

# COMMENTARY

---

## Post-Seattle Reflections on a Different Kind of GSA

*Lisa Greer, Geology Department, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia 24450, greerl@wlu.edu*

---

I always enjoy the annual GSA meeting. I find it stimulating, reinvigorating, and productive—a time and a place where ideas and motivation are born. This year was no different... and yet entirely different at the same time.

I met with colleagues, set deadlines, and roughed out two publications with co-authors. I outlined a proposal with colleagues and students from two universities, and I sketched out three abstracts with fellow researchers for an upcoming meeting in Japan. I met with longtime and new geo-friends and watched proudly as my student co-author, Lila Gerald, presented her first poster at a national meeting. I coerced a promise of course materials and field trip itineraries from two fellow professors, and I attended some very good talks and benefited from many great poster sessions. Overall, this ranked highly as one of my most fruitful and productive GSA meetings.

And yet this trip was entirely different from all past GSA ventures, because I was accompanied by my 6-month-old daughter, Maya.

I hesitated only briefly about bringing Maya to Seattle. It is a long trip, which coincided with my husband giving an invited talk at a meeting in Florida. I wondered, is it worth the effort? Will I accomplish anything at this meeting? What will people think about my “professionalism”?

Much to my delight, I believe Maya contributed greatly to the success and productivity of this meeting. Because of her, I met or made contact with many people I might never have met otherwise. Some people just made the effort to make eye contact or smile. Others made it a point to tell me how important they think it is to show younger colleagues that family and career are not mutually exclusive, particularly for those of us 30-something women who are starting families and teaching/research careers at the same time.

In addition, I have been heartily blessed with an easy and good-natured child. She is already adept at amusing herself. I was able to have lengthy, intelligent conversations with colleagues, particularly those who aren't easily distracted by

peripheral movement, while Maya played with “crinkle-star” and “squeaky-spiral.”

Now I am not entirely naïve. Having Maya with me did pose a few challenges.

As I write this on the plane ride home (Maya is finally taking a nap), I am tired. Very tired. Maya didn't understand the concept of a time change (prepared to greet the day at 5 a.m., Seattle time) and didn't have any desire to miss out on the fun (staying up way past her bedtime). But then again, I am *always* tired at the end of a GSA meeting.

I certainly missed my share of talks this year. At 6 months, Maya has “opinions” about presentations. If you heard her commentary during your presentation (as we made a hasty and polite retreat), I beg you to consider it a compliment. She usually liked what she saw. Yet the one upside to missing talks was ample time for posters—something I often miss as I rush from one session to another.

I owe this overwhelmingly positive GSA experience to a great many people. I owe thanks to my friends Beth and Pete, who brought their child, Oliver, to the Denver GSA meeting last year. Had I not seen them then, it might not have seemed a given that Maya could join me this year. I also owe a debt to my new family-friendly geology department at Washington and Lee University, where I began a new tenure-track position in August. I am grateful for the myriad kindnesses of strangers in Seattle. Doors were opened, smiles exchanged, and supportive comments granted. I especially appreciate colleagues like my good friend, Al, who could look at me and speak intelligently about our science, and yet when appropriate, acknowledge that I had a wonderful marvel at my side.

I am perhaps most grateful to the women who have done this (or similar adventures) before. I spoke with Cindy about the logistics of bringing a child in the field as she held Maya at the annual Association for Women Geologists (AWG) breakfast. I heard stories about teaching with babies in backpacks and playpens. And while I had to miss much of the presentation for the AWG Outstanding Educator Award to nurse in the hallway, I so sincerely appreciated the closing remarks by this year's award recipient, Patricia Kelley, who stated that “you can have a career and a family.”

I see that Maya is waking up now and we are almost home. As I look at her I am reminded of the person I must be most thankful to for the success of this trip. I must thank Maya for being such a fabulous, cheerful, easy-going, and wondrous kid. I thank her for making this meeting something different...and something very very good.

I hesitated to write this down, but I decided it might be worth it to let those of you in similar shoes know that next year, I will be eager to meet you and support your choice to integrate family and career. I am quite confident that many others will be eager to support you as well!