

Name	Neville
Age	45
Degree	Archaeology, Single Subject
Year	3
Full-Time/Part-Time	Part-Time
Disability	Restricted mobility

We live on top of the Chilterns and there was always lots of stuff from all periods lying around, everyday things. My granddad used to find a lot of archaeological artefacts. My grandmother's house was built on a Roman graveyard and my mother's on the site of an old monastery. I found a bronze book clasp in the garden when I was young. I suppose the interest has always been there. I have had a life of ups and downs, accidents that affect work. I had a very well-paid job as an HGV1 driver, but I cannot do that anymore. Very frustrating as the money is out there and it is nice to be able to feed your children. I have had several motorbike accidents. The main one which started it all off was when I was 19. A drunk driver drove straight into the side of me. The bike went airborne, and so did I. I landed on my face with my legs all over the place. As I lifted my head up, the motorbike landed on the back of my head and pushed it into the ground. That's one up for crash helmets. Completely smashed the lower half of my right leg, that is all screwed and plated, and upper arm problems. Quite a lot of other body injuries and the whole of my lower jaw was split across and lots of broken teeth, also a bit of broken cranium. But the brain still works; as long as that works I can take what happens when it comes.

I am very limited to what I can do physically at the moment. I do not walk very far, run or dance and I do not perform handstands. I cannot kneel; I just spend all day lying down trowelling which gets you closer to the archaeology with a better chance of spotting things. It is the only way I can do it. I can go up stairs. At home I do not sit in a chair; I sit on the floor as it is much more comfortable. I have to try and get up from there, just grin and bear it. Coping with pain – when life kicks you, you kick back hard. It is a difficult thing to cope with at times. I do not like the disabled 'sticker', it is stigmatic. Once you accept that you are disabled, you become disabled. The problem is my physical abilities. I get a large amount of pain a lot of the time and I have to negotiate between coping with the pain or coping with the painkillers. It is a difficult route to walk sometimes. I prefer not to take the painkillers; I prefer my body to tell me that I am still alive and to be careful. But it does interfere with my concentration. Sometimes I am reading a book and I have to re-read parts to get the gist of it. Sometimes writing is difficult, having another

operation on my shoulder next week. I get pig-headed; you need to be to get through. You could decide to sit down on your rear end and do zero for the rest of your life. You just put on everyone else and become a dire grumpy old man. I cannot do that. If you are born with a disability, maybe it is different. But at 19 years old and a drunk driver comes along and bang, just as you are coming up to the prime of your life. Very much ruined my opportunities for a number of years.

If you have disabilities, all you have to do is let people be aware of what they are and what you are capable of. Allowances can be made for things; it is good the way it works. Be friendly and polite with people, it does go a long way. Do not throw your problems on anyone else's doorstep. Some of my disabilities are not going to get better, they just patch me up and I keep going. There are a lot of people worse than me. They manage things their own way. They either learn from birth, or they have had to because of accidents or illnesses. Ten out of ten for them doing it. It is too easy to say, 'Right, that's it, I'm just going to sit down'. I have never sat down in my life. Sometimes I think, 'I'm going to the University today, brilliant!' It gives you a nice kick up the rear to motivate yourself and make something of it all.

With regards to Special Needs Support, having to lift things is the special need I need most, and maybe people's understanding of this. I go round smiling and being happy all the time. It is a genuine smile because I am pleased to see people. But sometimes when I get home and sit down, things are aching and hurting. Never pass it on to anyone else; never give them a bad day. I did see the Disability Officer; it was really about transport for me. I had just done four months in plaster and my wife was really understanding – she dropped me at the nearest railway station. So, I got three trains and one bus into the University, and one bus and three trains back. It was quite good; I was never late for anything. I do not really know what the Disability Office could have done for me. They are employed for the seriously physically disabled and the dyslexics. Helping the dyslexic students is more important because of all the studying. I have never been to see the Students' Union for help and I have not really explored Student Services. Counsellors, that is for people who classify themselves as disabled and need real help.

Staff at the University are very helpful, I cannot fault any of them. Despite how busy they are, there always seems to be the time made, helps to be in the right place at the right time. It is the encouragement you get as well. My poor tutor always has long face when he catches sight of me, probably does not know what is going to happen with me next. He has been very helpful. It is beneficial to them as well; they get to work with someone who is not totally able. There is a genuine

concern for people from the staff as well, and not patronisation; that is a real slap in the face if you are disabled, not something I entertain very well. I like people to talk to me straight. I do not like to look down on people, or be looked down on either. Teaching, I cannot fault it. I have learnt to work my way around problems rather than try to work straight through them. The problem is still there, but I can get round it. The assessments are critical, but positively critical. Good criticism is encouraging. It is great when you spot a point that they have not seen and you get a good two-way rapport going. I am quite pleased with it all. My only disappointment is with myself, sometimes due to circumstances beyond my control. Hopefully in two years time, and after five more operations, I should be back up on my feet properly.

Generally, fieldwork is quite demanding. It is not like Time Team on the television where they dig those little holes with a mechanical digger, it is not like that at all. They go straight down to a Roman context through hundreds of years of other archaeology and they are missing it. It is a media thing. Everything on the dig is quite accessible to me. The Director asked me if I was confident with going on site this year. I did a test walk round there a couple of weeks before and I was quite happy. This year the only problem I really had was that I could not push a wheelbarrow. I could carry a bucket and do everything I had done in previous years. If my leg was hurting, the supervisor would get me to do a less physical job for the day. You are part of the functioning of the site. No matter how small your part is, it all goes towards the greater picture. Helps you understand not just about the site, but about archaeology in general and yourself. It is constructive in all aspects. I took my turn cleaning the Portaloos. If I can assist in archaeology in any way, then I do not mind. I am an all-rounder, I will do it all. I have not specialised, I am into it all right from early hominids up to the modern day. No matter how small your contribution to any of it, your contribution is valuable. You value yourself by making a contribution, seeing little points of success. I do not want anything that is wrong with me to get in the way of things. If I have got no legs, or it is too far for we to walk, then can just wheel me up to the edge of the site and I will get on with it. Fortunately, that does not happen very often, but it is nice when they do it. I cannot foresee many problems. The only problems I do get are physical, and there is some stress that goes with it as well. If it was just things that did not work, I could deal with that a lot better. But with this damage, it does make it difficult. I am on very strong painkillers which interfere with the way I think. I would rather not take them at all. I go between too much pain, not much pain and this thing in the middle. It is just a physical sensation that is all it is. You can still function; you can do everything as long as you do not limit yourself, my mum used to say that limits are only in the mind. Unfortunately, I have learnt that limits are actually physical as well; she did not tell me that one.

I thoroughly enjoy the archaeology and like to take part in it. The training excavation is an archaeological dig, a scientific project and a school as well. There is this point of interest in front of you and it is your job to decipher what you are working on. It has done a lot for me, it has given me a big push and I can do it with my problems. There are other people I see on campus and I have no idea how they cope. But, they have made it; I think being at University has given them a push as well. Perhaps it gives that target for all disabled people.

For me, archaeology has given me something to aim for. If you have got a target when things do not look good, you can do it with or without help. With help from other people – that is the social aspect of fieldwork. I get on really well with the other students. There is this invisible student support system, especially amongst the mature students. Always pleased to see each other, a good atmosphere. It is good to promote yourself if given the chance to do this kind of thing. I have gradually worked my way up academically; a lot of other people have come straight into it for the first time.

I want to pursue a career in archaeology. Once all the medical stuff is out of the way, it is just adapting myself to the work. I enjoy being a student and I will miss it when I finish. I may come back, depending on my mark. You can have something like this like an anchor on a chain and drag it around, or you can pick it up and carry it. Just do not let it drag you back. I am trying to keep going forwards. I do appreciate the encouragement people have given me; a lot of establishments would not want to know. I am willing to dig on crutches and try to push myself forwards. Not just a personal thing, if a job needs doing, someone's got to do it!

A disability can be a very destructive thing personally, and can be to the people around you. Your attitude to other people is important. Do not bring it home or take it to the University, put it in its box and leave it there. I do get frustrated walking around on sticks and I have got another couple of years of that at least. It is all the things I cannot do anymore. Things change and you do different things and that is really what I have done. I cannot play rugby anymore, probably a good thing actually.