

## The Unsung Heroes of the Lab

by Minki

Our interview takes place in the EDSC science prep lab. One cannot help but notice, even before entering, how clean everything is. The tiles on the floor are like mirrors, and everything is where it needs to be. It is evident that whoever works here, they have a thing for cleanliness. The two guardian angels of this sanctuary for science-lovers are Ms. Karyn Moxey and Ms. Nga Ly.

As I step into the lab, a moment has to be taken to fully appreciate the surroundings. A wall of microscopes, another full of beakers and flasks. A small aquarium decorates the center of the lab, which has minimal space for movement. Almost like it was designed for just two people.

Nga has no qualms about the situation in the lab. "I'm pretty happy with working here and the current situation."

Both are tenured scientists, with Karyn doing a Bachelor's in Health Science and a Master's in Human Nutrition, and Nga majoring in Chemistry at Curtin University.

That knowledge has certainly helped them in their years as lab technicians at EDSC, with Karyn and Nga having 14 and 17 years under their belt respectively.

However, even with their extensive knowledge of the sciences and passion for education, neither has really considered being a classroom teacher. Although she is able to speak Chinese, Vietnamese and English, Nga feels none of them are "good enough to teach."

Karyn, on the other hand, has occasionally been in classrooms demonstrating rat dissections, but feels that "teaching is very demanding, with all the marking and discipline."

For these two, being a lab technician is almost like a match made in heaven, being able to play a crucial role in students' educations while getting a few weeks of vacation when the holidays roll around.

This was a crucial part of the appeal when Nga took the job, as her son used to attend the College, and she wanted to stay home with her kids during the holidays. "I chose the job because when my kid was younger, I could stay home with them during the school holidays," she recalls.

Despite their relatively behind-the-scenes role, Karyn and Nga still treasure their rapport with teachers.

Nga shares her special friendship with teachers such as Ms. Polidano and Mr. Williamson. "I think it is because my staffroom is right beside theirs. I think I have a good relationship with most of the "old" teachers, because they started around the same time as I did."

Karyn gives us a peek into the happenings in the science department. "We're able to go in there and have lunch and talk to people about other things besides just lessons and classes. We go out for dinners, either just the whole science faculty or maybe just certain people and so we get to know each other very well."



Ms Karyn Moxey (right) and Ms Nga Ly (left) in the Science Lab.

Karyn and Nga met in 2009, and it seems to have been during the former's job interview. And it seems to have been smooth sailing from then. Both women had no shortage of

praise for each other during their respective interviews. Karyn recalls, "I was already working in another school, as a lab tech, and that was a contract job, so it was going to come to an end after six months. So yeah, I jumped on SEEK and saw this job and applied! In the interview before I started, she

Nga feels the same way about (Nga) was there. There was a Karyn, stating that, "If it were lady, Christine Mitchell, who me, I don't think I would have been the Assistant Principal the time and energy to tidy back then, and Ms. Ly and a everything up the way she does couple of others were in my it."

interview."

As one walks around the lab, it certainly looks like they are telling the truth. Not a single thing seems out of place. The shelves lining the walls are filled with boxes of stationery and microscopes, and the teachers who regularly come to collect equipment for their classes always seem to find it where they look.

The corridor leading to the lab itself has a line of carts filled with practical equipment, heading to the day's lucky science classrooms. With the sheer amount of effort that would be needed to prepare these practicals, it is mind-boggling to think that this was accomplished by just two people.

Still, neither of them feels that the job is too taxing. "No, it's not physically demanding. Also, if I need any help, I can always get it," Nga reassures us. Being new to the school and suburb in general, I was also curious about their perspective on the changes over the past few years. "High rise apartments. That is one of the secrets why we have so many students coming in," Karyn recalls.

"I was here when John Handley was the principal but the transition from him to John Roberts was very smooth. There probably were different things happening affecting the teachers but what happened day to day here (in the lab) barely changed."

Nga had a similar experience regarding the changes in school management and how it affected her job. "I don't really deal with that, because I've only worked here, rather than teachers who have to deal with the principals and leaders, so I don't know if there's been any changes. But I'm sure the teaching program, the way they do things, has changed a fair bit, probably due to changing times

and the number of students we have."

Being in the science scene for so long in the 21st century, it was also not long before technology caught up with their jobs. "The biggest change that has happened here since I've worked here is the introduction of the risk assessment software so that we can be compliant with all the legal requirements. Back at the start every prac class was written by hand on a piece of paper on the noticeboard," Karyn reminisces.

Around 2010, the school was comprised of around 400 students, and now, with more than 1800 students, the number of people in the lab has not changed.

When asked about the most extraordinary thing that happened in their career in EDSC, both Karyn and Nga had the same answer. "When the Year 7s were allowed to design their own projects and there was no limit to what they could do, again, because they were thinking about things themselves, they came up with fantastic ideas, but we just had stuff everywhere. That was just absolute chaos, fun chaos, but madness."

"Usually I would say, "Look, this isn't going to work," or "I don't have the stuff for you," Nga chuckles.

Karyn had a fond memory she had to share. "One standout was that a few years back, a company called Aurecon were running a bridge building competition. One of the students won \$5000 or building the best bridge out of the whole of Victoria!" The winning bridge is still in the school, and it is made of sticks. The technicians did admit that it gets boring sometimes being in the lab. "Sometimes, when everyone's doing their exams and all we do is tidy up." "I'll go through the whole chemistry inventory and check what we have on the list against



John Roberts (Principal of EDSC) is pictured in the middle with students.

what is actually in the chem and its students treat its non-storage. It's not that I like to do it, but you know, it needs to be done. Back when I was doing my Masters, I used to get some study in," Karyn admits.

Nga has some other uses for this free time. "Sometimes I just google and search for holidays or recipes for dinner." With time running out, I asked the technicians what they see themselves doing in 5 years. Nga says she certainly will still be working here. "She (Ms. Moxey) definitely will be, since she is younger than me. But for a few more years I will still be here. I might cut down my hours but I will be here for a few more years. And then I will retire."

"I can't speak for Ms. Ly, I don't know, but I plan to be here until I can't be anymore. I think. That's the plan," Karyn commits. "I'm trying to get an extra day. Because of the extra student enrolments, trying to get that fourth day just to keep things rolling along."

Despite the ever-increasing student enrolment numbers, Karyn and Nga don't seem like they want any backup. "I'm pretty happy with working here and the current situation. Otherwise, I would have retired already." They also love how the school

teacher staff. "We get praise for everything that we do, regardless of the position you are in. So there is no problem here."

It seems like they will be here for some time. Karyn concludes the interview, "That pretty much covers it. It's quite a basic job, but it's important, and we know that, without the basic jobs, other things don't function so well. There was a time in the past when teachers had to do all of this themselves, and that was extremely difficult."