

# How I Met Prof. Nina Thornhill

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**Abstract:** In this paper, the author outlines how he met Prof. Nina, in the least expected of all places. Their acquaintance ultimately led to her making a great impact to his career as an early stage researcher, and as an academic from the Philippines. Although their interactions were only short and sporadic, all of them were very meaningful. K.E.S. Pilario is truly grateful to have met Prof. Nina, as he considers her a great mentor and friend.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

K.E.S. Pilario, the author, is currently an Assistant Professor from the University of the Philippines, Diliman. I am also pursuing my Ph.D. at Cranfield University, United Kingdom, while being mentored by Dr. Yi Cao. Prior to 2019, I have known Prof. Nina only as a name from research literature.

But then I participated in the European Symposium on Computer Aided Process Engineering (ESCAPE 29) at Eindhoven, Netherlands on June, 2019, which was my first ESCAPE. Here, *I finally met Prof. Nina!* (this is fairly recent!). For the rest of this paper, I'll give an account of how I met Prof. Nina and her influence on me.

## 2. MEETING PROF. NINA

On the 17th of June, 2019, the ESCAPE organizers sponsored a concert to be held at St. Catherine's church in Eindhoven. The interiors of the church were magnificent, perfect for a choir and organ concert (see Fig. 1). I am very excited about the concert, being a fan of classical and chorale music myself. Hence, I arrived at the venue a little early. When I got inside the church, I saw a lady sitting alone at the very front of the church; she looks eager to watch the concert as well. Even though I am not too familiar of what she looks like in person, I had a hunch that this lady was Prof. Nina.

I boldly took the seat next to her. At this time, the guests were still arriving. I introduced myself as Karl, and then asked her if she was who I thought she was. Indeed, she was Prof. Nina! I finally got to meet her.

Prior to this encounter, I knew Prof. Nina as a well-known academic in the process control community. I also knew that she was now the supervisor of my friend, Ruomu Tan, at Imperial College London. Ruomu previously worked

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with Dr. Yi, who was supervising her Ph.D. at Cranfield University. At Cranfield, Ruomu and I used to meet in group presentations. We also used to discuss about our respective research progress from time to time. However, when Dr. Yi changed institutions, Ruomu had to transfer to Imperial College. Ruomu then told me that her supervisor is now Prof. Nina.

When I met Prof. Nina at the concert, we talked about many things. Surprisingly, none of the conversation topics were about research nor being an academic. Instead, we both talked of music and church. I am glad to have known Prof. Nina outside the academic life. She is very friendly, engaging, and always full of stories to tell. We both enjoyed the concert afterwards. I happened to mention that I also join, and sometimes conduct, a choir in church from my country. To this, Prof. Nina said to me, "Keep on singing!" I appreciate that comment very much.

Back at the ESCAPE conference the next day, I saw her again and she wished me luck on my poster presentation as well.

## 3. MY VISIT TO ABB KRAKOW

After the ESCAPE conference, I was all set to visit Ruomu and Prof. Nina at ABB in Krakow, Poland (see Fig. 2). This is my 2nd and only other encounter with Prof. Nina as of writing. When I met them in ABB, we were joined by Anna Stief, another colleague who was also pursuing her Ph.D. then. I knew Anna because she was previously based in Cranfield for a short while. They all gave me a lovely tour in Old Town, Krakow.

We walked towards the main square, where we had lunch (see Fig. 3). We also talked about many things during this time. Prof. Nina told us stories about her trips, especially that time when she was in Japan. Towards the end, I asked her for any advice that she can give me as an early stage researcher. We both know that we've only known each other for a short time. But she gave me some advice that I will carry with me for the rest of my career.



Fig. 1. An image of the interiors of St. Catherine's church at Eindhoven, Netherlands, where the author met Prof. Nina. She is actually in the picture.



Fig. 2. The author's picture taken at ABB in Krakow, Poland, where he went to visit Prof. Nina and her colleagues.



Fig. 3. The author's picture with Prof. Nina and her colleagues, Anna and Ruomu, taken at Old Town, Krakow while having lunch.

#### 4. A WORD OF THANKS

To Prof. Nina, I wish you all the best in life!

I have recently known that you are about to retire, and so I wish we had made acquaintance earlier!

Just from our short encounters, I can see that you are a very inspiring mentor and friend. Please know that you have shaped my career in some way, and I am always thankful for that. May you be always full of life on your next chapter!

#### 5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, the author has outlined how he met Prof. Nina. The paper ends with a word of thanks. In the future, he hopes to have more encounters with Prof. Nina, even just for lunch. :)