

Dear friends and relatives,

Dad

The Botanical Internship and First Semester

2002 has been a very full and busy year. I started in early January with an 8-week Internship with the Centre for Plant Biodiversity, in Canberra. There were 17 Interns; we worked mainly at the Australian National Herbarium, located at the CSIRO and Australian National Botanic Gardens (ANBG). This was full time volunteer work and included field trips and lectures. The program included an optional research project on a native plant for horticultural purposes. We gave a 5-minute presentation, and an article that was published in the "Growing Native Plants" section of the ANBG website (see <http://www.anbg.gov.au/gnp/interns-2002/blechnum-penna-marina.html>). I used the Internship as work-experience for the Workready Unit, which allowed me to get credit points towards my degree. This meant keeping and preparing a large folder of notes on activities and lectures, and presenting a photo record of activities undertaken. Organisers also reported to my supervisor at UNE about my teamwork, participation, and seminar presentation.

During these 8 weeks in Canberra I lived with my now ex-boyfriend's family. For the first 3 weeks, they were away on holidays, and I experienced living alone (including setting off the house-alarm at 5.30 am!). I really enjoyed all my time in Canberra, I met a lot of wonderful people interested in Botany, and experienced living and working in a city which I loved (although a very unusual and quiet city). I also enjoyed meeting and catching up with family and friends in Canberra.

From Canberra, I drove back to Armidale. Definitely the longest drive I have ever done on my own. I even stayed overnight alone in a motel in Coonabarabran: another situation that I have never been in before. I went straight back into first semester, missing O'week and the first week of lectures. This was a particularly stressful semester. In this semester I was enrolled in 5 units (rather than the usual 4). My other subjects were Introductory Ecology; Ecology of Plant Populations; Fungi, Plants & the Environment; and Systematics I. My two ecology subjects were 2nd and 3rd year subjects that I studied concurrently. During this semester my face-to-face contact hours with lecturers was quite low. I found the increase in external studying to be a challenge. Only Introductory Ecology had formal lectures. For the Fungi subject there were about 5 of us who showed up weekly, and for Ecology of Plant Populations the lecturer was nice enough to run a weekly tutorial for 3 internal students.

Over the April holidays I attended the residential school for Ecology of Plant Populations. This was followed by a short week at mum's to catch up on study. I then travelled (on the long overnight train trip) to Sydney to attend a residential school for Systematics, at the Australian Museum. During this week I stayed with friends in Clovelly, and mastered the Sydney buses with my trusty street directory. This was a very full-on week for me, not only in long days of a subject which I found very difficult to understand, but also for the first time in living and traveling around Sydney (very overwhelming, so many people and cars). However, we were also given tours behind the scenes at the Australian Museum, and I was able to meet a lot of people involved in systematics. This was a week of new experiences.

Term 2 was long and stressful, but somehow I managed (with lots of thanks to mum and my friends) to get through the term and the exams. I finished first semester with High Distinctions in Workready; Fungi, Plants and the Environment; and Ecology of Plant Populations, and Distinctions in Introductory Ecology, and Systematics. And a resolve to not get so stressed about 2nd semester!

Second Semester and My Birthday

In the July holidays I had a week off, then back to Armidale for a night, before heading to the coast for a residential school for Aquatic Botany. After 4 days of residential school on a headland north of Coffs Harbour, I went back to the Farm for 2 days to attend a wedding, before flying down to Sydney for another residential school for Systematics II. This was the day before my 21st birthday, and just before I left I was given my wonderful Birthday Book! Now is the time I would like to say a HUGE THANKYOU to

everyone who contributed to this book. It is absolutely beautiful, and I got so many contributions. It was a great surprise! And is a pleasure to read.

The residential school for Systematics II was held at the Royal Botanic Gardens. I spent the day of my birthday at this residential school. It was a long day, and we were there until about 6.30 PM, at which time I left the building with another student. We were shown how to get out of the building after hours, only to discover we were locked out of the building, and locked in the carpark! At this stage I dropped my mobile phone, it blanked out, but thankfully turned on again, however the battery was getting very low. Someone came along and we got out of the carpark, but I didn't know how I was getting home. All I wanted was to make a phone call before the battery ran out, but I kept getting text messages from well-meaning people wishing me happy birthday! I thought I'd try to walk into town and catch the bus, but they'd changed the bus route since I was last there in April, and I couldn't find the right bus stop! So I was walking more and more blocks of Sydney's main streets, and of course when I finally decided to catch a taxi, I couldn't find one for another few blocks! I was just about in tears when I got in the taxi, and I have never been so thankful to a taxi driver for taking me home! I got back at about 7.30 PM, and burst into tears. It was just too much for my birthday. But after a bit of time for me to recover, we did go out for a late dinner. So all in all it was a memorable 21st birthday!

For the rest of the week in Sydney I mastered the transport once again! The week at the Botanic Gardens was again challenging in terms of the subject I was supposed to be learning. But the tours of the Herbarium and Gardens facilities were great, as were the staff and students. I even got a special extra tour by the woman called Elizabeth, who is studying liverworts (cute little non-vascular plants), to have another look at her collection in the glasshouse. On the last day we had a staff and student lunch, and as a surprise, my lecturer had bought a cake-ish kind of bun, and Elizabeth had managed to find, somewhere in the storerooms, a birthday candle! It was very nice of them. So I did get a cake and candle after all! And when I got back to College my friends had birthday things for me, so it was a very extended birthday period.

After being back at College only a few days, two friends and I drove up to Brisbane for the weekend. It was a great trip. We all stayed with a friend in her one-bedroom unit, looked around the city and caught up with another old friend of mine. But most importantly, the reason we were up there, was to see the Australia verses South Africa Rugby Union match! That really was a new and fun experience for me!

In 2nd semester I studied two external subjects (Aquatic Botany, and Systematics), and an individual project called a Science Project. This meant that I had no formal timetable for the semester (I missed having lectures and face-to-face learning!). I did my project on "Inbreeding depression in *Hibiscus trionum*". This is a fast-growing annual agricultural weed (commonly known as Bladder Ketmia). The project looked at self- and cross-fertilised progeny, and required growing the plants, and measuring various characters to determine if there was any difference between progeny type. I learnt a lot of practical details about running a project, and about the statistics required. I had two wonderful supervisors to help and teach me. And I lovingly nurtured 'my babies' in the glasshouse over the few months all the way to their first flowers! The project was very rewarding, and I was pleased with my High Distinction result. I also got a Distinction for Aquatic Botany, and a Credit for Systematics. This is my first and only credit, and is quite good considering the difficulty I experienced with the subject! But by the time I had finished, I really didn't care anymore, because that's the end of my degree! Three years that has gone very quickly. I graduate in April next year.

This year I was again quite successful in receiving a number of awards. Based on my results in 2001 I received the Noel Beadle Prize in Botany, and the Barker Prize in Genetics. At the Annual College Chancellor's dinner I received the Chancellors Award for Excellence in Science, and the P.A. Wright Prize for academic achievement and contribution to College, community, or University activities. These prizes gave me a total of \$600 prize money, so studying really does pay! This year the University also started a chapter of the Golden Key International Honour Society, for which I was invited to be one of the founding committee members, but declined because of other commitments. However I did become a member of this Society, where membership is offered to students in the top 15% of their course.

College life

This year I continued to be heavily involved in College activities. This no doubt impacted on me, taking time and energy from my studies, but still something that I love to do. I have played inter-collegiate sport including cricket, soccer, touch football, volleyball and basketball (not that we win, but we have a great time). I also entered various SFK (intercollegiate cultural) competition events. This included being involved in the inter-college Performance, where we did a 10-minute summary of The Wizard of Oz, and I played the Yellow Brick Road! Dressed completely in yellow (pants, jumper, hat, facepaint and cardboard sandwich board with painted bricks) I skipped around the stage followed by Dorothy and the rest of the characters, to the song "Follow the yellow brick road". This caused quite a bit of laughter. Despite what we felt was a great performance on our part, there was some controversy about the marking criteria, and organisation, and sadly the night was slightly dampened by this (we came last, but even the other colleges were shocked by this).

In 2002 I continued, for a second year running, to be the Treasurer on the Resident Common Room Committee. I was also involved as a College library volunteer, the Assistant Science Subject Tutor in Botany and Biology, as well as many other areas where I helped with College activities. A friend and I even compered our annual Awards Dinner in August, which was a nervous experience for me. I also organised a College volunteer gardening day at Saumarez Homestead (a National Trust homestead) for a second year - another exciting event! But I think the most exciting thing I did in College this year was to organise for the College to buy 100 daffodils and 50 anemones, and then to get about 10 residents to plant these under a beautiful deciduous tree (which happens to be outside my window!). We watched them grow, and it was very exciting to see these start to flower. I think we were all proud. They put on a beautiful display, and died down in time for the tree to come back into leaf!

The Future

Next year I am going back to UNE to do Honours in Botany. I have a project planned, with the same supervisors as I had for my Science Project this year. In this project, "Hybridisation between broad- and narrow-leaf forms of *Hibiscus trionum*", I will be looking at the same plant as before, but with a different purpose. The project has agricultural significance in terms of weed management, and may have taxonomic significance as well. I do think it's interesting how things tie together, where my honours project may provide useful information to the field of systematics, a subject which I have an interest in, but found so difficult this year that I thought I wouldn't continue with at the moment. Also, the person who studies this group of plants works at the Herbarium in Canberra, and is therefore a name I know through my Internship. So everything continues to be linked together.

I will be returning to live in College again next year, although I have dropped all formal commitments to be able to concentrate on Honours. For this reason I specifically chose not to apply for a Resident Tutorship in College, and am undergoing the process of having to let go of the Finances after 2 years. I think I may suffer from "college-withdrawals" next year, as it's been such a part of my life for so long. However, I have great friends in College, and I will still be participating in activities, as long as I don't have to organise them (with the exception of my gardening days, which I will continue!). So next year is looking like it will be an interesting year. I expect honours to be challenging, but intend to do well.

In the meantime, I am having a good holiday. I need the break to really relax and recover before starting again! I chose not to apply for any summer scholarships, so that I could have a long time off. I don't yet know what I want to do when I've finished my Honours. There are so many options available; I suppose I'll look at them all when I've finished.

I hope this has been of interest, and filled you in on where I am up to. I wish you all a wonderfully safe and happy holiday. And to those of you who I'll see on my trip to Victoria and Sydney early next year, I'm looking forward to it!

Love to you all.

Leah



XOX