

Name	Mary
Age	31-45
Position	Self-Employed Archaeologist
Disability	RSI, OCD, Eating Disorder

I suffer from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) which appears in various ways. I have also suffered from Eating Disorders on and off for the last 13 years. I tend to obsessively overdo things in great detail, a perfectionist. My coping strategies included self-imposed deadlines. In the Department I think I was always a bit intimidated and alienated by the macho male archaeologists. I felt I needed to prove myself and wanted to be valued for something I produced. I thought if I do things well, I will get more work.

I had a contract to produce an annotated bibliography, and I was doing this in too much detail. It involved masses of touch-typing. I was constantly leaning forward hunched up in a chair and I was getting back problems. The pain came on in one day in my hands when I was 29, Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI). I could not do anything, could not use my hands, could not write or handle paper, press buttons or pick up a kettle. You take your hands for granted, this was a real eye-opener. There is a difference between acquired and congenital disability. With an acquired disability you have a 'before and after' comparison. RSI was not properly recognised at the time and few treatments were available then. It was at the time of 'Yuppie Flu', and I got very little sympathy. I was a self-employed sub-contractor and could not sue.

I finished the commission by dictating into a Dictaphone, but I damaged my vocal chords doing it. A friend typed it up from the Dictaphone. I paid her from my own salary, £2.50 an hour, and I got £3 an hour. The bibliography was published 2½ to 3 years late: 900,000 words and about 630 pages at point 7 type, too much detail! But I have had no more work from the Department since. I could not work for a long time, paper made my fingertips feel they were on fire and sitting at a desk was bad. I became very bitter.

I had specialist treatment for several years using a programme of stretching exercises developed in Australia. It was a rehabilitation programme for building up the hand muscles. It was very painful, but worked. I was slowly building up the length of writing sessions from 50 seconds to 20 minutes over 2 years.

I started working again and did a church survey, did it in too much detail again! But this led to more work. I was contracted to work on a large buildings survey, 13 weeks work. The Unit was very good to me. We had to record each building in situ and were supposed to handwrite eyeball descriptions on site. I was given permission not to do that and to put it straight on the computer. They even provided me with a special keyboard. They also paid for the farming out of typing up parts of the descriptions. The people who worked with me went out of their way to help me. I reciprocated by giving them lifts in my car. Despite all this and my problems, I have been asked to work for this firm again.

Access to Work has provided me with special computer equipment as I am self-employed. They said they would pay for a secretary/note-taker, but I prefer not to because I want to do things myself. I do mostly standing building histories but really only working part-time. I have money left by my parents which subsidises what I earn.

I am a lot less bitter. I can still get worried about deadlines. When my parents died I was doing three jobs and developed Bulimia. This is all linked to OCD. When doing jobs things became an end in themselves. I was put on Prozac which works. It keeps me calm, I do not get excited or elated anymore. I do not get obsessed or feel compelled to put everything in anymore or get overwhelmed by the details. I can see the big picture and have a better perception of things. I cannot get worked up about anything; the Prozac is a dampener and has made me more laid back. I'm very good at lateral thinking and finding different ways of doing things now.