Starting this month Bagadilico has joined forces with the World Parkinson Coalition, the organizing force behind the triennial WPC congresses. This year's congress takes place in Montreal, where quite a few bagadilicans are already set to take part.

As Bagadilico joins the ranks of WPC partners we hope to strengthen our efforts to communicate our science to an even broader base, in particular towards patient organizations around the world.

WPC Executive Director Elizabeth Pollard believes that Parkinson's research can only benefit from a more open discussion climate where interdisciplinary research is promoted and where patients' own experiences help inform the research goals of the future.

“I think the main message is that if you don’t already have an opportunity to meet people with Parkinson’s, find a way to connect with your local PD group to actually meet people with PD and talk to them about what it’s like living with the disease on a day-to-day basis. A lot of time researchers do science based on their own ideas and if they actually talk to people who live with Parkinson’s it might inspire them to reconsider the research they’re doing. They might look at things a bit differently.

It’s also important for people with Parkinson’s to let scientists know when their work is inspirational to them and that it gives people great hope. This sort of encouragement can really keep basic researchers excited about their work and in touch with why their work is so important. So, in a nutshell, figure out a way to connect the community members so they can learn from each other and share ongoing research. Building that relationship is so important.

Read the full interview with “Eli” in this newsletter.

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**BAGADILICANS FORM NERVE CELLS - INSIDE THE BRAIN**

Two years ago, Malin Parmar’s group were the first scientists in the world to re-programme human skin cells, known as fibroblasts, to dopamine-producing nerve cells – without taking a detour via the stem cell stage. The research group has now gone a step further and shown that it is possible to re-programme both skin cells and transform cells directly to nerve cells, in place in the brain.

The researchers applied genes designed to be activated or de-activated using a drug. The genes were inserted into two types of human cells: fibroblasts and glia cells – support cells that are naturally present in the brain. Once the researchers had transplanted the cells into the brains of rats, the genes were activated using a drug in the animals’ drinking water. The cells then began their transformation into nerve cells.

“We are now developing the technique so that it can be used to create new nerve cells that replace the function of damaged cells. Being able to carry out the re-programming in vivo makes it possible to imagine a future in which we form new cells directly in the human brain, without taking a detour via cell cultures and transplants”, says Malin Parmar.

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**WPC 2013 - CALL FOR ABSTRACTS**

The World Parkinson Coalition is still accepting abstracts for the WPC 2013 to be held October 1 - 4, 2013 in Montreal, Canada. Two categories are offered for abstracts, either Scientific (with 38 areas of science to choose from) or Living with Parkinson’s (with five areas to choose from).

Anyone researching Parkinson’s disease or treating individuals living with Parkinson’s are invited to submit a scientific abstract. Those in the community who are designing or have already designed programs or projects that will affect quality of life for people living with Parkinson’s, may submit an abstract in the Living with Parkinson’s category. For category details, CLICK HERE.

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**MOTOR CONTROL SYMPOSIUM IN LAUSANNE**

Every year the School of Life Sciences at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL) holds a major international symposium on its campus: the EPFL Life Science Symposium (LSS).

This year’s edition, the LSS2013, will be organized by the Brain Mind Institute. It will take place August 28th-30th, 2013 in Auditorium SG1 under the title “Motor Control - from neural circuits and diseases to neuroprosthetics”.

This two and a half-day event is structured around several aspects of motor control that will each feature several high profile speakers from around the world:

- Motoneurons and Spinal Cord Circuits
- Motor Cortex
- Motor Planning & Action Selection
- Basal Ganglia & Parkinson’s Disease
- Neuroprosthetics & Brain Machine Interfaces

The abstract submission deadline is 1st June 2013. Early registration ends 1st June 2013. For further details, CLICK HERE.
Some hundred years after Skrefsrud first had set foot near India’s border to Nepal, two young twin sisters of Santali origin walked through the gates of a Christian monastery. At the tender age of eight the curly-haired girls had been sent away to a boarding school with educational methods evoking associations to military discipline. One of the girls was Reena Prity Murmu, now post-doc in the ‘Neural Plasticity & Repair Group’ at Lund University.

At 4.30 every morning, throughout the semester, stern-faced nuns would clap their hands, sounding the call for church service. After an hour or more of Godly teachings, it was time for heavy domestic chores. Scrubbing and rubbing on a par with Cinderella’s fairy tale burdens. Cleaning duties would then be followed by a routine portion of involuntary lean cuisine, bulgur in water. A standing order that would change no more often than breakfast was served.

End of breakfast, often coinciding with the break of dawn, signaled the start of the school day. Getting behind the worn out wooden desks was the high point of the day for Reena and her sister Meena. And it would soon become clear that

Nobody knows for certain when the Santali tribe of north-eastern India first arrived on the shores of the Bay of Bengal. Educated guesswork by researchers suggests they may have migrated from Australia around ten thousand years ago. Once living in the deep forests of Jharkhand and West Bengal, bowing at the feet of a multitude of naturalistic deities, many have today turned to Christianity. The reason? A young Norwegian man who had found solace in the words of the Bible from the inside of his prison cell. Lars Olsen Skrefsrud would later become a resourceful missionary on the Indian peninsula, where he started the Santal Mission.
they had a knack for absorbing knowledge. Always spurring each other on, the two sisters finished top-of-class on most occasions.

**DREAMING BIG**

As the years passed and they started to realize their own potential for academic prowess, Reena and Meena began to make grand plans for the future, their aspirations reaching far beyond the horizon visible from behind the faded concrete walls of the boarding school. Before they left the monastery at age sixteen, they would already have their eyes set on the endless opportunities provided by big city universities. The twins were set in their minds that they would one day win their independence. Education would be the ticket out.

In keeping with the cemented traditions of carved out gender roles in Indian society, Reena’s and Meena’s parents had sent their older brothers to better schools. On a mechanic’s and a school teacher’s limited salaries a choice had to be made, and betting on the boys was the sensible thing to do. However, the brothers’ motivation turned out to be lacking as they gradually lost interest for the world of education. As news of their wanting academic success reached home a window of opportunity was left ajar for the industrious sisters. If they could persuade their parents to send them to university instead, maybe they could escape the inevitable career-ending event of an arranged wedding.

At first, their father was against the idea of putting the girls through university. His wish was that they would stay at home to start preparations for life as a homemaker. A tedious and uninspiring exercise that Reena and Meena unwillingly took part in.

What ultimately tipped the scales in the girls favor was the persistent persuading of the nuns that had schooled them. Having followed the inseparable sisters for years they vouched for their quick minds and general thirst for knowledge. “Mr. Murmu it would be an opportunity missed not to have them pursue an academic career”.

Finally, after months of stubborn negotiations, their father succumbed and preparations to uproot from Santali life began. The giant, restless metropolis of Calcutta beckoned the Murmu sisters.

**LEAP OF FAITH**

Arriving on the east banks of the Hooghly River, where the sprawling city stretched...
out its never-ending tentacles, meant a rude awakening. Like fish out of water, Reena and Meena struggled with cultural and linguistic barriers from day one. Only being able to string together a few basic words in English, they were once again up against the odds. Again, they leaned on each other for support and inspiration. Well versed in the art of being the underdog they hit the books with renewed fervor.

Having survived the first year, constantly on the receiving end of taunts for less-than-chic wardrobe choices and a stuttering command of the English language, Reena and Meena once more began to make their mark in the classroom. A bachelor’s degree was soon followed by a master’s degree as the both of them shifted their attention from general biology to neuroscience. Only the last piece of the carefully plotted route towards freedom and independence was now missing.

GOING WEST

After a visit to the American embassy, the U.S. was always their preferred choice for building an academic career, they passed the German consulate where some universities were holding seminars to attract foreign students. On a chance, the twins entered the majestic building, resembling a miniature replica of the White House. In conversation with a director representing the university of Magdeburg they were encouraged to contact some professors there who were looking for “bright Indian PhD students”.

After weeks of e-mails back and forth, followed by a quick visit to Germany, they were offered PhD positions. Reena and Meena accepted. They had reached the finish line. The good news marked the end of a long and treacherous journey where the odds had been stacked against them at every single stop along the way. Many people would have stumbled on the first few hurdles. Very few would have made it all the way. The powerful bond between the two sisters, taking on the world arm-in-arm, surely helped. Time after time they built each other up in the face of adversity, until they ended up with inches-thick armor that could withstand any malicious comment or discriminatory action.

Today, they are both stripped of their armor. It is no longer necessary. After a decade practicing as neuroscientists in European universities they have conquered the freedoms they were always fighting for. Reena and Meena are left with a fearless attitude towards life, assured by their own trials and tribulations that just about anything is possible.

Master of Microscopy. For the past couple of years Reena has developed a method for imaging the active brain in real time using the two-photon microscopy.
Behind every successful World Parkinson’s Congress there stands a woman. Elizabeth “Eli” Pollard is the one-woman tour-de-force that has run each of the triennial congresses, an institution that today acts as a hub for Parkinson’s communities the world over. In a friendly tone, yet with unwavering conviction, she explains the purpose of the WPC and the many benefits that come from building bridges between a wide variety of stakeholders. What was once merely an idea for a single meeting has grown into global movement sprouting seeds for collaborations across continents. From her offices in New York City, a couple of blocks away from the iconic Grand Central station, she talked to me, via Skype, about the birth of the coalition and the preparations for the upcoming congress in Montreal in October.

What is the main role of the WPC?
- The main objective is to help build an international forum for the full Parkinson’s community to interact and learn from each other. That is, basic scientists, clinical researchers, rehabilitation specialists and people with Parkinson’s. Bringing them all together we think will help expedite the discovery of a cure. Taking people out of their silos and fostering a cross-pollination of these great minds could help create the spark that’s needed to, if not find the cure, at least move us closer to finding the cure.

How has the organization developed since it first got started in 2004?
- To be quite frank it started as an idea in 2002 that came out of a meeting with some leaders in the Parkinson’s field here in the US. They had seen that the Alzheimer’s community had a mixed meeting where they brought people from the patient community and their care partners, and they met with health professionals. The feeling was, why can’t we do that for Parkinson’s disease. In the very beginning the whole purpose was just to have this meeting and host the world congress, there was no other long-term vision. Because, in the beginning, we honestly were not sure if the world was ready for this.

- And so, when we had the first congress in 2006 and saw that it was incredibly successful – well attended, well received — that was when we realized that the world was ready for this. It was at that point that we started to talk about things like the WPC legacy, what were we going to do as a community, how are we going to improve the community. For example, when we look for a meeting venue now I always tell the city that we don’t just want to come in, have a meeting and leave. We want to make a difference to your community, your city, your region and your country. We want to make sure that the people living there are better off when we leave. That means working on some educational programs in that city or region.

- For example, in Glasgow in 2010 we had Parkinson’s training courses for people who worked in the front of house in the service industry, particularly in the hotels that were going to host our delegates, but also airport staff, taxi drivers and even the Fire Marshall! So that they not only could take better care of our delegates, but of other people with movement disorders in the future.

- The other thing is just the legacy that spins off of the meeting. A lot of people who come to the meeting are inspired to go off and do things. For example, we had one delegate in 2010 who returned to South Korea and started the first ever South Korean PD association for the pa-
tient community. Another young woman from Australia was so inspired that she went back and helped design and host the first young onset PD meeting in all of Australia. And then of course we have people who leave the meeting and write scientific articles, papers and books, which we love to hear about and document!

Why is it so important to connect different stakeholders within the PD-community?

- I really feel that the answer to the cure for PD is out there. However, leaders in the field, because they are so busy and dedicated to their own work, rarely have a chance to meet people working with PD outside of their own field. I think we can help here. You know, some of the greatest ideas in science, engineering, architecture and design have come out of the intersection of great minds. The idea here is that they could really learn from each other and create some sort of spark and push each other in a way that their other colleagues might not. People asking each other questions that make you think about your research in a different way may help you look at it from a different angle or initiate new collaborations. The cure is out there and we want to help connect the dots by breaking down barriers.

What is your role in the WPC?

- I keep everybody together and on the same page. It has grown tremendously and I just really run the organization from the back end, helping with the hiring of companies to assist with the logistics, hosting the committee meetings, organizing the ambassadors and working with all our partner organizations. I also oversee the website and eNewsletters, it’s quite a tall order.

What drives your ambition in your work with Parkinson’s disease?

- I just feel really great about it, to be honest. In this world it’s hard to make a difference and I feel like here I get a chance to do that. It may not change the lives of people all around the world but it affects the lives of people living with PD and that makes me feel good. I really love the idea that some of the people I’m working with could be the ones that come up with the cure. I love working with people who are dedicated and passionate about what they do. They could help unlock this mystery. I’m also driven by the amazing people around me who live with Parkinson’s and contribute to the science and awareness through their own advocacy. They keep me grounded and driven to just keep moving forward until we can close up shop and move on to curing another disease.

What are the main themes for the 2013 congress?

- The overall theme is advancing science, inspiring hope and promoting community. We have the three main days of the congress and we have one specific question that’s kicking off each day. For example, on day one the question is why and how specific neurons die in PD and what can be done about that. This is more focused towards basic science. On day two we’re looking more at the clinical science and we’re asking what are the non-motor manifestations of PD. Day three we’re looking at comprehensive care, at the new views on the management of PD. For example, biomarkers, diet, empowerment and the roles for health care professionals.

- One of the workshop formats, which I’m really excited about, are the small round-table discussions called ‘meet the experts’. Anyone can sit down at these tables, with just 10 other people, and ask questions and talk in-depth about a range of issues with experts.