

Noel Graham

After leaving school with just one GCSE, dropping out of college, and a decade of jobs occupying the bottom rung of the ladder, I fell ill. A subsequent three year battle with depression and a concurrent battle with a frankly inadequate, and sometime inaccessible mental health service, and I was left feeling lost in maze of profound despair. However, it was within this maze that I found hope. This affirmation was composed of an ambition and sense of duty to insure that others did not befall the same fate, by achieving a position where I was able to provide competent mental health care. A year later I had completed an Access to HE Diploma, where I discovered a passion and aptitude for study had replaced any previous doubts about my academic abilities. This course had equipped me with the skills and confidence to further my ambition to pursue a career within the mental health services. My undergrad awaited.

Although I was now aged 31, I was still apprehensive about this new undertaking. Over the preceding weeks leading up to Fresher's, a number of doubts governed my thoughts. Would I be welcomed by this new institution, receive adequate support, make new friends, or even be able cope with what I expected to be an impossible work load? This next step felt much bigger, and all these fears seemed exclusively reserved for me. However, they were quickly allayed by a mutuality among my fellow first years, and a university all too familiar with these universal doubts. Within the first few weeks we had been made welcome, reassured, and successfully integrated into fabric of university life; and along with a fantastic new group of friends, I was primed and ready for the exciting challenges that lay ahead. Now three years later, I am awaiting my results.

My chosen subject was psychology, the scientific study of cognition and behaviour. This course gave me the opportunity for an unparalleled level of study, in a conducive setting, alongside like-minded individuals possessing a mutual passion for learning. I had weekly classes and contact with academics such as doctors and professors, experts in their respective fields. I've learned skills of; research, critical evaluation, academic writing, group work, presentation, data and statistic interpretation, and work/time management; skills I use daily in every aspect of my life. The experiences of my past now seem like a blessing, if not for this unpleasant time I would not be where I am today, finishing off one of the most exciting and reward journeys of my life and ready to embark on another. In September I am starting a counselling certificate, a prerequisite for entry on to a Doctorate in Counselling Psychology, which I plan to apply for in 2017.

This is your choice. Do not make it out of obligation or to conform, for your parents, friends or peers, do it for yourself, and take ownership of one of the most exciting and rewarding chapters of a story worthy of your ambition.