

Melanie Hussey

I attended Warwick University from 1981 to 1984 and graduated with a B.A. (Hons) in English and European Literature. I followed up with a P.G.C.E. for middle school years in primary education.

My first job however was in I.T., working for the M.O.D as a programmer. This only lasted 6 months as programming did not come easily to me, and I left to become a primary school teacher. Less than 2 years later, I realised the grind that was state school teaching in an area of social deprivation and the hours, constant scrutiny, commensurate stress and poor pay meant that I soon changed back to I.T. where I became a software trainer. Teaching adults was far more rewarding and I was left to my own devices as the customers would soon shout if they weren't happy with any aspect of the training. I self-monitored through end of course feedback forms. After several years in various employed and self-employed positions mainly training in software packages, I did some voluntary English as a Foreign Language work and realised my vocation. I took a CELTA - (Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults) and have had a wonderful, though much lower paid, job for the last 14 years. It has been a constant source of interest and pleasure to meet students from all over the world in different teaching environments and to try to assist them in realising their dreams through the medium of the English language.

In terms of my time at Warwick, I can't say that I found it at all daunting. I had visited Oxford University (Pembroke College) as part of an attempt by our head teacher to get some of the brighter students at our comprehensive school to consider applying. I felt totally like a fish out of water – very alienated. Warwick was a hotchpotch of students at that time and I soon found friends from similar backgrounds. Those who attended Christian Union on the corridor in my first year clearly felt themselves superior and, at times, there were arguments and people were left out of social occasions but overall I didn't feel uncomfortable. This wasn't about class or social background but simple differences of opinion.

I would say though, that I had no aims beyond graduation. I had no advice from my family about what to do afterwards. I remember going to the Careers Advice section at the university at the time, but beyond a lot of bits of paper to read about different types of employment, there wasn't any real help. I fell into teaching as I had a natural ability to hold a conversation and to rarely feel intimidated.

At that time it didn't matter what extra-curricular activities you did, a degree guaranteed a job. I got my first job with the M.O.D. simply because I had a degree and passed their aptitude test. Finding a teaching job was more difficult – hence ending up in an area of social deprivation – but from there I went straight back into I.T. as a computer operator and subsequently a trainer. These were fairly well-paid jobs too. I did join in with RAG and attended film club regularly. In 2002 I received a Masters Degree from the University of West of England, my interest in film having been kindled at Warwick.

I can only say that whatever takes your interest at university, follow it through and don't be too lazy to make the effort. It won't come again so easily. Try out lots of things to discover what you think you would really like to do and try to future proof yourself. Now at the age of 53, I am glad that I got out of I.T. even though it was good to me, because it's harder as you get older to constantly learn new things at the pace which is expected these days. Doing a job that you love is one of the best things in life and many people don't get to do that – so establishing what you'd like to do as soon as possible has got to be a priority so that you can work towards achieving it.

The reassurance I can offer is that education is key towards challenging any form of intimidation – not just formal education but the education you receive from meeting and talking with people from all walks of life. Warwick will offer that opportunity and you should seize it with both hands.