As a student, participating delegate, and one of the organisers of the Students’ Psychology Conference, I had the immense pleasure of experiencing the conference from many different angles. I will forever look back on that week as a defining moment in my Psychology career.

Along with a colleague and friend from my Masters class, I was asked to be on the Scientific Committee for the conference towards the end of March. We were thrilled and anxious to be part of the team and both emotions would soon be well justified. A tremendous amount of work was put into the organisation of the conference from signposts to ceremonies and we all persisted indefatigably until the very end. Through all of the meetings, abstract reviews, and coordinating of volunteers I still had the tasks of preparing a presentation for the conference as well as finishing my semester assignments and studying for exams. I couldn’t believe how quickly the conference arrived and when it did we all had to hit the ground running. The amount of tasks that had to be addressed that week kept me on my feet from early in the
morning to late at night and I learnt a lot about myself in the process. This year has been an incredible journey for me, but the week of the conference stands out as the greatest highlight.

With all the commotion and excitement of the conference week, I anxiously anticipated giving my presentation, ‘Perceptions of interracial contact on a South African sample: A Q-methodology approach’. I was thrilled to be part of hundreds of delegates who would be sharing their research with the conference delegates. I was amazed at the calibre of some of the research being presented. Having gone to the International Congress of Psychology a year earlier I felt I was a conference master and knew exactly what to expect when it came to the presentations, but, as I remarked at the closing event, I saw many presentations and speakers who were far better than those I’d seen at the international conference. I was proud to be a presenter, a Witsie, and a South African.

What I really enjoyed on the student level was the amount of networking taking place on a daily basis. Seeing people chat animatedly in the passages, yell compliments about each other’s research, and exchange pieces of paper with contact details was very uplifting. That’s exactly what these conferences should be about. Being a postgraduate student can often be very challenging, especially when it comes to research. With coursework we can share ideas and help each other understand concepts but with our research it can be difficult to communicate issues and help guide each other. During the conference I discovered some students who were doing research in the same field as mine and discussing our research with one another was euphoric. We have even discussed writing papers together once our degrees are complete; which is something I truly look forward to. Without the conference I would never have the enthusiasm for my research that I do now.

As the Master of Ceremonies for the conference I was often in a position to see the majority of delegates gathered together. During the Opening Ceremony I noticed there was some trepidation amongst the delegates. By the time the closing event arrived, delegates were much more spirited and closer to each other emotionally and I feel that this can be attributed to the atmosphere of the conference. The support being offered was something to behold. The Cocktail Party was also a contributing factor to the warmth and openness during the closing event as people had mingled freely and danced madly with each other the night before without being concerned about what presentation they needed to be at next. The way peoplelet loose at the party shattered my calm facade and organisational prowess, causing me to ‘bust a move’ in front of laughing onlookers. The evening was another conference highlight.

In the years ahead, I will continue to recollect the conference with great fondness. Seeing delegates from all over Southern Africa, being part of an amazing group of presenters, having a position on an epic team of organisers, and living the conference from the beginning to the end has given me a new lease on the subject of Psychology and inspired me to continue to achieve to new heights.
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Kyla Mills is a Master’s Degree student in Research Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. Her research interests are largely within the realm of social psychology, especially race, as well as psychometrics.