

MRS Featured Volunteer

Alex King

MRS Councillor, 1998–2000

What is your favorite element?
The element of surprise.

What do you read first in MRS Bulletin?

The classified advertisements. Aside from a constant, though mostly passive interest in finding a new job, these provide the most interesting and useful information about what's hot, and who cares.

What was the last book you read?

The God of Small Things, by Arundhati Roy. It seemed, from the title, like it might be a good book for a microscopist to read. It's a wonderful, magically written book. A kind of moral tale gone awry, in which horrifying consequences result from human frailties, miscommunications, and mistimings. Despite all of that, it somehow succeeds in being quite beautiful and uplifting.

What inspired you to be a materials researcher?

Ignorance, bad habits, and an economic recession. When I was an undergraduate I found that some of the stuff I was being taught seemed incomplete, so I used to ask questions about it. One professor, in particular, was quite candid about the shortcomings of the theories that he taught on crystal defects, so I set about trying to find more information. When I graduated from Sheffield University the UK was in the throes of a mad economic cycle and the job offers were not very attractive, so I looked into delaying my entry into real life while I satisfied my curiosity about some of the more obscure questions that I still had. Graduate school was the easy path to follow, and the rest follows from there.

What did you first do as an MRS volunteer?

I believe that I picked up some paper that had fallen to the floor in the registra-



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tion area, some time in the 1980s. On a more formal basis, I was a symposium organizer for the Fall Meeting of 1993. The subject was "Defect-Interface Interactions" which, curiously enough, was the subject that sparked my interest through its incompleteness when I was an undergraduate. Looking through the proceedings, I realize that I am now just as confused about the subject as I was nearly 25 years ago, but on a higher level.

What is your Motto?

I have a different motto for almost every situation. Most are plagiarized from more creative minds than my own. My favorites include a statement variously ascribed, but I think the Emperor Tiberius said it first, in response to the news that the citizens of Rome hated him: "*Oderint dum metuant*" (Let them hate me, so long as they fear me). Despite that, I can't quite seem to get my students to hate me. I'll just settle for fear.

If you were not a materials researcher, what would you be?

Unemployed. If I had the money (which I don't) I would go back to

school, and it matters very little for which subject. I never pass up the opportunity to be a student. Taking a short course is a great reminder of what a privilege it is to have no responsibility but to learn. I might study law, or medicine, or the culinary arts....Now if I had to earn my living, I guess I would have to make use of the skills I have available. I could be an academic administrator. (Done that already. No skills required at all!) I could be a cook, which is very much in my family's tradition. I do love to cook, but I would be professionally impaired by also loving to eat what I cook. If I could just start over and pick a different career, I am not sure what I would do. I love to travel, so maybe a diplomatic job? I could be happy as a scientific attaché in a nice embassy somewhere. I would like to be a writer, but I lack the discipline.

What common household item do you use in your lab?

Dustpan and brush. I feel that it is very important for my students to develop a high level of skill in the application of these vital tools.

Alex King is currently a member of the Materials Research Society Council and chairs the International Affairs Subcommittee. Before that, he co-chaired the MRS Spring 1997 Meeting, implementing the "Meeting Chairs' Poster Prize," and served as a symposium organizer at the MRS Fall 1993 Meeting and on the Meetings Quality Subcommittee. He is professor and head of the School of Materials Engineering at Purdue University.

To contribute to **MRS Featured Volunteer**, send in your responses to the questions to *MRS Bulletin*, 506 Keystone Drive, Warrendale, PA 15086-7573, USA; fax 724-779-8313; e-mail Bulletin@mrs.org. Include your name, volunteer activity, address, fax, and e-mail.