

Ashley Interview

Transcript:

So tell me, about how you got into University?

What was your journey to get here?

I was about fourteen and a half what I was at school and they started talking about work experience and from that I started to think about what I wanted to do and I originally wanted to go to Law and become a Barrister which is completely different from what I'm doing now but it was then that I decided that I wanted to go to University whatever happened

How did you get to think about University, did your Foster Carer suggest it to you?

Well because originally I was thinking that I wanted to go into Law because I wanted to be a Barrister I knew that I needed to go to University so then from that point on I sought of assumed in my mind that I would go to university I didn't really have a great deal of thought until it actually came to the end of my last year at college and I was thinking about what I wanted to do but up until then it was basically, once I decided that I wanted to do something with a degree I took it for granted that I'd be in education for the foreseeable future. It wasn't really until I went to college when I started really knuckling down and then my old person changed as it were because I went up there and it was a completely different life, I mean I know damn well that if I have stayed at school until sixth form I wouldn't have moved on I would have stayed at sixth form, I would have either dropped out or finished there and come out with terrible A levels and gone to work at Tesco's or something. Then I went to an open evening and thought brilliant, it looked absolutely ace and I couldn't wait to go there

What was good about it then?

I don't know, I think it was just because there were a lot of students around mincing about not doing a great deal but they were just there

Mincing about?

Well yeah, you can talk to people, you can talk to the teachers and the way everything was set out it was organised in a way that I could see exactly what I wanted to see, which was brilliant for me as if things are organised then I don't look at twice, so I went up there and I had been able to talk one on one with a lot of the teachers and after I came back from the open evening I knew exactly what I wanted to do, I filled out all the forms with all the subjects and got it done straight away. Then it came to three days before and I was

terrified, I thought I was going to drop out, I wasn't going to go, I don't anyone who is going to be there. Complete flash bang into this place full of posh people that I don't know, and then there is just me with my fag and my not so expensive clothes. I mean I had long black hair back then, it wasn't pretty! I'm not good at talking to new people, I mean I'm not good at meeting new people in general, I'm really, really bad at it. I mean I still only know about four people here at University that I talk to on a regular basis. They are the only ones I've met and I've not spread myself out much more, which isn't a problem because I don't need a much bigger group because I'm not in Huddersfield all of the time, it's only when I'm at Uni and Student night that I'm here

So what are you studying at University now?

I'm studying History at the moment, I'm just starting my second year as of today and then I have got the third year of dissertation and I should have a fourth year of teacher training but I don't know if that will be here or at another University I haven't decided yet it just depends on how things go over the next few years

So what is life like at University? What was it like on your first day?

On my first day I hated it, I thought it was horrible, I didn't like it. The induction week was alright, because I got told a lot of things that were quite stimulating which was brilliant but then after three weeks I thought this is a horrible, horrible place, I hated it with a passion, I couldn't bare it, Just because I didn't like the first year, because you don't get any choice in your first year, you have to do preparation stuff. It was like an induction year, so it was a case of I just didn't like it. It wasn't modern history it was more medieval stories. So I almost dropped out because of family problems going on at the same time, they always ring up when I don't want them too! But I got over it and ended up staying after all, and now I'm starting again today and I actually can't wait to get back in and this year I get all my own subjects and all my own modules and can study specifically what I want to and I think it's going to be great I can't wait to start, I can't wait to get stuck in

So tell me how you manage your money?

Basically, if I've got some money in the bank then I've got some money to spend, if there's no money in the bank then I haven't got any money to spend and that's my managing system! Well this year I have bought a wallet so this year I'm going to manage it a bit better. I'm going to draw money out each week, put it in my wallet and just spend that so that way it should last longer!

So you've got a good relationship with your Foster Carer?

Oh yes, as far as I'm concerned she is my mother, she has done everything for me, she has brought me up throughout being a teenager and I came out of care now about two years ago and I still talk to her most days, if not every other day. If I've not spoken to her for a week she will ring me up and say "why haven't you rung me" or "are you still alive" something strange like that. I don't think we will ever lose contact because she is just everything to me she really, really is. She's quite happy for me to move back in anytime.

Tell me about what kind of support you get from Roger and other young people that are care leavers at the University?

We I don't think that as care leavers we interact that much because we are only ever really together when there is something going on with Roger, mainly because we're in different years and all on different

courses, so we don't really have a lot of time together. I don't really see a lot of people, I only really see the people on my course, I just don't see anyone else.

So tell me about the kind of relationship you have got with Roger

Well Roger, we sort of help each other out a lot, I mean I'll be there to help out with the days that he's running and tell him when he's coming up with stupid ideas that aren't going to work! I'm quite happy to turn around and say "no Roger, you're not doing that!"

On the other side of that, whenever I've had problems at home or specifically when I've had problems with leaving care team I will go and talk to Roger about it because he can advise me. He can give me any ammunition I need or what to say, well not what to say but what Laws and he will send me link to Laws and tell me what rights I have etc. So in that sense he has been really useful and just when I've had personal problems there has been someone else I can talk to, we can just pop up here and just sit generally in one of these rooms and just talk through it which has been a massive help for me this year, and he's also been helpful for me in University in general as during the back end of last year I had quite a number of family problems all going on at the same time and I got behind in some of my work and he was able to speak to the head of my course and just explain to her that I was having some problems and they arranged an extension for me which made a massive difference because otherwise I could have had to do re sits and all sorts to catch up on what I had missed just because I couldn't keep up with it at that point in time, so that made a massive help a massive difference. It wasn't just me going in and talking to her it was someone else to clarify it for me so it didn't just look like excuses.

So he was like a bit of an ally for you?

Yes, yes definitely and that really does help because it's not always easy coming into University and talking to people about being a care leaver, I mean I'm happy to tell anyone, in fact the thing that I find the strangest thing and I really don't know why people do it but if people ask about my parents and I say "oh now I don't really see them that often because I was brought up in foster care" they say "oh I'm so sorry I didn't realise" and I think why are you apologising? There is nothing wrong with it, I didn't do anything wrong to be in care or I'm not any less of a person, it's not like somebody died and it's not anything to apologise for and normally I do say "what are you apologising for?"

There are supportive teachers, usually the lessons that I have worked in they said that I should go to university but the problem with the teachers is that they all think I should go to University to do their subject! Rather than you should go to University to study what you want to study which was quite difficult because they want to keep you on their side of it and I don't know why because once you go to University you're not going to have anything more to do with them anyway so there is not really any reason for them to do it but they do sort of have that general biased to their own subject which to be fair once I'm teaching I will probably be exactly the same with History so I will be saying "yes you should go to University and do History!" And yes Medieval History of course it's a necessity! But yes, that made it more difficult because it made it more difficult to choose, my main problem with it was that I didn't understand University at all, none of my family had ever been, I had no idea of what to expect, it wasn't until no word of a lie it, just after my first year I found out what my degree was! All thanks to Wikipedia! It was Wikipedia that told me! I just typed in BA Hons', I had no idea what it meant and I found out that it was a Bachelor Arts Honours and I looked it all up and went through it and I thought that's great now I know what I'm studying, now I know what I'm going to attain from this degree.

Why did you not know that?

Because no one ever told me it, I mean when I first came to University I thought it was the strangest thing that people just assumed it. I thought that in the induction week they would have a lesson where they would explain it and that they would explain how all your grades work etc but they don't they just assume that you already know it and I found that quite disheartening because I just didn't have a clue, I knew what with my actual work but I didn't have a clue what I was going to get from it or how a credit system worked or how the marking system worked at all, I just thought that I would hand an essay in and hope for the best it was that simple! I didn't have a clue otherwise. That is one reason why you should use Wikipedia it sorted me out!

Other than that I think it was just myself being confident and sort of understanding what I wanted and having that realisation that you don't need to know what job you want to do when you leave University you just need to study what you enjoy studying, because at the end of the day I've discovered that, well I had just started University when it became apparent and then quite obvious to me that when you're actually looking for a job they are not that interested in what degree you have got they are just interested in the fact that you have got a degree. It's only something that's specific that they want a degree in that subject so I thought in that case you can do absolutely anything as long as you have got that bit of paper that says you've got a degree.

What would you say to young people who are thinking about going to a website to understand what University is about? How would you encapsulate it?

It's a massive adventure, everyday is a new adventure. Everything is so new and so different but in a good way, I've just had the last four months off for summer and I've hated every minute of it, I just couldn't wait to get back stuck in it here because I just thought it was brilliant. My main issue before coming here was this notion that it a ridiculous hard thing to do but it's not that difficult. It was only at the end of my A levels that people told me that A levels are more difficult than a degree because your studying so many different things in one go that haven't got anything to do with each other whereas with a degree even though you have got different modules you can essentially focus on one specific idea or one specific way of thinking and carry that through all of it. I think it's brilliant especially if you have got a passion for that subject, you can develop that and I think that's the main idea of a degree, that's how I see it, being able to develop your own understanding of that field.

How is it an adventure apart from the academic side of it?

Meeting all these new people when you think you're the only one that's like you and there is no-one else in the world like you and then you go to University and find someone that is exactly the same. That's quite an overwhelming feeling but a brilliant feeling at the same time just because you meet all these new people and then there are all these new pubs to find, which is a massively important part of University, I mean it's at least 50% of university life. I must have spent 50% of my time at University at the student bar because it's a case of go to lecture, come out of lecture, go to the Uni bar, go to the next lecture, that's just how it works it's brilliant that you can actually do that you know, go to your lecture come out have a fag have a drink, go back then go into town do a bit of shopping then go to your next lecture and that style of living is just great because it's a lot more on your terms because you've got more free time but there is always lots to do and there are always lots of people around and you generally find that you have got all the people on your course to spend your free time with, it's brilliant. I really do think it's great and in that sense it's just a

massive adventure and you also discover and learn a lot about more yourself and find out who you are as a person and you find out how independent you really are and the studying is all down to yourself. But the problem with it is that depending on the person it can be the most difficult thing in your world because your told very little amount of information and then told now go and write an essay and for me it was like being dropped in at the deep end and was really overwhelming because in the past I've had all of the information given to me in a lesson, I've had to find some information myself but it was all in a book within a lesson it wasn't like go away find some books and do it so that side was difficult but once I got into the swing of it the independence was brilliant.

So you like the independence that you're given academically wise, what other kinds of independence have you got? Living independently, managing your own money.

Managing money isn't an entertaining thing it frightens me, it's more of a terrifying thing because I'm not that good at it, I'm hoping to get better at it. I'm good at making plans but not good at sticking to them!