

■ It took 35 years for a university degree, but this disabled man says it was well worth it.

## DOING IT THE HARD WAY

As a boy in London, Canada, in the 1920s, I often looked across the River Thames at the buildings of the University of Western Ontario, and watched the comings and goings of the young people who were fortunate enough to spend several years of their lives studying within its walls. You lucky students, I thought; I would have given half of any years of life remaining to me to be able to go to university and study for a degree in geography or history.

Later, in my home town of Manchester, the same pattern repeated itself. This time it was the students attending lectures at Manchester University at whom I gazed enviously.

I never got to university. Instead, I started work at a greengrocer's shop and spent my time delivering orders, cleaning fish, and scrubbing floors. My wage rose to 15 shillings a week. Other

young men who were not so lucky spent their time waiting for work at the labour exchange. These were the 1930s with over 2m. men unemployed. Maybe the Blackshirts marching along Oxford Road were right, and one should exclaim with them — to Hell with culture!

\* \* \*

How to get a better education? That question puzzled me for years. Books could be borrowed from the public library. Newspapers given by customers to wrap up fish could be read first. Free Saturday lectures were available at Manchester University. On a borrowed bicycle one could ride along Kingsway or Stockport Road to study geology in Derbyshire or archaeology in Cheshire. It got you away from the stifling wilderness of the housing estates. But it was not enough!

It seemed to me that if one could not get an education

by going to university and studying for a degree in geography, then one could learn something about the subject by starting off with a pack on one's back and a few pounds in one's pockets, to tramp and work one's way across foreign countries. Let the world be your university. So I started off.

In five years I made two trips to the Arctic and two to Africa, visited most of Europe. I worked as deck-hand on the Finnish four-masted barque *Herzogin Cecilie*, witnessed the outbreak of the Spanish civil war, stowed away on a ship bound for Spitzbergen, walked to the Oasis of Tafilet in the Sahara, to study the architecture of desert castles. I worked as seaman, cook, gold-miner, clerk, guide. Sometimes I feasted, sometimes I starved. I learned some geography.

I came back from Africa to spend a year at Fircroft College, Bournville, studying economics, philosophy, geography, and history. This college's function is to provide men who left school at an early age with the opportu-

nity of improving their education. My year at Fircroft opened new horizons, for as well as learning subjects I mixed with men of my own kind. Afterwards, lectures organized by the Workers Educational Association helped to fill in gaps in my knowledge.

• • •

During the Second World War I worked on farms in various parts of England and Wales. I had been born crippled and the Army did not want a lame man. Archaeology became my chief study. The war over, I studied for the Diploma in Archaeology, attending lectures at London University by Professor Gordon Childe, Dr. Kathleen Kenyon, and others. I felt I was getting somewhere at last, but my money ran out and I had to quit. Married now, with a wife and small daughter to care for, my ambition revived to go to university and study for a degree. Interviewed by Professor A. V. Williamson, of the Department of Geography, Leeds University, I learnt that it was considered almost impossible for a man approaching 40, with a family

to maintain, to go to university.

While undergoing the two-year courses for teachers at Sheffield Training College, I discovered several third-year students were studying for degrees by means of correspondence courses. They could sit the examinations as external students of London University. London was an examining university; attendance at lectures was not compulsory, and students could study wherever they happened to be. London University students were to be found in isolated places thousands of miles from England.

Embarked upon my career as a teacher, my spare time was spent in preparing to pass the university entrance examinations. I began by passing the examination for the Diploma in Geography. Correspondence courses got me through this. I had no G.C.E. passes to show (having been educated in Canada years before), and the university refused to recognize my Certificate in Education which teachers gained by two years' study and passing examinations; they made me

sit the G.C.E. examination and pass at Advanced level. I was ill at examination time, so a year was wasted before I could sit the exam: I passed.

The final examination for the degree of B.Sc. (Economics) was in two parts. Part One consisted of eight papers, all of which had to be taken on the same occasion, and the student was allowed to be weak in only one paper, otherwise he had to sit the whole eight papers again. Part Two consisted of five papers. Men who had gained this degree by part-time study estimated it could be accomplished in seven years.

The weekly lessons provided by the correspondence school with which I enrolled varied in quality, but on the whole were very good. They consisted of lesson notes — often very copious — a weekly test, and model answers to the previous week's test. The answers to the weekly test were sent to one's personal tutor to be corrected, and returned with his comments. Some tutor skimmed their corrections, but generally speaking the staff did appear to take an interest in

the student's work. Some tutors proved to be the authors of the textbooks one was studying. Some proved quite friendly, scribbling personal notes of encouragement.

\* \* \*

Another four years of part-time study caused me to despair of ever gaining a degree by means of correspondence courses. The human contact, the ability to ask questions and receive individual answers are lacking. To sit down at a pile of lessons and textbooks, evening after evening, after a tiring day's work at school, becomes more and more difficult as the years go by. The feeling that one is a fool to go on trying becomes more and more pronounced. There is no *time* for social contact with one's wife and family, or with friends. Eventually they begin to lose patience with you.

A second attempt to get a place as a student at Leeds University proved unsuccessful. This time it was Prof. R. S. Dickenson who told me that a middle-aged man with a family to maintain did not stand a chance. Was there no hope at all for men in my

position? External students of London University could attend lectures for the B.Sc. (Economics) degree at the Institute of Technology, in Bradford. I decided to take a year off from teaching and attend lectures there three days a week. It meant a 20-mile journey each way from the Yorkshire village in which we lived, but it was worth it. The lecturers were first-class and very helpful. When I sat the examination for Part One I passed seven papers, and was referred in the eighth. This paper, Principles of Economics, I had to sit three times before passing.

Although I investigated every possible channel of official assistance to students, for funds to maintain myself and my family during that year of study, no help was forthcoming. We had to rely on savings and gifts from charitable organization; much of my success is due to the fact that I have the best wife in the world. Part Two was comparatively easy, by means of correspondence courses, and evening lectures at the College of Commerce, Manchester.

So I got my degree at the age of 50, or 35 years after the idea first came to me that I had a brain good enough for a university education, if only I had the opportunity.

How much did it cost? About £150, which includes fees for correspondence courses, books, maps, postage, tuition at the various colleges, fees for courses in field-geography. Plus the loss of a year's salary as a teacher. Also, it would be ungenerous to omit mention of the assistance given by such organizations as the West Riding County Library, Cheshire County Library, in loaning the expensive textbooks need-

ed; without their ready cooperation the costs of one's studies would be much increased. My thanks go out to them.

Was it worth it? Very definitely Yes. As a disabled man I now possess a higher qualification to a different type of teaching post, should future circumstances require me to give up my present job. Also, there has been the sheer delight of learning, of following a group of closely related subjects to a higher level. And lastly, I have proved to my own satisfaction that I could do it. — "J. H. L.", *The London Times*, Educational Supplement, May 24, 1963.

## GOOD GOVERNMENT

A wise and frugal government (which) shall restrain men from injuring on another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government. — *Thomas Jefferson*.