may judge me for things I say about my life, but I hope to provoke deep thinking or interesting conversations. I'd like people to see the film, or read my work, and then perhaps reflect about parts of their own life.

You've been dealing with cancer for ten years now. What has it taught you?

The biggest thing that it has taught me is that the universe is constantly changing. There are always new developments. No doctor has ever given me a "You've got a year to live" kind of diagnosis and anyway I don't take things as a final sentence. I keep on believing. Things can change in a good way. Life is in a constant state of change and dealing with illness has taught me to never lose hope.

Do you have strategies so you don't think about it all the time?

If I am going through something I may think about it in the middle of the night. However, I don't think about it very much. I focus on the day to day and good moments. I am not sure what there is to 'think' about it anyway. I feel the feelings in the moment when they hit, but then I seek new solutions and approaches.

It sounds like much of the personal development you did prior has helped you deal with major illness.

I wouldn't recommend cancer for people but there are good things that can come out of it. I can just write my books and I do have a lot of freedom. But at times yes, for someone who values freedom so much, it can get to stages where I can't believe how my life has ended up – that I'm tied here and tethered to 'this' but perhaps that is how I have learned to be happy in the present moment as well. It has certainly helped me to learn that.







PRECIOUS

South-Western Australia is home to three species of black cockatoos – Baudin's cockatoo, forest red-tailed black cockatoo and Carnaby's cockatoo. All three species are listed as threatened under state and federal legislation, but it is the Carnaby's, or Ngoolarks as they are known in the Noongar language, which are most visible in the Perth-Peel region, where pressure on the birds is high.

Given the real threat of extinction, Murdoch University has launched a community empowerment program that will see researchers, Aboriginal organisations, local governments, and conservation groups take collective action to protect the endangered birds.



Professor Kris Warren holding a nestling Carnaby's cockatoo.

With support from Lotterywest, and in conjunction with Murdoch's Harry Butler Institute and Ngangk Yira Institute for Change, the **Keep Carnaby's Flying – Ngoolarks Forever** project has partnered with the Winjan Bindjareb Boodja Rangers, BirdLife Australia, Perth NRM, South East Regional Centre for Urban Landcare (SERCUL), Peel-Harvey Catchment Council, Landcare Serpentine-Jarrahdale, Urban Bushland Council of WA, Kaarakin Black Cockatoo Conservation Centre, and Curtin University's Trace and Environmental DNA Laboratory.

In the urban areas we have lost 50% of our Carnaby's cockatoos in the last five decades. The pressures facing these birds fundamentally hinge around the continued, significant loss of Banksia woodland in urban and regional areas. In addition, numbers are being dramatically impacted by the continued harvesting of the Gnangara-Pinjar-Yanchep Pine Plantations, which provide a very important food source for the birds when they migrate back from their breeding grounds with their fledglings.

There is also pressure coming through troubling applications for mining exploration at key breeding sites for Carnaby's cockatoos.

Carnaby's cockatoos have adapted over time to feed on pine. It is obviously not native vegetation, but with the loss of banksia, pine has become an important additional food source. Native vegetation however, remains of paramount importance for the birds.

Project lead Professor Kris Warren from Murdoch's School of Veterinary Medicine and the Harry Butler Institute has many years of experience studying Ngoolarks.

"We've done a lot of research since 2010 on the health of Carnaby's cockatoos, including going into the field and sampling nestlings at key breeding sites" Professor Warren said. "We've sampled 426 nestlings over an 11-year period, giving us baseline health data and making this the longest and largest parrot health study completed in Australasia."

Collaborating with colleague Dr Jill Shephard, an ecologist who works extensively on the analysis and modelling side of the research, Prof. Warren

“They’re such iconic and charismatic birds, and we are blessed by the fact that we see them so often in Perth. It’s unusual to have threatened wildlife that the public see on a regular basis.”

–Professor Kris Warren



and the research team are also highlighting other threats to Carnaby’s cockatoo numbers. For example, there is competition with other species, including corellas and feral honey bees, for the few remaining nest hollows, which form only in centuries-old trees.

There is also a constant threat of vehicle strike. Carnaby’s cockatoos can often be found drinking from potholes and puddles on roads, as they prefer to drink from shallow water. There are also major risks from grain spill during road haulage, as the birds often feed on the spillage.

The research team is also investigating a toxicity-related hindlimb paralysis syndrome that has been discovered in Carnaby’s cockatoos, and which may potentially be linked to chemical contaminants resulting from agricultural practices in regional areas.



Prior to her Murdoch tenure, Professor Warren worked with a broad range of different animals. Following graduation, she completed an internship in zoo medicine at Perth Zoo and spent five years in East Kalimantan working with orangutans. She always nurtured a desire to work

with wildlife and lights up when discussing what it is that makes black cockatoos special.

“They’re such iconic and charismatic birds, and we are blessed by the fact that we see them so often in Perth. It’s unusual to have threatened wildlife that the public see on a regular basis.”

“They are very special birds with so much

character, so much personality in the way they interact with each other; they’re incredibly social. The more you work with them, the more you develop an appreciation. For me they’re part of our natural heritage and it’s critical that we protect them.”



“We are all responsible for boodjar – for planet earth, sky land and water. The protection of these birds is a mirror being held up to us”

-Jade Maddox



Left to right: Barb Hostalek, Professor Kris Warren and Jade Maddox.

This view of the birds' cultural significance resonates with local Elders' and Noongar peoples' perspectives, and it was important that the Keep Carnaby's Flying project worked in consultation with Noongar people.

Led by Cultural Engagement Lead Barb Hostalek, together with her Ngangk Yira Institute for Change colleague Jade Maddox, the team has run cultural engagement workshops in support of grassroots community action to advocate for the survival of Ngoolarks.

"When we spoke with the Ngangk Yira Council of Elders and the Winjan Aboriginal Corporation Elders from Mandurah Binjareb they told of the cultural significance of black cockatoos for Noongar people. The Elders shared highly emotive stories and different stories about their relationship with the Ngoolarks," said Barb.

The cultural engagement work has brought in numerous powerful and inspirational quotes, such as the following from Milly Penny from Middar Yorga Dance Troupe.

"We are all connected. We all want to be part of the solution. We have four generations of Middar dancers, and we want to help. We can dance the health of these birds back in from the brink of extinction, back to abundance."

Murdoch's Jade Maddox encapsulated the urgency succinctly:

"We are all responsible for boodjar – for planet earth, sky land and water. The protection of these birds is a mirror being held up to us," she said.

"Everything is interconnected, the birds are dying, the food is dying, their waters are going, land is flattened without a care – it all interconnects. We used to see mobs of them. Families had them as a totem – they were messengers of the changing of the seasons and the coming of the rains. It's very sad."

As a younger Aboriginal person, Barbara always feels honoured to be at the foot of older knowledge holders and wiser people:

"I think the value systems shared really connect with my own cultural value system and family cultural values. Also, as someone who is part of a research project, I look at the broader systemic impact it can have on our combined communities – western and Aboriginal community lenses. They are great values we can all embrace, and we are granted the authority to do that through the Elders."

Brett Hill, Noongar Elder and Board Director of Winjan Corporation, is optimistic about the results that are possible through working closely with local authorities.

"Collaborating with Councils is a model to change the way things are done. It's an opportunity to work together to save the Ngoolarks," he said.



The official launch of **Keep Carnaby's Flying – Ngoolarks Forever** project saw the screening in Murdoch's Kim Beazley Lecture Theatre of a special film by documentary maker Jane Hammond. *Black Cockatoo Crisis* documents the threat to the species, and how community action can halt the destruction of the habitats that support them.

Jane consulted with the Murdoch research group to incorporate their research findings into the film, which is helping to spearhead a social impact campaign to push for change.



The launch also saw donations pour in for special water troughs which are being placed on the Murdoch South Street campus to support the campus' black cockatoos; a project overseen by Murdoch's Sustainability Manager, Leah Knapp:

"Heat stress can be a real problem for Ngoolarks, and they need shallow drinking water regularly. Thanks to donor support, Murdoch has been able to purchase three water troughs that are specifically designed for black cockatoos. Self-flushing and therefore reducing the chance of pathogens in the water, the troughs stand four metres off the ground. Known as a 'Cockitrough', they cost \$5,000 and are constructed by the Town of Victoria Park's Maintenance and Gardens team."

Leah has been working in Sustainability at Murdoch for over a decade and has extensive firsthand experience of the Ngoolarks on campus.

"The campus is regarded as a super roost due to its many tall trees. We have been participating in a citizen science project since 2010 called the

Great Cocky Count (run by Birdlife Australia) – which is like a census night for black cockatoos. What it has shown us is that black cockatoos love our campus, which serves as a refuge in the heart of suburbia."

The University is hoping to install further Cockitroughs on campus and, if possible, at the Mandurah campus, which lies next to a bushland reserve.

"The campus is an important steppingstone for the birds as they access the whole region. They move through here, but they also like to hang around," said Leah. "Since 2010, we have been able to secure grant funding to install artificial nest hollows, and these have been used by the black cockatoos to fledge chicks. They also get used by owls and galahs."

"I love that the birds spend so much time here, and I think they are so much a part of the campus culture and what helps make the place special. They are a resilient species, clever and adaptable and I feel hopeful for their future."

"Heat stress can be a real problem for Ngoolarks, and they need shallow drinking water regularly. Thanks to donor support, Murdoch has been able to purchase three water troughs that are specifically designed for black cockatoos."

- Leah Knapp

One of the key questions is how the community can help save the cockatoos. The good news is if you live in South West WA and have a garden, however small, you can! Black cockatoo diet consists of seeds, nuts, and cones from native plants, particularly banksia, hakea jarrah and marri, so these are excellent to plant in your garden. Although not local, macadamia trees are also useful, as they can provide high-energy food for Ngoolarks in the short-term as the native plants establish.

If you don't have a garden, there are still plenty of ways you can get involved in the push to save these precious birds. For example, you can volunteer to help with the native plant revegetation teams organised by specialist not-for-profit organisations that are partners in the [**Keep Carnaby's Flying – Ngoolarks Forever**](#) project. Just click on their websites below for further information.

[**Perth NRM**](#)

[**SERCUL \(South East regional Centre for Urban Landcare\)**](#)

[**Peel Harvey Catchment Council**](#)

[**Landcare SJ**](#)

[**Urban Bushland Council of WA**](#)



Also, you can look out for when your local council hosts community planting events, or volunteer at Kaarakin Black Cockatoo Conservation Centre. A not for profit, Kaarakin is not only involved in the care and husbandry of black cockatoos being rehabilitated back to the wild, but also helps with restoration of habitat, to give black cockatoos more roosting, foraging, and nesting sites.

If you are short on time to volunteer and would like to contribute financially to the purchase of further water troughs for the Murdoch South Street campus, please [**contact Murdoch's Advancement team.**](#)





“Perth and South West WA are the only places in the world where these birds live. At the moment they don’t have enough habitat left; that’s the main reason their numbers keep falling.”

–Professor Kris Warren

Despite the ever-expanding urban sprawl in the Perth and Peel regions and dramatic loss of habitat, Professor Warren remains hopeful that is not too late to turn the tide.

“We can’t wait too long because we’ve lost so much. The patches that we still have are fragmented so we need to create vegetation corridors. We need to make sure that these birds and other wildlife are able to move through the landscape,” she said.

In addition to retaining our mature trees and better managing the impacts of land clearing associated with construction and development, Prof. Warren believes it is important to simply recognise the unique nature of where we are situated.

“As we often highlight when talking with decision makers, in South West WA we live in one of 36 globally unique biodiversity hotspots. To classify as a hotspot, a region must have numerous

unique, endemic species. But it also has to have lost at least 70% of the habitat for these species. So, it’s not an enviable status to have. It shows how precarious the situation here is,” she said.

“When you look at what makes Perth an amazing place to live and what people love about it, part of it is the wildlife around us. We have threatened species such as black cockatoos and quenda that people have the chance to see around their homes, workplaces, and schools. We look around the world and see so many places that have already completely lost their wildlife.

“Perth and South West WA are the only places in the world where these birds live. At the moment they don’t have enough habitat left; that’s the main reason their numbers keep falling. When we shift to ‘net gain’ of native habitat, including in Perth, we’ll know we’re on the right path to saving these threatened species.”





Q&A

ON UX

How much do you know about UX? I thought so. Time to shed a little light on this concisely abbreviated and fascinating industry that is going on behind the scenes with every product we use, from disposable tea stirrers to space rockets and everything in between.

The user experience (UX) is essentially what a user of a particular product experiences when using that product. A UX designer's job is thus to create a product that provides the best possible user experience. Alumnus Danielle McDonald (BA Hons History & Intl. Stud. 2002) is currently working as a Senior UX Research Manager at a company that has been quite successful at developing products – Google.

After studying at Murdoch, Danielle worked in Student Recruitment at Murdoch for several years before ultimately finding her industry niche. We sent some questions over to her London base to lift the lid on the analytical world underneath those two capital letters...

How was your time at Murdoch?

I spent a number of years working for the University after I graduated so my memories of studying there are somewhat coloured by that experience. I was lucky enough to be taught by people like Tara Brabazon who were just so knowledgeable, as well as fantastic teachers. They cared about their subjects, and it showed.

Any special memories?

I was juggling work and studying at the same time, and I can remember a sign at the old Tavern proclaiming, "Tavinology 101, the only unit you won't fail!" and feeling like I was failing at being a university student because of it! Times have changed a little since then. I was also looking after work at Sir Walter's for a while, and it gave me some insight into my teachers that I wouldn't have otherwise had – I'm still not sure if I can make a decent coffee though.

What career journey/working experience led you to the field of UX Research and the position that you're currently in?

Funnily enough, I can credit my time working at Murdoch after I graduated for my path to UX Research. I spent many years in Prospective Students and in retrospect, had many, many conversations which would shape how I approached my role and the content we created to support students on their journey to university. As a subject matter expert in student recruitment, I moved to a role at UWA's web office where I discovered that UX was a thing. Discovering a craft that cared about more than the business goals, but considered them in concert with user needs, was exactly the balance that I had been driving in my role at Murdoch for all those years. After discovering UX, I made it my focus, moving into a UX Consultancy role and working agency-side, before going in house, and then ultimately into big tech at Facebook and now Google.

Were you always interested in design?

No! Growing up my sister was always the artistic one and it took me some time to unpack the design/art relationship. But now I can see that we are all creators in some way and for me, that takes the form of solving problems, genuine people problems, in elegant but complicated digital spaces.

An understanding of UX is becoming more public knowledge these days. How would you describe to someone who does not know what UX is, what it is and why it is important in the world?

User experience, or UX, is about solving genuine problems. Without a deep understanding of the user, their context and the problems they have, the opportunities to improve challenging parts of life aren't as obvious and have less chance of being successful. For me, without a real problem to solve, there is less chance you are delivering true value to people. Without value, there is less business impact – you aren't selling something that people feel delivers for them in some way. So, UX is about delivering value from a foundation of user context. My more frivolous response is "I'm the one who helps make sure those apps you use are actually usable" – because we have all had moments when we've wanted to throw our hands up in despair at a particularly frightful website.

What is the value of UX Research?

UXR empowers decision making. Understanding user needs, challenges, what works and what doesn't, empowers teams to make informed decisions whether that is in strategic planning or tactical delivery. Without UXR, it is difficult to make decisions from a place of understanding. UXR seeks to understand what and why using applied scientific methods, and take the guesswork out of deciding where to go. User Research helps identify problems to solve and identify which potential solution is most suitable. UXR helps ensure the end solution is usable and measures the success of the product you ultimately launch, coming full circle with additional understanding of where else you can support or do better for people.



User Experience Research is sometimes described as an intersection between design and psychology. Do you agree and how would you describe User Experience Research?

UX Research is where the rubber hits the road on understanding and so having a good foundation of psychology or other social sciences is incredibly valuable. Being able to apply that knowledge, particularly as a tactical rather than strategic practitioner requires a level of design context otherwise your insights will fall short and be hard for your team to make use of. Many of my UXR colleagues have PhD backgrounds from a range of different disciplines, many from psychology and as well as other social sciences, however very few of the PhD trained UX Researchers I have worked with come from a design-specific background.

Less to public knowledge is how an Experience team is assembled/structured. How would you describe what a UX Research Manager does?

UX Research managers balance product, process and people. That is the golden triangle for all Design leaders, however our processes are coloured by our respective specialisation. So, in practice, a UX Research manager looks after their people, focusing on their professional growth and wellbeing, as well as ensuring they are working on the right things, at the right time, in the right way in order to have impact within their product teams.

UX Research managers help ensure the way the work happens is optimised, ironing out how work is prioritised, the expectations and interactions between functions, as well as research operations which is an entire job in and of itself. Lastly, and by no means least, is helping shape the product, providing insight and perspective on strategic and tactical efforts based on understanding of both the user needs and business goals.

Researchers are in a unique position to shape the direction of product and take on the role of the user advocate in many contexts. UX Research management requires a lot of relationship building, product understanding, business acumen and strategic thinking. You need to be able to understand and appreciate the bigger picture and support your team to help deliver insights that are most meaningful and actionable for the wider team.

“UX Research is where the rubber hits the road on understanding and so having a good foundation of psychology or other social sciences is incredibly valuable.”






Where does your work come into play in the design process?

I help ensure we are thinking about what we need to learn as early as possible, so we have user understanding before we need it. As influencers of decisions, we need to build understanding in a timely manner, often before our colleagues are aware that an opportunity is arising. When a problem is identified, we then work to help out design colleagues to assess possible solutions and concepts, evaluating how well design ideas solve user problems. We then support the assessment of solution usability, so the final product is as straightforward to use as possible for the core audience.

UX Research (and UX Testing for that matter) is often overlooked by companies wishing to keep their processes 'lean'. In what ways does your work break this norm?

I am lucky enough to work in an environment where understanding user needs is expected and valued although we don't just get free reign. We always aim to do just enough research, no more, no less. This doesn't mean my colleagues always "get" exactly what UX Research is, the same ways I wouldn't understand the nuances and minutiae of some of my peer's specialisations. However, by and large, my colleagues value the practice of UX Research because they have seen first-hand the impact of not having research's contribution versus when they have that user insight to base decisions on. Having teammates build an appreciation for user needs through empathy building activities and first-hand interaction with users, particularly by attending research sessions helps us all learn that we don't know everything and that we are not our users.



“We forget that someone, somewhere designed everything around us!”

In the world of UX, the user should sit centrally in a well thought out design. How do you get to advocate for the user from ideation to through to deployment in the design process?

I talk A LOT! Constantly. And from the user perspective. You have to keep telling their stories and explaining their context. Ideally you share the research with the team – it is a team sport and not something that researchers should ever do in isolation. We don't go away and do the research and then throw the insights back over the fence. We work hard to take our colleagues on the research journey with us in order for them to build their understanding and appreciation for the users firsthand, so that when we are in the middle of the development process, they are able to bring the user back into their minds and into their approach for themselves.

If you had to choose one method of UX Research, which would it be and why?

Interviews! People always tell you amazing things that you would never predict. It is always interesting and illuminating. And I love it. Interviews in the field, somewhere I haven't visited before – even better!

The tech industry is an ever-changing terrain. How do you stay up to date with new technologies and trends in the industry?

Reading! I am also lucky enough to work in a space where there are a lot of internal communications about progressive technologies. I am also a member of a number of professional groups and organisations where I get to share war stories and learn about new ways of doing things.

What are some of your favourite products and why?

The humble kettle. Being able to quickly boil water and pour it out without spilling it everywhere trumps the humble teapot which always seems to drip!

We forget that someone, somewhere designed everything around us! When you start to think about the environment through that lens you are at once assaulted by the amazing ideas and approaches people have discovered, and also horrified that people got funded for some awful things!

What advice would you give to aspiring UX Professionals interested in design, research, etc?

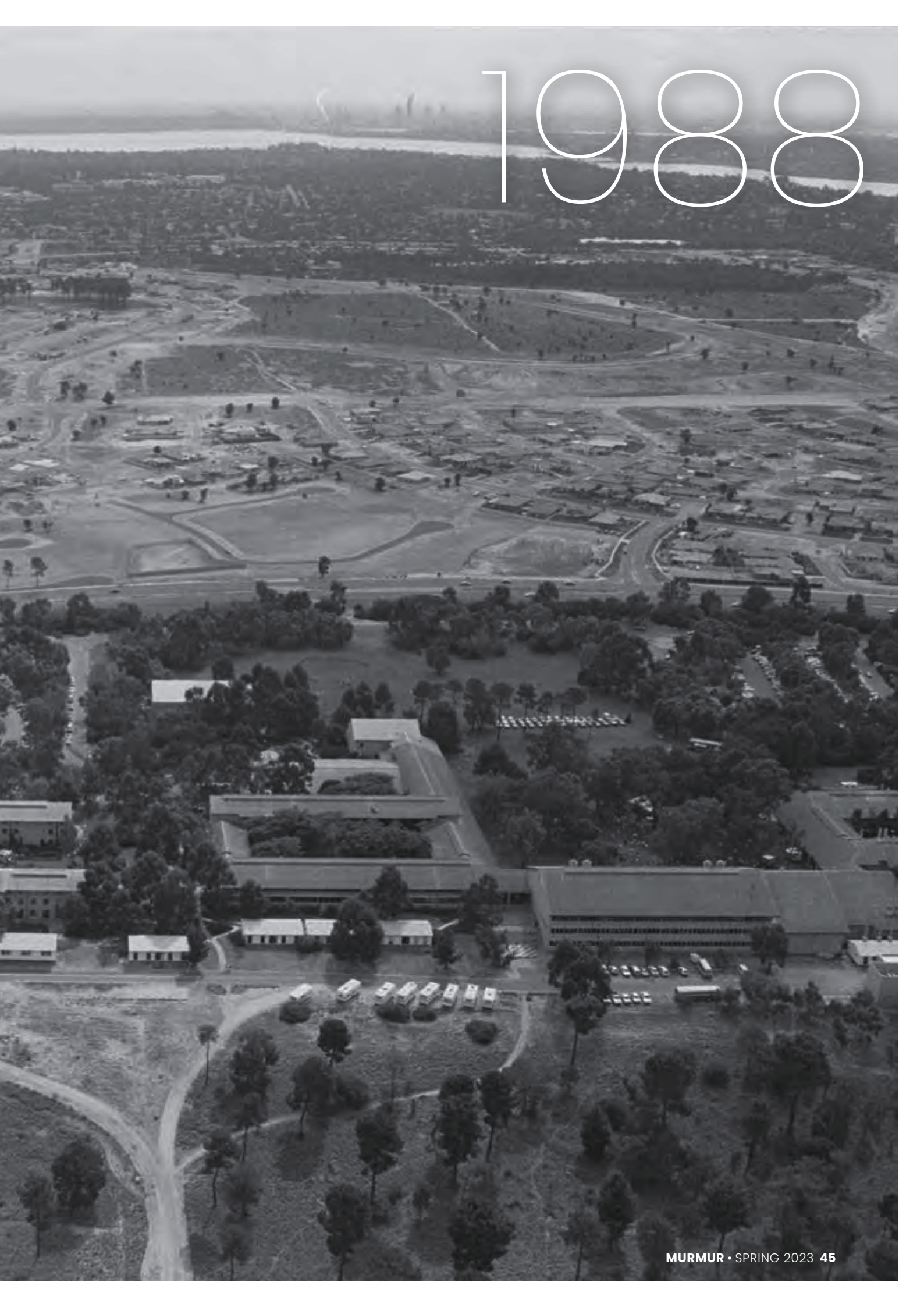
Read! There is so much information out there, there is no excuse for not getting the basics under your belt. Also joining your local UX Meetup – the UX Meetup in Perth was pivotal for me, back when I joined it was a book club! I learnt so much, met my community and started my journey into UX. I found my people and have been able to go on many adventures as a result.



Winthrop looks a little different!

As the University approaches its 50th anniversary celebrations in 2024 we will continue to unearth and showcase treasures from the archives. Here is another wonderful aerial shot of the Murdoch University Open Day 1988. Photo by University Photographer Brian Richards care of Murdoch University Special Collections.

1988



Ngala kwop biddi.
Building a brighter
future, together.

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