My OU journey started almost 20 years ago. I had just dropped out of Medical School and gone to work in Switzerland. I was bored and needed something to occupy my brain. So I started doing short 10 point courses. I thoroughly enjoyed them and did several over the course of my time abroad. Upon returning to Scotland I embarked on an Open Degree which very quickly became a BSc in Maths and Physics. I enjoyed every minute of my studies and then I had a huge mental health breakdown.

I was hospitalised. I was sectioned and very nearly didn’t survive. I lost my job and the majority of my friends. My world shrank to the four walls of my bedroom. I went through the darkest time of my life and The OU came with me. It was my one and only constant through all that turmoil.

Studying with poor mental health is never easy. When depression and anxiety are so crippling that you can barely get out of bed it can be almost impossible to sit down and make your brain learn new things. I struggled almost every day, but I didn’t want to let go of my studies. I couldn’t give up. It was the only thing that didn’t get devoured by the darkness of my breakdown. And I am so pleased that it didn’t.

It was not easy and I didn’t get the marks that I knew I could have before my breakdown. I had to come to terms with that and it took years to, but I also didn’t crash and burn. I wouldn’t let myself. Studying was the only ‘normality’ that I had. It was the thing that got me out of bed and made me face my mental health and find a way to manage it. Needing to be well enough to study pushed me to learn about myself and my mental health and find a way back from the abyss. I have no idea if I would have managed that without having The OU there pulling me along. They didn’t do anything special, just the fact that I was studying and that there was something to work to in the distance was enough. I had lost all other hope or direction or meaning to my life. Studying gave me meaning. It gave me something to strive towards.

I hated myself and my existence, but the OU didn’t. It was the only place I could ‘go’ that I wasn’t treated differently. Maybe that was because no one other than my tutors and the disability team knew that I had poor mental health, or maybe it was because it doesn’t matter. I was another student and I was there to study and that was all that mattered. Studying made me feel ‘normal’ which was something that I didn’t get anywhere else.

Now, 13 years on from my breakdown, I still struggle, but I will not give up on studying. I got my BSc and I am now trying to do a Masters. It’s not easy, but it is possible. Crutches can come in all shapes and sizes. Mine came in the shape of the OU and I am grateful for it everyday. My determination to study truly saved my life and the OU gave me the chance to turn my world around.

I’d like to share an inspirational story from my life that some may find unusual. A year ago, I travelled to the United States to chase tornadoes – quite literally. I joined a team of storm chasers in the Great Plains and spent two weeks tracking some of the most extreme weather on Earth. The experience was a mixture of adrenaline, scientific curiosity, and awe at nature’s raw power.

What stuck with me most was how controlled chaos can actually be managed with the right preparation, data, and teamwork. That mindset has stayed with me, especially now as I study cyber security with the Open University. Just like with storms, threats in IT can seem overwhelming, but with knowledge and planning, even the most intense situations can be tackled head-on.

I hope this resonates with others who are facing challenges or pursuing paths that might seem daunting. Sometimes you have to chase the storm to understand your own strength.

Hi Everyone,

I’ve just completed my EMA for Module DA223. The essay topic was about Racialism which was an extremely sensitive subject since I am a British Citizen and a Born Again Christian.

However, the amazing coincidence is that, not knowing the essay subject, my wife and I had booked flights to Kenya to have a three-week holiday with my wife’s Auntie.

My father-in-law grew up in Kenya, his parents being Christian missionaries in Africa.

We’re currently having an amazing time, especially me; digesting the African culture through the lens of my recent study experience.

I look upon my holiday as more of a Field Trip, an addition to the module assignment which brings my learning into a whole new dimension!

Hello,

just wanted to share how my Uni studies have

taken an interesting journey from starting with autism struggles

with one course, to changing to a different course in February,

that now has set me off thinking and feeling differently about how

i handle my disabilities - autism and epilepsy - but also how I

learn within the OU. Being in the over 50 category! I am getting

to grips with the speed of all the tech stuff! and all the help has

been overwhelming. Am now recommending the OU to friends

within the charities I support and have found that on hospital visits

the number of NHS workers who have or have gained qualifications

with the OU is impressive! I definitely have gained more confidence

in talking to people about my subject - history as well as even studyin

online for people who live in rural areas. Thank you OU!