



Hugh Stelmach Environment Team Leader

When I was at school, I was the typical sports-oriented, academically lazy boy. We were left to go out playing for hours, exploring in the fields, making dens, treehouses, bonfires. We only used to go home for food. What I loved most was football.

When I was 16 I tried out for the local team, but I was too small. I felt like life had stopped, it was horrible.

Luckily I was getting interested in girls around that time, and that was a compensation. I had

hair like David Cassidy's and I was a bit of a Jack-the-Lad for the ladies, I suppose. The only place we had to meet was the youth club in the local church. We didn't really get involved with alcohol - there wasn't anywhere you could buy it. We were pretty innocent, I think. It was cheap to watch football matches and they were unticketed, so we thought nothing of jumping on the train to Manchester and seeing the big teams play at Old Trafford - especially when I worked on the railways and got free travel.

Back then there was lots of work about so you could just try out different jobs as you liked. I tried all sorts - train driver,

textile factory, I worked as a civilian for the RAF for nineteen years, and later for a bespoke joinery manufacturer, until the recession hit hard and I was made redundant.

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I worked for the RAF during the Falklands War, in my mid-twenties. If you can imagine an Airfix model, each plane has thousands of parts, the spares were stored in the centre at Carlisle,

and my job was to find all the missing parts. I was working eighteen, nineteen hours a day searching for parts, using the officers' mess to grab a few hours' sleep. I managed to find every single part except for the rubber plugs that are used on some planes for rocket launchers - and my claim to fame is that I was given the AOC's commendation for it, the youngest person ever to get that apparently.

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I spent about eight months out of work, which was horrendous. I got pretty good at housework, making the tea - she still wouldn't let me near the washing machine though! Then, luckily, I saw the advert for Environment Team Leader. I've been encouraged here to use my experience in the private sector to try and improve the systems we have here.

Now I've had the opportunity to study a foundation degree in Health Service Management. I think I have to work 10-15% harder than the younger students because you're talking about theory and models, where mine are

all based on experience. But I really enjoy the process of mapping my experience onto the theory and vice versa. The funny thing is that both of my sons are also studying at university - one film production, one law - and when they come back home on holiday we're all chuntering about our assignments and so on!

I served on my local parish council until I started the degree. I was responsible for organising a Jubilee party for 1000 families, and it was so successful we're going to do it again this year! I think apathy is the biggest problem in that kind of community work. People are resistant

to change - but I quite like change. I think we need to move forward, take on challenges to keep us fresh, keep us alive.

