

Name	Robert
Age	30-45
Position	Academic Archaeologist
Disability	Upper Body Disability, Hearing Impairment

I have a relatively rare condition which is called Okhiro Syndrome. It wasn't a recognised condition when I was young, so I didn't realise it had a name until I was about 28 or 29 when I had various genetic tests. It is present in thousands of people to some extent; I have a very moderate form of it. It includes both the deafness and the upper arm disability. A lot of people look at me and mistakenly assume that I'm Thalidomide. In terms of impairment, I'm more profoundly impaired in my hearing. I'm deaf in one ear and partially deaf in the other. In my professional life most people think I have an upper body disability, but they don't register the hearing. That's been important as sometimes people think that I'm a bit cold because I seem to ignore them. One thing I try to say to people when I first meet them is 'Poke me in the ribs if I ignore you'. My wife tells me that it's not as big a problem as I think it is.

When I was a child I didn't go to a special school, I went to a standard Comprehensive. My parents always took a very strong line, for which I'll always be grateful, that I should be treated just like any other kid and, unless there was something specific that I couldn't really do, I was treated the same as my sisters. I've seen a lot of young people, admittedly with more profound impairments than me, treated as if they can't do something until proven otherwise and it has been very difficult for them. Coming into archaeology, my mind set was if someone had said to me, "You can't do that because you have a disability", I would have taken a few seconds to understand where they were coming from.

I first got into archaeology when I was 15 or 16 years old, the day after I'd finished my O Levels. Earlier, I'd been very keen on castles and had read Hoskins, but I hadn't done any archaeology as such. Walking home after my last O Level exam I passed a site, a rescue excavation. I had nothing to do for three or four months before A Levels, so I volunteered to work. I don't know to what extent my disability registered with people, but they accepted me on site without batting an eyelid. I was set to trowel in an area that was archaeologically insignificant, as I now realise 25 years on, until they found out whether I was any good or not. I don't believe I was treated differently from any other 16 year old turning up without any archaeological experience. Fairly rapidly I was moved on to a structure and the highlight of the dig: I excavated a new born, or still-born, child from the foundations. During the course of that

excavation I can't say that there was any particular moment that I felt that my impairment was an issue in terms of my ability to do the work, or that I felt that I was being treated differently by the supervisors.

I spent the next few years digging in the summers whilst I was a student. Again, it's very difficult to pinpoint any concrete moments when I felt that I couldn't do something, or that I was being discriminated against. I was asked if I could manipulate a wheelbarrow by one supervisor. To be fair, this was within two minutes of meeting me for the first time, and nothing like that happened subsequently on the three weeks that I spent on that site. Once or twice I sensed that I was being given lighter jobs. Looking back on it now, I realise that what I did instinctively was to volunteer for the heavy jobs. I don't think I rationalised this at the time because of my upbringing; I thought of myself as not having an impairment, of not being disabled. My actions were instinctive, rather than reflective. One particular excavation in Greece, may be I was a bit paranoid, but I sensed that I was being kept away from heavier work. So I volunteered to dig the toilet pit. For me, that was a little bit of a statement at the time. I never felt that there was anything that I couldn't do, and I very rarely felt that anyone was treating me differently. The vast majority of people soon realised after meeting me that they could just ask me to do something, and it would get done.

I had no problems as an archaeologist as such, but there were one or two things at University. My admissions interview for Cambridge was with two very eminent and dry academics, neither of whom was an archaeologist; I was very nervous at first, terrified in fact. No one from my family had ever gone to Oxford or Cambridge, and no one for ten years from my school. The first question I was asked was, "Can you manipulate books?" I thought, if that is going to be the general academic standard of the questions, I'm going to be okay here.

After undergraduate, I went on to PhD, very much about standing buildings rather than excavation. I was about that time that I began to grow up and realise that I actually wasn't a particularly good digger; for no reason to do with my disability, I just wasn't particularly good at trowelling. It took me some time to realise as a student that there was nothing inherently wrong or shameful about this. Being reflective about it, I do feel that one of the strong components of archaeology is the field ethic, but there is a lack of awareness about how this ethic impacts negatively upon disability issues. I was made to feel that if one wasn't a good fieldworker, however that is defined, then one wasn't a proper archaeologist in some way. Looking back, I think I had an issue with stamina. A lot of tasks I could do perfectly well, but for me it took a lot more energy than someone without an impairment. At the end of the working day I'd be utterly exhausted, whereas everyone else would be

going off to the pub. This, combined with my deafness (I couldn't hear very well in the pub) meant that I was a little less sociable than other people. If you talk to some of my student contemporaries they may have thought I was a bit distant. Perhaps there is some truth in that, but I was exhausted! This didn't occur to me at the time; I wasn't particularly reflective at that age.

The only concrete case where active discrimination threatened my career didn't actually come from archaeology. For my PhD I needed to be able to drive a car. I took my driving test, failed it twice, for perfectly valid reasons, and on the third occasion I passed. When it came to issuing me with the Pass Certificate, the Test Instructor insisted on giving me one that didn't say this person had passed. He wrote one saying, 'This person is capable of driving a modified car, given their deformity'. I was furious, and so were my parents. We were on the verge of legal action about it; I had passed the test fair and square. I'd passed it in a car with automatic transmission but, in every other way, a perfectly standard model. So I felt that this was totally out of order. When I sent the Certificate off to the DVLA, they said that it was not a problem because they were going to give me a standard licence. So it didn't go any further than that.

What I've consistently found with friends and in archaeology is that having a very visible disability is actually very revealing socially. You very quickly twig what people are really like by watching their attitudes towards you. They spot the upper arm disability, but not the deafness. What I've learned is there is no relationship between people's academic ability and common sense. It goes back to my Cambridge interview, the eminent academic with a brain the size of a planet who couldn't see that I was perfectly capable of manipulating books.

In the mental image that I have of myself I don't actually see myself as someone who has a disability. Until a few years ago, when it came to ticking the box 'Are you disabled?', I would not tick it on principle. I changed my mind about that after having read some of the theoretical literature; I understand why that's important now. Last week I was interviewed by a local paper. I'd just got some new slick clothes and I thought I looked pretty cool. When I saw the photo of myself in the paper, I thought, "That's not me, that person has a disability". So I'm interested in how people with disabilities think of themselves. This feeds into questions about role models. When a disabled person is going about their daily business, to what extent are they carrying a banner, or just doing what they want to do? If I were to make a list of all the times I've been conscious of my disability, it would be very short.

I did quite a bit of fieldwork in my first few years as a lecturer, but I was mostly on the side of the trench getting someone else to do the work. I became increasingly disengaged from the field process. As I explained, about ten years ago I came to the conclusion that I wasn't a particularly good fieldworker; not for reasons of any impairment, or in any way I was ashamed of, it is just my strength in archaeology is the big picture. I'm a parachutist, rather than a truffle hunter. That's what I do best and what I've concentrated on.

Since then, the only times I've been conscious of my disability has been very much in the University management context. There have been one or two cases where I haven't been treated fairly; in particular, my opinions haven't been taken as seriously as they might have been. I've had colleagues of whom I'm the Line Manager who have behaved in a way that surprised me. I sometimes think that it is a similar experience to that of some women who are uncertain when a particular situation arises. You think, "Are they treating me this way because I am genuinely not very good, because they think I'm stupid, or because I'm disabled?" I don't know the answer to that question; although there have been times when I've known that I've made a total hash of some situations! But I don't try and blame it on my disability. When I make a casual reference to my disability you can see people visibly relax. A self-deprecating remark does seem to put them at their ease sometimes.

My attitude to other disabled people, and this comes from what I've learned through my own experience and becoming more reflective over the years, is to always discuss with them what their needs and aims are. I take this attitude not because of what I now know about disability theory, but because of the whole impact of student-centred learning. SCL has trained me to ask as a first question of all students what they want to get out of the experience; students with disabilities are no different in this sense from any other student.

I sometimes wonder if I am a role model, but I very quickly decide that is rather arrogant of me, and my impairment is not that profound anyway. I tend to react with a lot of hostility to people who don't have a disability telling me how well they think I'm getting on. If they're wearing glasses, I say the same back to them. People with disabilities have never made a comment like that to me. I've been lucky in my career and relatively successful. I wonder when I get to 60 or 65 and look back, whether I will have been a role model; but the voice of reason tells me that's a rather presumptuous thing to think.

As a Line Manager, and having access to other people's personnel files, I am very aware that there are a lot of people walking around who

appear perfectly average, but who are carrying the most tremendous burdens of different kinds. It has made me a little impatient with a few colleagues who sometimes appear to be very quick to use a medical or personal issue to claim a particular status. They are unaware of other colleagues who choose not to make these things an issue. I support the spirit and the letter of recent legislation very strongly, but there is a danger, perhaps inevitable, that a minority of people will take it as a licence to make certain kinds of demands. Makes me sound a bit reactionary!