

Student with AD(H)D

The background before I came to university involved a spell with the military, in the Paras, 30 years in PR, working on Situations and projects as diverse as Porsche 959 Racing Team, High Protein Fruit Bars, Number 10 Downing Street and Privy Councillors in the House of Lords – and just about anything in between.

I came to university carrying a hidden burden. The reason I wasn't commissioned in the Paras was that although I passed all entrance tests for Sandhurst in the 80% region, the one thing I failed abysmally was the logical asymmetrical tests – LOGIC. I carried that until I came to university, when I discovered a great release in being able to put a name to these things that I didn't seem to be able to do.

I could be entrepreneurial, show loads of dynamism and energy in situations, but the logic of form-filling or even at the photocopier machine, trying to collate correctly the photo-copying, would throw me – I couldn't do it.

So I camouflaged my situation in business; by navigating around these situations as far as I could. It often manifested itself through serious self-negation, lack of confidence and overarching 'bluster' in situations I *could* do. So unkindly years earlier the seemingly apocalyptic indictment stayed with me that "I always hit the nail on the side of the head".

I am still a Member of the Institute of Directors; during my years in PR I was recognised as the number 2 in the world of horticulture. Currently I help fund my existence by doing some PR for an international LA-based artist – my job is to make him world-renowned – and I hope to launch him on to the world through the auspices of Bournemouth University...

...and all the time I was hiding my 'disability' – this unknown factor (my Achilles Heel) which often, when it manifested itself, earned me the label of "bloody thick", and which I almost believed myself, because I had no idea what it was!

Having come to university in my later years, to do an Archaeology degree, the PR world having shrunk a little for people of my age – I discovered the freedom in finding out the truth – that the logical mental functions I couldn't perform were apparently due to ADHD – Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

Through certain manoeuvres and learning support, one finds suddenly an increase in self-respect, achievement in a new area and the joy of knowing that there is a way round these burdens that had plagued one for almost a lifetime.

For me, the miracle has been receiving the support of a mentor – a 'study buddy' – an archaeologist herself, but one gifted with empathy, knowledge, an ability to manage me and keep me to routines and structures that are necessary to keep me on track.

Of course, my own gift of communication, persuasion, personality, lateral thinking to overcome my difficulty - my very lack of logic, in fact - is the reason that she has succeeded in 'enabling' me to access my studies. The very diagnosis of ADHD was a relief – the beginning of my freedom to be who I really am. I walked out of jail.

Armed with an Educational Psychology report, and an assessment from the Access Centre, I found myself the proud new owner of a suite of 'assistive technology' – PC, voice recognition software, scanner, printer, specialist software to 'mind map' my assignments – great stuff but not the whole answer.

What has really made the difference has been the 'human support' – someone (an archaeologist yet) to take notes from my lectures so that I could enjoy the luxury of listening to the lecturer and absorbing the knowledge. And my 'mentor' – an academic assistant who has been so much more.

From being frustrated, anxious – dead scared in fact, at the beginning of my course – I have mellowed in the knowledge that I can do this. I did it last year – much to my surprise and overwhelming joy, I passed my exams and progressed to the second year.

At last, with the support provided by the university Educational Access programme, I am achieving an understanding of what I learn and at last being able to demonstrate my true academic potential!