

ACHIEVEMENTS

Chair of Governors of my local primary school,

Having left state school teaching, I wanted to remain involved in the education system. My partner has a child at the local primary school and, since I believe that it takes a community to raise a child, I saw being a parent governor as the ideal way for me to contribute to the local community.

Green Party member,

My political activism has grown slowly over recent years, but the policies of the Green Party leading up to the 2015 Election resonated strongly with me. I find the party incredibly civilised in the modern political climate. *Altre Mon es Possible*, as the Catalans say. I hope the Greens will help to shape that world (although I've met Jeremy Corbyn and he's very civilised too).

season ticket holder

Sometimes you reap what you sow, even if you forget having sown. I put my name on the list for a season ticket. I thought it might be fun. I wasn't desperate to get one; I've never been more than a modest supporter of a team. But when the opportunity came, the time was right, and my partner said I should do something for myself. I encourage you to invest in your future, however you can, even if it's booking gig tickets for six months hence and then forgetting about them. That way, whatever life throws at you, you'll have a few pleasant surprises along the way.

London Sperm Bank donor,

I joined LSB for a number of reasons, one of which was to have a genetic child remotely, in case I couldn't have one of my own. I wanted someone to have my genes. I hope you don't think that's an entirely selfish wish. I'm proud of my genetic make-up and of the life I've managed to create with it, and I hope you enjoy whatever you create with my input.

Active member of [REDACTED]

I write in uncertain times. The world could be very different in only a few years, or even months. I want to do something to shape its future direction. So I sign petitions, and sometimes I march, and I always support those fighting for social justice. I try to stand up for what I believe in, because if not I, then who?

Published author [REDACTED]

My father is a writer of sorts, a journalist. Other family members have occasionally put pen to paper. I love writing and don't do enough of it. But I've never been as good at finishing writing projects as I am at starting them. So completing and publishing two books, even if they are textbooks, is an accomplishment that I think is worth mentioning. I hope to produce much more in the time that is left to me.

Voluntary tutor [REDACTED]

A very rich man recently wrote that other very rich people, rich enough that they will never have to work again, have two goals: learning and service. I think it's instructive, when making decisions, to begin by saying *If money were no object*, even when financial concerns cannot easily be ignored. The teaching I do voluntarily might say more about me than the teaching I do for money. I see one particular girl most Fridays, and have done for a couple of years now. She has a difficult relationship with her mother and a limited relationship with her father. I suppose that she, like you, is a preemptive substitute for the children I may not have. But the rich man was right: if you can afford to spend some of your time doing things that don't always bring in any money, then service is very rewarding. (Learning is very rewarding too.)

[REDACTED] chess ranking [REDACTED]

I'm pretty competitive, but primarily with myself (although I do love beating competitive people and giving the impression of not really caring). I like to know that I'm making progress ~ learning again. So when I started playing chess online I watched my ranking carefully. [REDACTED] is a reasonable level, but there's plenty of room for improvement.

GMAT score [REDACTED]

There are achievements that impress other people more than they impress me. This is one of those. The GMAT happens to be something I can do well. My high score doesn't make me a good person, but it's nice to have.

Geocacher, [REDACTED]

At university, we had modules called Special Authors ~ writers that we studied in depth. One of mine was Montaigne, and I recommend that you read his *Essais* at some point. (I had hoped that, like Montaigne, I might retire at the age of 38 to a tower in the countryside near Bordeaux, but I'm [REDACTED] still working [REDACTED]. I do however visit south-west France whenever I get the chance: it's one of my favourite parts of the world.) He extols the benefits of travel, and I agree with him: travel broadens the mind and promotes tolerance of others while allowing you to better critique the world you come from. Geocaching has led me to a number of places I wouldn't otherwise have visited, some far from home and others a stone's throw from places I know well. I've learnt a lot; I've seen a lot more. It's an activity I don't think I'll ever get bored of, even if I sometimes go months without doing it.

Teacher of Maths and Special Educational Needs, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

My mother always thought I should be a teacher. She used to cut job ads out of the paper and send them to me. But I was happy doing my own thing for a few years after university, dabbling in this and that, living here and there, and getting the life experience from which private school had largely sheltered me. I don't know why I finally decided to commit more than a year or two to teaching, but I learnt a lot from my PGCE and have learnt even more from what is now becoming a career in education. I always wanted to work with students who were just beginning to think for themselves. Teaching is not always as glamorous as *Dead Poets Society* makes it look (although management can be just as backward). But it has allowed me to help others, and that gives me a lot of satisfaction.

Captain of a football team, [REDACTED]

It's important to be part of a team sometimes, especially if you're happy on your own. You'll quickly learn that some people are leaders, some are followers and others are neither. I was always neither. But there comes a point where if you don't do something, it doesn't get done. So I agreed to captain a team, which basically involved doing all the admin and the finances. We had some great nights, both on the pitch and afterwards. And for the duration of each game, I was able to forget about everything else and live in the moment. I hope you find things that allow you to forget the mundanity and the frustrations of everyday life, and team sports are certainly healthier in that respect than drink or drugs.

Best online poker tournament finish: [REDACTED]

Did I mention that I'm competitive? I love games, especially games of skill which offer the opportunity to learn. Poker is one of those games. I'm not great at it, but I can hold my own most of the time, and I've had the odd decent result. I've also had some memorable home games with the guys, with pizza, and good music, and later whisky.

PGCE, French & Spanish, [REDACTED]

I have two postgraduate degrees, [REDACTED] and then there's my PGCE. It's my only professional qualification as an adult; among other things, it signals the moment my life gained a bit more direction.

Tour guide (France, UK)

Back in the day, I was responsible for getting upwards of 40 people, children and adults, round France while ensuring that they learnt something without drinking too much (especially the children) and had fun without losing track of time and delaying the rest of the group (especially the adults). Things didn't always go smoothly, but we got there, and we learnt stuff, and we had a lot of fun (and the occasional drink).

Lived in Catalunya

Live abroad at some point. You won't regret it. I've lived in Canada, France and Spain, for about a year each, and the experiences have been amazing: learning new languages, or new bits of old languages; meeting a whole new range of interesting people; and generally immersing myself in a different culture. With my genes you're bound to experience a certain amount of *wanderlust*: my advice is to give in to it regularly.

Book diary

At the turn of the millennium, I bought two diaries: a letter-writing diary and a book diary. The first didn't get beyond page one, but the second is still with me. It encourages me to read more (competing with myself again), and better, and reminds me what books I've read so that I can reread one or two of the best ones and enjoy them all over again. I've never really kept a proper diary, but this is one way of keeping some sort of record of my past.

MA (First Class) French and Linguistics

Another achievement that means more to others than it does to me, but I did work quite hard, especially in my final year. On one paper, I quoted Rabelais's description of a man who "got high on hemp" ~ an indication that he had been hanged, since hangmen used hemp for their ropes ~ and wondered whether Rabelais (another one of my special authors) enjoyed smoking pot (something I'd come across during my gap year in Canada). I have an image of Rabelais and Nostradamus together at the University of Montpellier in 1530, sharing a spliff on the banks of the river. It probably never happened. But it might have done. Incidentally, I got one of my highest marks on that paper. Either the examiner was bored or he (or possibly she) appreciated my unconventional interpretation of the text. Conventional has its place, but it will only get you so far, and many of the most interesting people I know are highly unconventional. If you ever read Rabelais in English, Urquhart's translation is the one to go for.

Right back, [REDACTED]

I wasn't that good. But I turned up, and I tried, and I didn't let the side down.

Steward, [REDACTED] FC and [REDACTED] FC

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] At school, I used to go to the local Ladbrokes, full of smoke and old gamblers, and bet 50p or even £1 on a horse for the joy of watching it probably not win while forgetting the day-to-day for a few minutes. [REDACTED], I'd walk half an hour up the hill to the [REDACTED] Ground [REDACTED] and then stand in my steward's fluorescent uniform, perhaps reading Baudelaire or just daydreaming, in front of a small group of away fans waiting for the game to start. [REDACTED] was a little quieter but it allowed me to make a bit of cash while giving something back to the community. I tend to seek out different experiences as they make for interesting (and sometimes very pleasant) memories.

Assistant, secondary school in Provence, [REDACTED]

My year in a small town [REDACTED] was my first experience of living abroad on my own. I was lucky with the place and saw a lot of southern France, and a little of Italy, while I was there. I managed to get a reasonable report, while not working too hard and helping a few French teenagers understand and speak English a little better. I also improved my own spoken French a lot. If you want to speak another language, immersion is essential.

Courier, Montréal, [REDACTED]

After a slightly sheltered childhood, I started to grow up during my gap year, finding work, managing my time and money and being exposed to experiences that shaped my view of the kind of person I wanted to be. As a courier I got to explore downtown Montreal, flirt with some stunning receptionists, play indoor golf with a CEO (I lost \$2) and see how a real business works. The boss of the agency I worked for was a friend of a friend. I didn't really know him when I started. A year later he had become something of a mentor, although I didn't realise that fully until later. When

he died of cancer, I ran my first marathon [REDACTED] in his memory. It's easier to overcome challenges with the right motivation. I've run two more marathons since; they were both much harder.

A Levels Grade A ~ English, Maths, French, Ancient Greek, [REDACTED]

I've never been much of a scientist but I seem to have a facility for languages and Maths, although being taught in small classes helped.

Youth Club instructor, Canada, [REDACTED]

My first proper job ~ previously I had a paper round and polished books for £2/hour (don't get a job polishing books – it will give you serious back pain). To work at the youth club, I had to gain several certificates the year before, and at that age a year's wait seemed like forever. But this was also my first experience of teaching and showed me the joy I could get from helping others achieve their goals. Also Canada is an amazing place to spend one summer, let alone every summer growing up.

Supporter, [REDACTED] FC

I like to be different, and to take a stand. I saw my first football match just after my seventh birthday, but a few years later I decided that [REDACTED] fans were racist and fickle. So I decided to pursue my own path and chose a team whose name and colours I liked. I've never regretted it. So it's more than ok to be different.

Grade 4 Piano; Grade 5 Theory

I didn't get very far with piano, although I did break my wrist (ice skating in Germany) shortly before my Grade 5 Piano exam. But I'm passing on some half-decent musical genes (my parents met in a singing group). If you find that you're happiest among creative people, you can blame me.

Winner, 12 & Under Boys Singles tennis [REDACTED]

Sometimes as a child it's nice to win something, even if people tell you it's the taking part that counts. I'm proud of my few tennis trophies, of which this was the first. I also won the men's solo canoe Crab Race at the Boating

Regatta, following in my grandfather's footsteps. You have seamanship in your genes from both sides of my family; at the very least, you should know that when the sun is over the yardarm, it's time for a drink.