

A fine balance

MAY 30, 2014

BY: STEPHANIE HARRINGTON

TAGS: [ALUMNI](#) [COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE](#)



Nicole Oliver is on break from the studio.

She's drinking coffee in a park off Main Street in Vancouver. After our interview, she'll collect her two boys from school and take them home. Then she'll return to the studio for another three hours, finishing her work day around 10 p.m.

Oliver does voice work for four animated television shows, including *The Littlest Pet Shop* and *My Little Pony*, as well as featuring in film and commercials. The Master of Arts in Professional Communication alumna has had an enviable career spanning two decades in the entertainment industry, after graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from York University.

She produces and directs, has earned several Leo award nominations and awards, and has worked as an actor for every major network in Canada and the US. So it was personal fulfillment, rather than a career change, that motivated Oliver to return to university.

"Education has always been really important to me and my family," she says. "I really felt for my own sense of self going back to get a master's was important. I wanted to challenge myself."

Oliver used her master's as an opportunity to examine "supermom syndrome," an issue she struggled with through motherhood. After an altercation with a driver in downtown Vancouver brought her to tears, Oliver decided to confront what had been plaguing her. She started researching issues around identity and motherhood, particularly a mother's need to overachieve. For her thesis, she interviewed other

mothers who suffered from "trying to do it all," depression and post-partum depression, using her own experience as a case study.

"For the first five years of my motherhood experience, shadows continued to live next to me. Actually, swallowed me is probably a more accurate description," Oliver writes in her thesis. "I believe I have embraced, embodied, and devoured being a supermom in order to prevent my running away from motherhood altogether."

Researching the issue was cathartic for Oliver, who was honoured by the Union of British Columbia Performers on International Women's Day for her outstanding contribution to the entertainment industry and union. This year, Oliver plans to write and direct her first short film, based on her thesis.

"We need more female directors, we need more female storytellers," she says. "The female voice is potent. It matters and it needs to be heard."

Oliver will continue to diversify her career. While studying at Royal Roads, she started Predator Communications, a multimedia consultancy, with her husband, film composer Chris Ainscough. They plan to continue growing the company's clientele, which has included Vancouver Fire and Rescue Services.

"Why should you limit yourself?" Oliver says. "If you work hard, success will come from your labour. I can't wait to see what the next 10 years hold."