

Name	Anita
Age	>60
Degree	Archaeology
Year	1
Full-Time/Part-Time	Part-Time
Disability	Multiple Sclerosis

When I left school, I went straight into banking and worked there for 30 years until I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. Since then I have been heavily involved in the local MS Support Centre, studying and generally having a good life. My MS is not severe, although I know that it is there. I seem to have had one huge attack to begin with and nothing much since. I have been very lucky and have not had any eyesight problems, no fuzzy or tunnel vision. What it has done to me principally is affected my right hand side so that there is muscle weakness. For instance, I find it difficult to hold a pen or pencil for any length of time. The University allows me 25% more time in exams because I have to stop and rest. I cannot scribble away furiously for a couple of hours, my writing just deteriorates. So I have this muscle weakness in my right arm. I used to drag my right foot, but that seems to have sorted itself out; but I do get tired. Most people with MS will say it is many things, but most commonly it is chronic fatigue. It comes and goes like most of the MS symptoms; it varies from day to day and person to person. You look on the positive side and if it is a good day, I will get stuck into something. If it is not quite such a good day, I will sit and do some revision instead. I find that I have to pace myself. MS fatigue is quite different from ordinary body fatigue. It is not cured by a good night's sleep or by sitting down and having a nice cup of tea. You can be going along perfectly happy and feeling fine and then, for no apparent reason, it is like a tap opening in your feet and all the energy runs out. I have been lucky and the symptoms have not affected me enormously. I just get on with it, if can.

I have always been interested in archaeology and started doing a part-time history degree at the University. I then thought that I would like to change to combined history and archaeology. Before I did that, I had been a volunteer on a local archaeological project for two years. It was a question of getting there, 14 or 15 miles away, and seeing what I could do. I felt that I got a very good grounding in the basic techniques. I was very much allowed to have a go at everything and, having done the initial training, I just took it day-by-day. I did digging, hands and knees stuff, barrowing, almost everything. If I found I was getting tired, or something was getting beyond me, I would go and do something else.

That seemed to work quite well. Nobody said to me, 'What are you doing there? You're supposed to be doing X or Y'. That was what was so very appealing about it. It was not regulated and they saw me as a responsible adult. They also knew that I had MS because I had told the organisers up front. There was no point in hiding it; there would be Health and Safety issues if I felt wobbly in a trench. I told them that I do not do mattocks; it is just something I do not do. You have to know your limitations, but I did everything else. When I felt tired, I went over to the Finds Hut and did some washing, cataloguing or marking. I enjoyed it enormously and learnt a lot.

I find fieldwork very appealing on a personal level. I thought that the archaeologists were fairly filthy, cheerful and untidy people who did not take themselves desperately seriously. Their pleasure and interest in finding something was positively infectious. Even a lump of old iron being passed from hand to hand, the sheer delight of finding something was very attractive. From the point of view of belonging, I did not find that I ever felt that I did not belong. Even in the first year when I was very aware that I was just sweated labour and did not know much at all about things. I was just told to get down on my hands and knees and do it. That was fine; it opened up areas of interest. We were often working in twos or threes on a huge site, so there was not much team building. The professional archaeologists on the dig had such extensive knowledge. Talking to them and reading the literature, magazines and journals, it just spread the knowledge out a bit. You start to follow it up and it is infinite. You do not know when to stop. I thought that the dig was especially well handled. Every week there was a session for everyone on the project from the lowest digger up explaining what had been done, what had been found and where we were going/looking for next. A particular expert would get all the rookies like me together and talk about the artefacts, their significance and context, in a fairly formal teaching session. It was fascinating, you began to realise the sheer depth of knowledge these people must have to be able to identify these things, even tiny fish bones. That was useful and impressive. You were not just there to labour, you were there to learn something, and I did.

This last year the dig got down to levels where I would not have felt safe, because I am a bit hesitant about going up and down ladders. So I decided that if it was that deep, I would go and work on Finds. It was a matter of access. I think that people who are more disabled than me would find it more difficult to get access unless ramps could be built and maintained, but that would be pushing it a bit for an excavation.

I have had one satisfying and responsible career in my life, I do not think I want another one in archaeology, not at my age. If I was younger, I would probably give it some thought; although, it does seem

to be a very insecure profession. A lot of the people I talked to were on short-term contracts and did not know what was going to happen when that particular job finished. I have no regrets about doing an archaeology degree; although I do have a lot of broken fingernails. Coming home at times I suppose I looked like a complete tramp. I would get on the bus and get stared at by these very respectable people. I am glad I did it and I will volunteer for another dig this year.

I think with sensitivity, and being aware that we all have disadvantages of one sort or another, that archaeology could be a lot more inclusive than it is. Before I started, I had the view of a young, fit and healthy image. Not so much an image problem, more of an image factor. I am sure that if the idea that we cannot all do everything could be got across, it would be a lot better. That is being a human being, not a disabled person. If that idea could be developed, I do not see why archaeology cannot be inclusive. There is a chap I met at College with chronic arthritis; he can hardly bend down on his hands and knees. But he can do the most astonishing detailed and beautiful drawings. If people have the skills to do these things, nobody feels uncomfortable if they are able to exploit these skills.