

Name	Rebecca
Age	45-60
Position	Professional Archaeologist – Bones Specialist
Disability	Restricted Mobility

I've just turned 46. I had gone through Undergraduate School in America for two years when I was 18 and 19. It didn't appeal to me, so I took 16 years off and worked as Bar Tender and in Sales. Then I hurt my back, I blew out several discs. It took five years to get back surgery and I've had three vertebrae fused together.

During those five years I became restless and I went back to School and got an undergraduate degree in Archaeology. I went on to Yale University for my Masters. After that, I found it hard to get a job. In any case, during the Masters I contracted Lyme Disease. This led to arthritis, inflamed temporal lobes, body aches, chronic fatigue and chronic pain. I'm on the same medicine that MS sufferers take. I have a cane, can't walk too far or carry heavy things. I sometimes get so exhausted or fatigued that I can't move. Weirdly, I have days when I get hyper-active! It varies from day-to-day.

I did Field School as an undergraduate and also worked with an archaeology club on community archaeology. We did a lot of contract work. I'd go out to sites and dig throughout the day; I might show up a bit late, I might leave early or just rest a bit at times. But these were friends of mine and they understood. They knew that I would do good work when I was actually working. When I'm given animal bones to analyse I'll work up to 20 straight hours on a good day. I'll keep going if I think I can, and then I won't do other days. I've been able to pace myself analysing skeletal material on site. I don't just look at age and sex; I try to interpret social status and standard of living.

When it came to getting a real job, I'd send out résumés and they'd often call me up. But when they heard that I may not be able to give them 50 hours a week, the offer of a job would be hastily withdrawn. That happened on several occasions.

I applied to a big firm that had a lot of Native American remains out in California. I sent them my CV and the owner of the company called me up directly and said he couldn't understand why I wasn't working. I explained that I'd just finished my Masters and he seemed satisfied with that. So we chatted for a while and when I told him about my approach to analysing human skeletal remains, he got very excited as it was the sort of information he wanted to know about. So I sent off an email in

which I mentioned my spinal fusion, but that I could dig out graves just fine. I didn't mention the other things, just the spinal fusion. About a week later I got a reply, "I'm sorry, the job was filled quickly due to a heavy influx of applications". I was pretty crushed by that.

The next one was a job with a small firm. I sent an application and the guy called me up. In the middle of the conversation I said, "By the way, I've had a spinal fusion. Do you still want to hire someone who might be considered disabled?" He didn't know and said He'd think about it over the weekend. He called me on the Monday and we chatted some more, but he was still a little hesitant. I offered to fly down to Florida. So I went down and toured the site; it was body recovery, skeletons, not anything strenuous, just scraping away. He took me for lunch and said that I'd be better off in the lab, rather than in the field. So I took the job in the lab. It got to be more of an effort to get the remains out and I was put into the field. After a few days the woman running the site said, "If you can't be here at 6.00 am and work straight through to 2.30 pm, we can't use you". So I went back to the lab. That was a bit of a thankless job.

I'm based in England now and the job I'm doing now is a church, lots of human bones. The people I work for are very forthcoming and pragmatic, especially when I suggest things. I get the feeling that they understand. They know I walk round with a cane a bit, but they don't know about the other stuff. I came back from a strenuous conference in Santorini straight back onto site yesterday and I crashed today. They seem to be cool about it which is wonderful. When I'm on site I'll work from 8.00 or 9.00 in the morning right through to 7.30 at night. It's a big community dig with lots of people helping, older people and school kids, so very mixed abilities.

The thing is, you've got to get into the job and show them what you can do. But how do you get started? They take one look and won't employ you. How do you get the experience?