

This story was filmed and recorded during early February 2006 for 'Hear all about it!'

This campaign is a wonderful selection of inspiring adult learning stories told by the learners themselves. The highlights from Ted's interview which can be watched and read; this is the transcript of the whole interview. The on-line learning champions would be delighted if his stories were used to promote learning in your organisation, college or charity. You can link you webpage to the West Midlands Learning Directory – Hear all about it! page

www.wmld.org/pages/hear_all_about_it/.



Ted's story –

My name's Edward Rudge but I like to be called Ted, and I'm currently 65 and I live at Shirley in the West Midlands. Birmingham born, all my life spent in Birmingham, worked in Birmingham.

At the Birmingham University, that's where I studied. I did 6 years study there, and I ended up with a Bachelor of Philosophy, two certificates of higher education, I then went on to do other things that the university recognised and put me up for this award with NIACE.

When I left School I was 15, I was born in 1940, and my tutors at the school I belong to were... I don't like to say the wrong words. But they were people who were not teachers in my eyes; they were there just to monitor you through. They taught you to read, they taught you to spell, they taught you to write, but there was no pushing, no effort. So on leaving school all you were was factory fodder, they just wanted you to work in a factory and earn your living.

I earned my living for British Telecom, which was Post Office telephones before that, and I stayed with them all my life. I had a lovely life out of it. Towards the end they were downsizing the staff, getting rid of people, I was 55 so I ended up with nowhere to go in the daytime. So I thought, right I'll try and do something about it. My wife heard a radio programme that was looking for people to join a course, a new course at Birmingham University, on the study of Birmingham. We've always loved the old parts of Birmingham and the study of it, so we went on the course. One thing led to another and 6 years later we finished the course and ended up with a degree.

So now instead of leaving school at 15 with nothing, all my life I'd gone through with 2 children who had gone to University, and they left me behind at about 10 in education terms, I can now compete on their terms. That was the real reason behind it. Every time I went for promotion with BT it was "What qualifications have you got?" Well all I'd got was 2 road safety certificates. But now I've got loads of things. I even took City in Guilds, In IT while I was at the University. I've got lots and lots of qualifications now. Whether I want to use them or not is another story but at least I've got them.

The course I was on was to do with the Life Long Learning, there's a school of life long learning at the university. There are several ways you can get your degree, the normal way is to leave school, join the University, get your degree when your 20 and you're in the big world. The Adult learning is quite different.

Sometimes there's a foundation course, to see what you can do, others have certificates of higher education, so at the end of it you've at least got something, a certificate, then they encourage you to move on. The first 2 years were the study of Birmingham. We studied Birmingham and then moved on. What do you move on to? Then we studied family history, social history.

So we'd done the History of Birmingham, social history, family history, and 2 certificates of higher education that equates to two thirds of a degree. At that present time there was no degree on the History of Birmingham. So they moved us into the philosophy stream of the university, then all of a sudden we had to understand the Philosophy of things and the study of Humanity. That's where my book came in. I was able to tell people about how I'd interviewed Romany Gypsies, the way the book came together, the life they led, where they came from. I did a dissertation on the Romany Gypsy Chains Birmingham. At the moment we've got no Romany Gypsies in Birmingham, they are all living in houses, other parts of the country they are still travelling, and it was a lovely dissertation.

I wrote a book while I was at the University; we were looking for a title so we called it *Brum Roamin*. Without the 'g' on the end. So like *Done Roamin*. Knock the 'g' off. It was a catchy phrase to cover the subject. The subject was part of the studies we did on Birmingham studies, studying communities; each student had a certain community to study. If you've been to university you soon realise that if you study something then study something that a lot of people have written about cause there's a lot of material to read. All the material subjects were already taken, the Irish of Birmingham, the Indians of Birmingham, most of those subjects had already gone and I was looking for somewhere and a tutor turned round and said, "do the Romany Gypsies, nobody has ever done that one before". For want of anything else I did it and found out that there was nothing that had been written about it. A lot of newspaper articles and a lot of court cases and things like that. We suddenly found out that the biggest enclave in England was in Birmingham at one time, over 300 families had got together. Knowing that dates and times and that we found, we thought lets find the families of these people.

So I went on the radio and we put out an appeal. The phone never stopped ringing for about a fortnight with all these gypsies. I went out and talked to them and one thing led to another and I was getting phone calls from all over the world to do with this subject, it was really getting good. So my tutor advised me to start my own archive up, so I interviewed people and kept an archive of what I'd said, and it just built up to about 80 cases. These 80 cases had stories they had heard from their parents or their grandparents, it needed writing up. I was at the time going to these Saturday courses learning how to put things together. I thought this is a wonderful opportunity to keep writing, and keep writing and that helped me.

The story got put together and Birmingham libraries wanted to publish it and they gave me an editor. We met and he looked at it and he said, "This is War and Peace, it will never sell. What you've got to do is rewrite it and get it punchy". So we rewrote it to 30 thousand words. It's difficult cutting words out,

you've written them and you don't want to throw them away. Suddenly you have to. Anyway it got accepted and they published it and now it is a success story.

The book got published and that gives you a lift, have you ever written a book? When you first see it. It's a wonderful feeling. Then we had a book launch, and we had over 300 families to this book launch, all gypsies, we had it at the library theatre. It was wonderful, wonderful. At the theatre I promised them, I'd do my best to get where your gypsy people were, which is now a park, as Birmingham in the 1800's people came in, Birmingham got built on, built on, built on. And what was happening was all of these houses was coming to a certain point where they'd got the cross roads of three districts, Handsorth, Smethwich and Birmingham. That's exactly where they were, these gypsies, on a river that runs through which was the border. And as the buildings got more important, they got to this point where they were surrounded by buildings, and that became important then. So the only way they could use that was to take the gypsies off. So they got evicted. As it turned out they didn't use it for building they built a park on it. I promised the audience that I would try and do my best and try and get them a memorial to the gypsies. Never thinking that I'm now saying to a local council can I put a memorial up to Romanies who they are trying to keep out of parks and open spaces and things like that. For over a year I was back and forwards to Sandwell council and in the end we got permission to do it.

I got the gypsies to raise the money, they raised the money, they bought the stone, I arranged the plaque, we got it fitted, and they dug the hole and put it in. We did it 100 years to the day of the eviction, so it was a real historical thing, and we are now meeting every year on that date, it's been there since July and it hasn't been touched, wonderful.

When I came to the end of the course after 6 years, Birmingham was looking for guides for the Back-to-Back houses. Back to Back houses was the traditional house to accommodate these people that came into the city .In the 60's Birmingham knocked every one down, except for one little group which was identified in 2000 and have been lottery money done up. The National Trust were looking for tour guides, I was just writing my dissertation and I thought, I was born in one, my wife was born in one, I thought well we musn't let this opportunity go. All this knowledge I've got from NIACE, all this University stuff, now they are looking for guides, perfect.

So I was then writing my dissertation and having to learn National Trust 10 weeks of training to become one of their guides. All of this helped the Award that I got. Now every Tuesday I am at the back to backs taking everybody round. It's wonderful. Since then the original 20 guides that they nominated for the starter course, thinking 20 would be enough; they've got 120 now. These have been people that have been born in back houses, others haven't but they are all taught to the same standard.

That was at the same time as writing the dissertation for the University, and it was quite a heady 6 years. People say now you've finished your education

what are you going to do now? I said well I'm going to have a gap year (laughs) I'm doing catch-up at home at the moment. Jobs I haven't done for 6 years. Then I'm going to go back and do web design. That's what I'm going to do next year. You know the bug's there and I don't want to let it go now.

I was very interested in the subject and I thought being as though I was going to Birmingham University you would be at the University. But 75% of the time was done at Birmingham library, where all the facilities were laid on there. It was part time, during the day or of a Saturday. Because I was studying in Birmingham, what better than the centre to learn, you've got all the museums and the libraries, the statues and buildings,

So place of learning didn't come into it you were told where to go. But it came into it when you started looking at cost, at the time you was paying train fares backwards and forwards to Birmingham that you couldn't recoup and you was paying for the course itself. After a bit that didn't come into it you knew each year it was part of your budget to carry on. Since you've stopped you start to realise how much you did spend to get what you've got.

Students talk about getting into debt and things like that, but fortunately we were at the other end of the scale where we had perhaps got the resources to do it, to get what we got.

The day I went to NIACE's awards ceremony in London it was just like the OSCARS, and to elevate somebody who was born in a Back House to something like this where you was meeting the leaders of the country. They all wanted to speak to you, the answer to that without doubt is yes. I do lot of after dinner speeches now and go to clubs and tell them about NIACE and tell them about learning. All this wouldn't of happened. It's just built up now and I have no fear at all and I'll talk to anybody, anywhere on any subject. So it has been worth it, yes.

This project was managed by jo.knight@niace.org.uk - who can be contracted for more information. She works for NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education). Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council funded the project.

