

Name	Simon
Age	31-45
Degree	Archaeology, Single Subject
Year	2
Full-Time/Part-Time	Part-Time
Disability	Dyslexia, Arthritis, Upper Limbs Disability, Mental Health Difficulties
Diagnosis	Over 5 years ago

I was involved in a serious motorcycle accident in 1993. My left hand was almost severed; my left shoulder was trapped and crushed resulting in more damage. In my right shoulder I have problems with the right clavicle which twisted and I had to have bone grafts and bone removed. I also severed the tendons in my right wrist. This has left me with Chronic Pain Fatigue, so I am in pain a lot of the time. I get a bit lethargic at time which leads to depression and it has also left me with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I have intrusive memories, flashbacks and disturbed sleep patterns at times. That also leads to depression. I am also very badly dyslexic which affects my reading and writing skills. Since the accident I have had numerous operations, in and out of hospital for treatment. I was medically retired from my previous work with a Health Authority. Because of the medical retirement and regular hospitalisation it was nigh on impossible to find employment. What I am qualified to do I am not physically capable of doing, and anything I am physically capable of doing I am not qualified to do. So I decided to train at University, to study something of interest. Get myself out of an armchair and do something positive. I am still constantly looking for a job, but it is difficult in my position. It is a case of finding a path where it is beneficial to me and to others. It has been very frustrating and it can be a cause of depression at times. Discrimination does happen, I know when I am up against able-bodied people I do feel that I am handicapped.

When I was doing a Higher Certificate in Archaeology I went on the University training dig for two weeks. I learnt the basics of trench work there, and I ended up staying for four weeks. During the second two weeks I was allowed to spend more time on the environmental side and I started flotation sieving. They taught me an awful lot. After that, I was a fieldworker on a waterlogged site. Because I had experience of sieving, I was asked to sieve on this project.

I went back to the training dig the following year as a volunteer and also back to the waterlogged site. I went to the training dig three or four times as a volunteer getting as much experience as possible. Other projects I have been involved with through the University are a Mesolithic site that was an exploratory excavation. On the water-logged dig I did some 'dendro' work on a submerged forest. From that I was asked to help with the work on a medieval ship. Because I have had so much experience doing wet-sieving and flotation-sieving, I have been able to specialise and find a niche.

As a student I was taken under the wing of the Director of the waterlogged site. He encouraged to move beyond sieving and to look at things under microscopes. I have worked alongside specialists in molluscs and fish bones. I have managed to get lots and lots of fieldwork experience and have been able to specialise. I found something that I am physically capable of doing, and it holds a total fascination as well. I am taking it further than a normal environmental siever would do. I have worked on several medium and had to adapt and develop the methods and techniques for each one. It has been good. When I started, I just wanted to dig. With my physical limitations two weeks of digging was as much as I could cope with. Even with the flotation sieving there are times when I have to take a break. I have to work at my own pace. On the waterlogged dig they allowed me to do this and develop my skills.

The fieldwork is all about getting a lot of experience and creating a CV where it shows. Also, having the people that you can ask for references, it highlights that I have definitely got the ability and experience. I am working towards a qualification as well. Then I stand in very good stead if the job I have trained to do comes along. I take every opportunity I can. I could sit in an armchair playing a Playstation, or I can get out in the real world and do something positive. I see all fieldwork and University work as positive and towards a destination and a goal. Any fieldwork opportunity is going to be good in the long run on a CV. Fingers-crossed; it will lead to a job at some point.

Being involved in the accident, the continual hospitalisation and the mental health aspects of it, I have had to completely change my lifestyle from what I was before. I feel that I am somebody now and can make a contribution. I have been made to feel a valued member of a team. I can put my head up and say I am an Archaeologist. I am somebody, I am not a disabled person sat in an armchair. I am an Archaeologist, I have a speciality and I am working towards a job. People respect what I do, a valued member of the team which is what I was before the accident, although it is a different team. I have met some very fascinating people and gained so much from just being with people on fieldwork. Learning

excavation techniques, lifting Bronze Age wooden structures out of peat; very specialised work and all the vast experience I have had. I have got so many happy memories. I was in the doldrums for a long time going in and out of hospital, this has turned my life around, I now have things to look forward to and have some fantastic friends into all sorts of things. The knowledge is not just built on the experience, but sharing experiences with others. I have been very fortunate to work with people who have made it through, and hopefully when I have made it through I will be with them.

There have been difficulties. The first time on the training dig I was absolutely full of excitement and driven on by the first opportunity to dig and get involved. It was absolutely wonderful. I went straight from there to the waterlogged dig, but I could not maintain the pace of everyone else. I had to learn to pace myself. That is the advantage of being able to specialise, I can do it at my own pace. There are physical limitations, it has been difficult with having to continuously go into hospital, I have been very limited in that.

Mental health wise, there were problems at the training dig last year as a student. I was not in the best physical health or mental health. I had become a regular face getting involved sitting in the environmental hut doing stuff at my own pace. As a student, I do not think anyone had sat down and considered my disabilities or my special needs. My supervisor had not been spoken to about it. I was difficult one day when I said: 'I can't sieve today'. I can't physically sieve and I am not mentally capable of sieving every day. My supervisor had not been made aware of my condition. I had to sit down with him and explain my problems. It would have been nice if there had been a little more interaction in the first place where they could have known what to expect. My reputation from the other dig may have preceded me a little bit as well, with them saying: 'He's good at this'. I was very much left in charge showing students what I do. I felt I ended up running it for the first couple of weeks. I do not mind acting that role, but I certainly was not treated in that role. It was left for me to clear up everything at the end of the day and sort everything out. The person in charge did not have the time to do it. I gave a lot of input to a lot of students, but I was supposed to be assessed on my abilities, but there were no clear-cut guidelines, no: 'This is what we want'. It was: 'Do you mind getting on with it and showing the students'. I was doing more than washing dirt; I was looking for the finds. Everyone I did this with, like me, found it absolutely fascinating. There was a bit of disagreement about the value of what I was doing with the site boss and I felt very under pressure, unnecessary pressure. If I had known the state of my physical and mental health it might have been different. I was exhausted and had to give up. I spent the next two weeks on site. I went to the environmental

hut every day and offered my assistance, but was not accepted, which was a shame. So I just wandered around the site helping people, there was plenty of interaction. I was still involved, but very much on the sidelines. I was burnt out. There was some breakdown in communication and some supervisors were not aware of my condition. There was also no clear-cut: 'This is what you will be doing'.

Maybe, with hindsight, I should have just played the student bit and gone in the trench and dug, but I didn't need the extra trowelling experience. I did complain about some samples not being taken properly and I was belittled for doing this. The supervisors are professionals, but I am an environmental specialist. This added to my own tension. I do not know if I was arrogant and they took it offensively. I did not mean it offensively. One supervisor said: 'All the charcoal for a sample' and another one said: 'Not all the charcoal'. So I was working in a conflicting environment: friction, friction, friction. It was just unfortunate. Later on, I found out that several of the supervisors thought that it was beneficial for me to be there. That was important to me. It was a shame that I was not in the best of physical or mental health. The lack of understanding of what I am capable of and what I do caused maybe a bit too much friction.

I have been trained to be meticulous in my study and I have specialised in this, trained in these techniques and always giving it a go. Learning like that has given me immense experience and I've taken the opportunities that have come along. I have the fascination and I am keen and it is a niche where I can fulfil something. I have improved and people have allowed me to fulfil my potential. It has developed me by just giving things a try.

I have taken opportunities. There have been so many other projects I just wish I had been able to go on more. I love Archaeology and I am rebuilding my life. I had no idea that I would end up at this point. In an ideal world I would be out there on a trowel somewhere, but I realised physically that I could not do it. But I did not give up then because there was something that fascinated me. On the training dig if I had been interested in planning, I could have developed into a planner. If I had been interested in finds, I could have developed into finds. Archaeology is a multi-disciplinary science; it encapsulates lots of different walks and areas. The University offers a starting point where you can take that further and develop it and yourself. That is a real bonus for everybody.

On the waterlogged dig I have always gone as a student. I could have been paid. I have to be aware that when you get paid to do something there is a whole different level of expectations and I have always made it plain that if there is something that I am not comfortable doing, or any

time that I do not want to continue, I shall stop. They wanted to move the photographic tower and I said I couldn't do that, physically I can not do that. There was no pressure, they understood. I work at my own pace.

The social side of the fieldwork has been mixed for me. Last year I did not really interact. With the mental health problems I was very withdrawn and very tired after the first two weeks. I spent a lot of time just sleeping. I had other things on my mind, very withdrawn. Previous years it has been brilliant, they're like a family.