

DANDRITE Alumni Feature

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How would you describe your academic career path up until now?

The two words that first come to mind are fractured and fortunate. During my PhD time my project took quite some detours, both in terms of actual scientific content but also the physical setting of where to conduct the work. Following my PhD, I moved to Stockholm for a postdoc position that eventually coincided with the corona pandemic bringing some new challenges and restrictions on work and travelling. In my second postdoc with Poul Nissen, some corona restrictions were still in place in the beginning and our department physically moved to a new location. Despite everything though, I have been incredibly fortunate to work with and around amazing colleagues, both in direct collaborations and also just as lab neighbours. Furthermore, I have had some fantastic supervisors and mentors throughout my career so far. They have taught me so many things, not just on being a researcher, but on many aspects of being a colleague in an academic community.

What were the highlights of your time at DANDRITE and why?

There have been many good times for me at DANDRITE, however, the one highlight that jumps to mind was the public release of the protein structure prediction tool known as AlphaFold. This has completely revolutionised how I construct scientific hypotheses to test and it has already become a fully integrated, indispensable tool in my general work flow. Although it has only been two-three years since AlphaFold became available, the impact it has had on essentially all projects is truly mind blowing. I used this tool a lot in my DANDRITE projects and so this stands out as a milestone in science – there was a time before and after AlphaFold.

Describe your new job?

My new job is not so very different from when I was a senior postdoc. Working as a PI there is of course more mentoring and supervision tasks for postdocs and students in my group, but I still do a lot of lab work together with my group members. In time I will also get to do more teaching, which I look very much forward to.

In what ways do you think the skills and experiences acquired during your time at DANDRITE contribute to your current position?

I think it has really helped me to realise the importance and value of establishing good collaborations and being open to incoming suggestions on collaborations. Thus, now that I have my own research group, I have very early on reached out to colleagues for potential collaborations and also encouraged people in my group to be open if they are approached by colleagues who would like to collaborate.

What aspects of working in the field of science do you find most exciting?

Without a doubt it is when you discover something for the first time that adds new knowledge to a particular field of study. That process really gets me excited to the point of being unable to sleep because my thoughts are spinning crazy on new ideas and hypotheses built on this new knowledge. It is even better if the discovery is made with a team of colleagues to share the excitement.

Where do you see yourself professionally in 5 years?

I see myself still as a PI, leading my research group to study even more exciting aspects of cardiolipin synthesis and maturation. Hopefully the group will have grown in number of young researchers and ideally, I will still manage to have time for working in the lab every now and then.

What advice would you give to others pursuing or wanting to pursue an academic career in Denmark, based on your own experiences?

It may sound trivial, but the best advice I can give is to test yourself in a new and different research environment. After finishing your PhD, go abroad to a new lab in a new country just to see how research is done elsewhere. I am confident that it will be a great experience for all and it helps to develop yourself as a researcher and might change your perspective on certain things.