





Maria




I'm Maria, I'm a learning technologist. I've experienced abuse and trauma, and I'm passionate about equity and inclusion in higher education.




My school days were tough; my school was very white and there was lots of casual racism. It helps that I have a lovely long-term boyfriend, although he's very into his drinking. Things aren't smooth, but I know we'll get through this, we're meant to be together. ...




A few years after finishing school, I decided it wasn't enough to just get married, I wanted a degree. I went to a university nearby so we didn't break up, but things got bad. With me away, he got more and more into drugs and alcohol, and became physically and emotionally abusive. ...




The abuse got really bad. I finally found the courage to break up, to say no more, but I feel like I've lost a major part of my identity and I don't know how to get past this. When I ask for help, people don't take me seriously, they just tell me to get a haircut and a new lipstick! ...




I'm throwing myself into my studies, and I'm doing surprisingly well. If I can just keep focused, just get through each new task, each new assignment, I can get through this, I can get over this aching sense of loss, I can find who I am meant to be. ...




Final assessments are here. I've made it this far. I'm channelling my experiences into them, doing an artistic expression of racism, abuse, trauma and aloneness. I'm not sure how well I've done but it's been weirdly cathartic and healing. ...



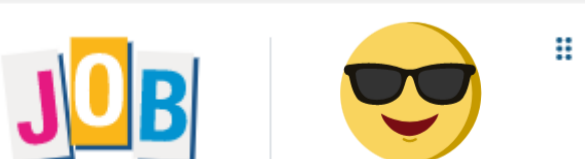
I'm starting to get better. There's been no magic solution, I never got any help or support from my university. My friends have helped a bit, but it's hard to get close to people. But I'm starting to find strength within myself, determination, the will to go on and to succeed. ...




I'm starting to burn out. I can't keep on like this. I'm sending out cries for help, I made my last assignments all about self-harm and suicide attempts, but no one's listening. ...




I finished university! And I've been officially diagnosed with PTSD, which explains so much and is so affirming! But I now have the rest of my life to get on with, somehow. I feel elated but rudderless. I'm scared to move on; for all its evils, I know this place, I feel I belong here. ...

I got a new job, I'll be supporting students, and I'm in a different university! I'm feeling excited and proud of myself, I think my experiences will help me help others. There are some issues with culture, though. It's very white, I think I'm a diversity hire, and that's a horrible feeling. ...



Things are bad. The everyday racism and toxicity are more than I can bear. To make things worse, my boss put me on a course on domestic abuse safeguarding, and it triggered me so much I completely broke down. No one knew how to react, there's no support here. ...



I've got a new job in a different university. I'm a learning technologist now, and I'm learning a lot about myself. The culture is better here, it's supportive, my colleagues encourage me to use my experiences for good, to help others and make the world a better place. ...



Jath



My name is Jath, I'm a senior lecturer and programme lead in a university. I've made my way through higher education due to sheer determination and willpower.



I grew in a small city in West Africa. My father paid for my school fees, but we couldn't afford much else. I now work in a bank, but I want more. I love my father, but his life will not be my life. I have a scholarship to go to university, I will study hard and things will be different for me. ...



I received a scholarship to study in a neighbouring country! I'm working hard, but things are very difficult here. The allowance comes months late, I can't pay for things, and I know nobody here. It's hard, but will be worth it. I have a dream, I will be somebody one day. ...



My study abroad has been cut short. They locked their doors and left us with nothing, just a certificate, no degree. I had to come home, ask for my old job back, start my studies again. I am ashamed; some of my peers stayed there and got jobs because of the shame of returning. ...



My aunt has offered me an opportunity to go to the UK, study business there and live with her. It means leaving my job in the bank, leaving my half-finished degree and starting again in England. It's a risk, but I'm going to do it, I believe it will be worth it. ...



I'm working hard, I have two jobs lecturing in colleges and I'm studying for my MBA. I work all day, I take a train for an hour, work until 9pm, then go home and study half the night. It's okay. I have determination, I have a dream, my family are proud. I will be somebody one day. ...



I finished my degree, at last! And I got a job as a lecturer in a college! I saw the ad while I was cleaning the college, and I asked the manager if I could apply. I told him, I believe I can do this, and I will work for free for the first month if I can't. He gave me the job! ...



I'm in the UK, studying business management and working as a cleaner. It's hard at times, things are very different here, but I'm working hard, meeting interesting people and getting good grades. Life is: dream, struggle, victory; you cannot jump the struggle part. ...



I'm still teaching full time, and now I am also doing a PhD. My father is so proud, he cannot wait to see me a doctor. I'm also doing volunteer work, mentoring and helping people. I want to make a difference, I want to change lives. ...



My father has died. I am writing the final chapter of my PhD, and he had a visa to visit me, but now he will never see me become a doctor. But I won't give up, this is for him. I know he would be proud. I will be somebody one day and he would be proud. ...



I am working. I have my first university job, associate lecturer. I am still lecturing in colleges, still volunteering and mentoring. I am writing a book and taking courses in education. I am searching for opportunities. I have a dream, I have vision. I believe in myself. ...




I have a full time, permanent job in a university! I am a senior lecturer. I am writing and publishing, one day I will be a professor and I will go back to my country and make a difference. Now I am somebody. And I will keep working to change lives and impact people. ...




Grace




I'm Grace, I'm a lecturer and I've taken a long and winding path through life and academia. It's taken me a long time to find myself and what I wanted, but it was worth it in the end.




I grew up in a period of civil unrest, you might say civil war. There was a level of tension in the house all the time. My grandmother lived with us and was very nervy. If you were 5 minutes late home you were in trouble. I wanted to go somewhere else, I needed to escape.




I did well in my exams, and I wanted to go to university. I was the first in my family, my parents are teachers but had no experience in choosing a university or a course or anything. I didn't know what to study, I just knew I wanted to do something I'd never done before.




I went away to university! But it became clear pretty quickly that I hadn't chosen well. The course was wrong, and I was so homesick, but I couldn't talk to my parents because my grandma was always there. I had to say everything was fine, then I'd go away and just cry.


I hung on in there for the whole degree, and I got a 2-2. I was convinced my earlier good grades were a fluke; I don't know if I wasn't clever, or wasn't interested, or wasn't able to be interested. I'd wanted university to rescue me from my home situation, but it didn't.




The university kept giving me temp contracts but passing me over for permanent contracts. They told me I'm too diffident and not confident enough in my own abilities. One day, I realised I wanted to do a doctorate – that would give me the confidence I need!



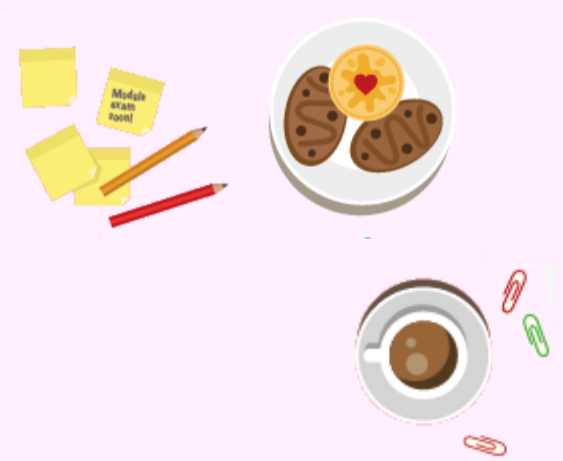

One day, years later, a university mentor came into my school, a placement person. I thought wow, that sounds interesting! Maybe that's what I've been missing! So I started studying my masters, and got a temp job at a university




I couldn't do what I wanted for a career because of my degree outcome. So I decided to be a teacher, like my parents. I didn't really like it, but I figured it was what I was meant for. Then I got pregnant, so I thought I'd just be a mum and do the odd bit of teaching here and there.




I started an EdD but it wasn't what I thought, it didn't give me what I needed. There was no support, my imposter syndrome was getting to me and I had a lot of stuff going on at home with my family. In the end I had to drop out. It was a relief in a way, but I missed university.

I feel like I'm wandering around, wobbling around in the desert or something. I miss university and I can't let go of the idea of a doctorate, I feel like I'm being drawn back to academia, somehow. But I need to do it in my own time, when I feel ready.



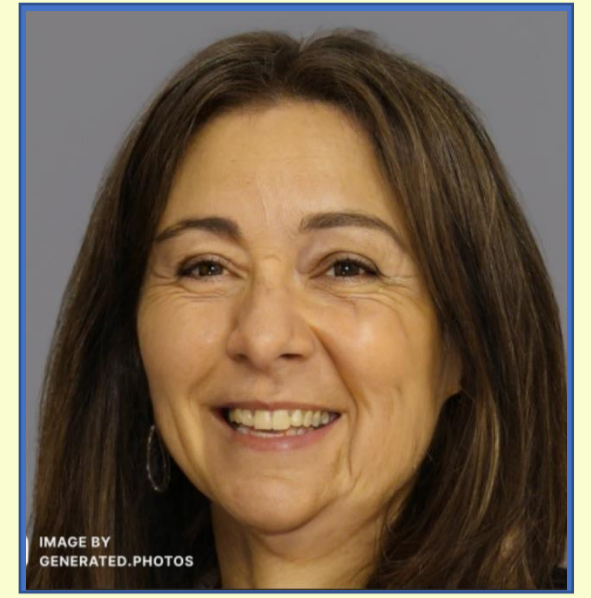
I've done it, I've started a PhD. It may not have worked before, but I still feel it's right for me. Sometimes, wandering in the desert for a while makes you feel more sure, more certain when something is right for you.




At my grand old age, I have completed my PhD and got a lectureship in a university I love. I finally feel like I've arrived. Sometimes, if things don't work out at first, you find other ways to get where you're going to, but you can make it in the end.



Ana




I'm Ana, I'm a deputy head of school. I'm enthusiastic, passionate and keen to make a difference, I want to inspire the next generation of business leaders.




I moved to the UK in my last year of high school. I struggled to fit in, found it difficult to make friends or understand what was going on in class. I wished my teachers would help, but they didn't. I lost confidence in myself and didn't do well in my exams.




I got a job in telemarketing; there were lots of international people and I started to make friends and build confidence in myself again. I got promoted to trainee manager and learned that I was good at leading and inspiring a team.



My work sponsored me to study for a certificate in management. I was apprehensive at first, I thought I wasn't good at study, but I found I loved it! I passed with a good mark, and I decided I wanted to go on and study for a degree in Business Management.


My firm was bought out and I was made redundant. I'm telling myself I don't mind too much, I can temp for a while and fund my studies myself. It's good to get new experiences in different places.




Work is going well, I've started studying for my MBA, and I've taken on some tutoring and marking work for my university. I love teaching, I feel strongly about teaching the next generation of leaders. I might see if I can do more of this.




I finished my degree, and I have a new job! Finally, I feel secure and not like I'm constantly hustling. My pay is lower and the workload is higher, but it's worth it just to stay in one place. If things work out here, I might do an MBA and see if I can get promoted.




I've been working in different places and studying part-time alongside work for a degree in business management. It's incredibly difficult; starting a new job is always exhausting and my partner wants to start a family. There is so much to do and never enough time!



My work is going through a series of major restructures. I am constantly under increasing operational pressure and under threat of redundancy. I can't do this anymore, I'm tired, burned out and ready for a change. I'm starting to think about lecturing full time.

I took the plunge and accepted a job as a full-time lecturer! It was very different to my previous work, and I realised I had a lot to learn. But I loved teaching and helping my students build confidence and realise their potential. Academia made me feel energised again.



I was made a programme leader, and while I was really honoured and excited, it made me nervous to realise how little I knew about teaching. Even though I loved the work, I struggled with imposter syndrome at times.



I have a new job at a different university, I'm now deputy head of school! It's more responsibility, and means running a larger and more complex team than I have before, but I'm really excited about the challenge!