

After most COVID restrictions had been lifted, I could finally travel abroad to attend a scientific conference! The first of my PhD after more than two years. I had gathered some interesting data regarding Alexander Disease mutant GFAP and early brain organoid development. As such, I applied with a poster abstract for the Gordon Research Conference on Intermediate Filaments. All the way down in Mount Snow, VT, USA. I was very excited and eager to represent our department! I was even more excited when I heard I was invited to give a talk during the conference. My first conference in the USA.

I arrived in Boston on Thursday the 2nd of June 2022 after a 6 hour flight or so. I had been to the USA before, but never in Boston. With my trolley I was strolling through the streets of Boston, absorbing everything American this city had to offer. Jetlagged, but excited, I quickly checked in at HI Hostel. First experience in Boston, first experience in a Hostel. After a quick shower I immediately started exploring the city, indulging myself in extra large coffees, burgers with Mac 'n Cheese, and of course a large beer to keep the spirit flying high. The bars were tempting, but I had to rest.

The next day I woke up early at 4 AM. Noisy dorm rooms were not really my piece of cake I figured out. I got up quickly and started exploring the city. I walked through the Boston Commons, a nice park that offers a runaway from the gasoline-slurping V8s. Walking has always been my favorite means of getting around a city. I walked all the way to Boston University, crossed the Charles River, visited the MIT campus, went to Harvard square and thought about all the smart people that come here daily. My legs were getting tired after a long walk so I took the subway back to Boston city centre. I had to get dinner in Little Italy. Right Choice! Large plate of spaghetti, large plate of tiramisu, of course all accompanied by Italian beer and Limoncello! Unfortunately my jetlag told me to go to sleep and so I did. I wanted to be fresh and fruity for the Gordon Research Seminar in Vermont the next day, a two day programme for PhD students and post-docs that preceded the GRC.

After another dorm room night of sleep, I got up early, went downtown, had a real American breakfast with fried potatoes, fried eggs, steak, half a litre of coffee and a good dose of joy with other customers. I took the subway back to the airport where our shuttle bus to Mount Snow would depart. After a social gathering and check in, we made our way to our destination. The bus ride was a glimpse of what was to come: science and fun. Our hotel was big, beautifully located and surrounded by green fields of grass, broad streets, hills and, of course, a mall.

Such a good idea of Elly, my supervisor, to also attend the GRS. I got to know a lot of people and already felt at home before the GRC even started. Alright, down to business. My talk was planned for Wednesday morning during the session on intermediate filaments and neurodegenerative diseases. I had a few days to prepare my presentation and attend all the other interesting talks. I was sucked in by science during the day. The weather was great most of the days, there was a swimming pool that the GRS people familiarized themselves with early on, there was a gym and there was an organized hike all the way up to Mount Snow! I did not take the hike, because I already took the lift up a few days before during the GRS. A mesmerizing view that got me thinking about my life goals for a while. How rewarding it was, after so many years to be standing on top of Mount Snow, waiting to present at my first conference.



The morning of my talk, I revised my presentation a couple of times, practised it twice and I felt ready. I enjoy presenting when I am prepared. I felt confident and the talk went as planned. I put in a few jokes (I mean, the guy who first described Rosenthal fibers, the hallmark of Alexander Disease, was called Werner Rosenthal, born on the same day as I was, the 24th of June!) and was rewarded with enthusiasm and post-doc opportunities.



The next day was even more relaxing, because I already gave my talk. Sad, however, was the fact that it was already the last day of the conference. After the science, we all gathered for a few drinks, played beer pong, listened to Al and Alex the bartenders telling stories and went down to the poster room occasionally to explain what exactly we meant to say, but couldn't get across properly in the midst of the all the fun.

Friday, the 10th of June. I joined Elly and Milos Pekny in the car ride back to Boston Logan Airport. End of the countryside time. Back to the city life. I had scheduled a long weekend in Boston and would only fly back to Amsterdam on Monday so after a nap in the car, I felt revitalized and joined Giulio Agnetti and some other GRC attendees for a nice lunch at the Hilton Hotel. We shook hands and went our own way. My way was back to downtown Boston! I had to get a glimpse of the Boston nightlife. I particularly enjoyed Ned Devine's, Sissy K's and The Bell in Hand Tavern (the oldest tavern in the USA!).



Saturday and Sunday were spent strolling through the city, taking some relax time in parks, visiting the seaside, watching out over the city from Rooftop bars and thinking about my next visit to Boston. On Sunday I enjoyed my last real American meal and while sitting on the restaurant's terrace, I submerged myself in my creative side and wrote a little poem for Boston, Courtesy of Bostonians:

For years he wanted to visit
Memories of her so vivid
The city known for wicked
Boston, the place to live it

Red bricks
Small alleys, green parks,
A memory that sticks

Strolling through the city
Street entertainers so witty
Big cars, waving flags
Pride and hearts
Young people eager to start
Grow and dream of the stars
A city that reminds of wars
Won in a near distant past
Freedom minds that forever last

He wanders through Boston's unseen
Thinking of places she might have been
This city heals
He will be back he feels
Memories to be lost in
See you soon in Boston