

## Eleanor Frajka-Williams

Lecturer in Physical Oceanography, University of Southampton, National Oceanography Centre, Southampton, UK, e.frajka-williams@noc.soton.ac.uk

Despite growing up in Southern California enjoying the beach, tide pools, and scuba diving, I never knew that “oceanography” existed as a science. And having three science-loving sisters and some great teachers (male and female), I also didn’t realize that women in science were unusual. As an undergrad in math at Harvard, female peers were scarce, and I learned that the physics building had only recently added a women’s bathroom. Around the same time, I started to look for ways to use math in the real world and spent a summer at Scripps Institution of Oceanography. Almost by accident, I found myself on a two-week research cruise—using math to address environmental problems, with the added thrill of fieldwork. I was hooked!

Fourteen years later, I still love it. My research now focuses on large-scale ocean circulation and its effect on and response to climate change. I make and use ocean observations and enjoy combining two or more data types (satellite, in situ hydrography, moorings, or autonomous platforms) to better understand ocean dynamics than would otherwise be possible.

It hasn’t been all smooth sailing. At one particularly challenging period in my graduate degree, I had serious doubts about my future. My daughter was months old, and upon returning from unpaid maternity leave, I found my computer’s hard drive had failed (back up your work!). I was four years into the PhD, with a new advisor (previous one had moved), my first paper rejected, and my general exam not yet undertaken. Exhausted, and not sure where I was headed, I participated in a training workshop at the University of Washington. There, I met Kate, a coach, who helped me rediscover what I enjoyed and was good at doing, and I knew I was still meant to be in this work.

There were still rough patches, as any parent of very young children can attest (breastfeeding, constant sleep deprivation, or a child home with chicken pox make my list). Now, I have two school-aged kids, a husband who also travels for



Eleanor Frajka-Williams attaching styrofoam cups from her kids’ classes on RRS *James Cook* in spring 2014. (The real work of the cruise was refurbishing the RAPID [Rapid Climate Change] moorings that monitor the meridional overturning circulation at 26°N in the Atlantic.)

work, and a work environment with occasionally conflicting priorities: teach, go to conferences, research, prepare lectures, write proposals. I still go to sea, thanks to my husband’s ability to manage at home, and I help the kids feel involved by visiting their classes (giving a talk to three-year-olds is a new experience!), then taking their 80+ styrofoam cups to shrink. In creating solutions to the work-life dilemmas that continuously arise, I have relied on both practical and moral support from a variety of sources: my husband, an understanding boss, several incredible mentors in the department and in MPOWIR (Mentoring Physical Oceanographers to Increase Retention; see MPOWIR article in this issue), and now a critical mass of young female colleagues in Earth sciences at Southampton.

From looking at the last issue of *Oceanography* on women, it’s clear that things are looking up. More institutions now recognize the value of investing in their staffs by enabling solutions to diverse work-life situations. I look forward to when these accommodations are as routine and natural as including a women’s bathroom in a building.