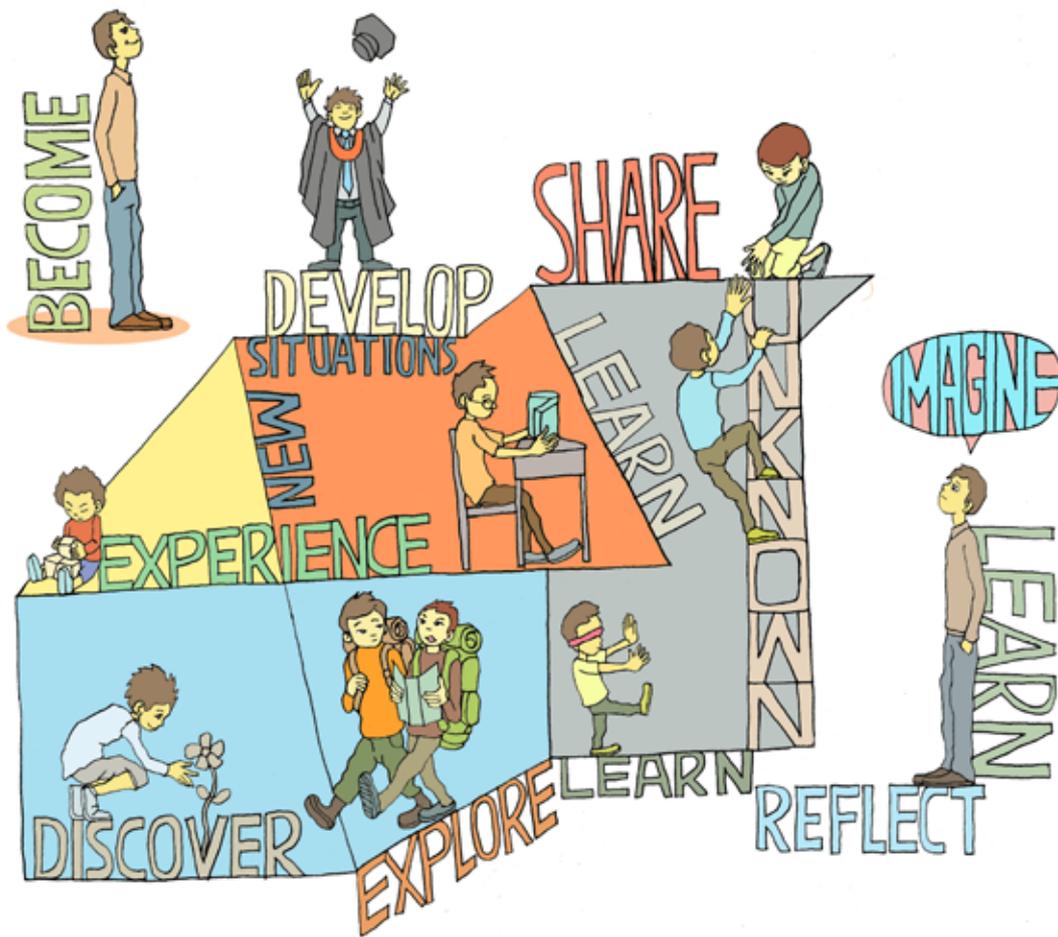


# 10 Stories of Lifewide Learning



*Here are some examples of stories written by students about things they have done in addition to their academic programme through which they have learnt and developed*

# 1

Over the one and a half years I have been at University, every experience I've had, challenge I've faced and friendship I've made has shaped me and lead to some incredible opportunities.

Before I came to university, I had very little knowledge of music theory. Although I had been singing for some time at various events and writing a multitude of inadequate songs, I had never believed in myself or considered myself to be a valuable contributor to the realm of music. I chose creative music technology because it was something I could find a passion in, not because I believed it was something I was good at.

This year, I have tried not to simply study robotically, (which perhaps was my approach to studies last year) but really delve into my learning and simultaneously broaden my lifewide experiences through and beyond it. It is so important to believe in yourself, especially as a musician and composer.

What a privilege it is to be brushing shoulders with such a wealth of gifted musicians! Last year, I thought of myself unworthy to collaborate with these people that I looked up to. I felt a sense that I didn't belong here. However, this year I've realized that I am on a journey of self-discovery. Not that I now consider myself "worthy", but I am now choosing to place my insecurities aside in an attempt to cease them from holding me back and stopping me from developing and growing as a person and musician. I have been learning from guest speakers of the music industry, to first say yes, and work out how to do it later... a philosophy I have sought to adopt in my musical endeavors.

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I met a rapper last year in a strange and uncomfortable environment; we had both agreed to assist an unknown music student in his experiment. I was blown away by this young rapper's talents and fresh, uncorrupted lyrics. For years, I had been praying for a rapper to write with... and now, I was face-to-face with the answer to my prayers. When he asked me to collaborate with him, how could I have said no? "First say yes, and work out how to do it later", right? So that's what I did.

This friendship has been so great; we went to London together to meet with one of his producers, and it was such an eye-opener for me to really see what a producer's life was like in the *real* world. They have both come to gospel choir rehearsals to get an idea of the sound for our track and we are now in the process of writing for the choir, him and hopefully an orchestra. Although it is a really ambitious idea, I am thoroughly enjoying the experience and am developing the necessary skills not only through my studies but also through the process of transcribing, arranging and teaching new songs to the choir; something I *never* imagined I'd be capable of doing.

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This year when I moved into my new room, it didn't take long for the couple I was living with to discover that I lead the gospel choir at university. They immediately put me in contact with their nephew who's in a band. This band, *Mikobi* were in the process of recording their new album and required a gospel choir. Funny, that. Although at first, I thought it was strange to contact an unknown person regarding a

shared musical passion, I sheepishly made myself known and offered the services of the choir.

To make a long story short, I met them at some rehearsal studies and they played me some of their tracks. I liked their sound. That night they sent me some live recordings and within a few hours I returned the songs with three-part harmonies I'd sung over them. I thought to myself, 'Why not? I'll give it a go!' and placed very little pressure on myself.

They replied with such enthusiasm! I actually really enjoyed the process of allowing myself to get lost in the music, and sing what comes naturally. They liked my voice in particular, and asked if I'd record the parts on their album. What an honour. I won't lie, I hate my voice... but to have someone believe in me like that is such an incredible encouragement and it seemed to just belittle my insecurities. We recorded the smoothest and most enjoyable session I've ever experienced in *Vamp Studios* about a month later.

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Recently, an old friend of mine from Southampton got in contact about his band, *Crossbeam's* new album. They were wanting a choir-like backing, and so had asked a few singers they knew to go and record some harmonies they had written. There were 8 of us at the session and so together we recorded each part separately to then be layered up.

We were singing and recording for 4 hours straight. Unbelievable considering most of us were ill with sore throats and stuffy noses! To learn the parts and record straight away with enthusiasm and passion was quite a challenge, but I loved it. It was so nice to work to my strengths of learning aurally and being able to pick up harmonies quickly; a strength I had really been developing with my role in the gospel choir for the last year and a half. It was nice to now see how this gift could benefit me in situations beyond Monday night gospel choir rehearsals.

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It is inspiring to me how things fall into place; how the people you meet and things you do lead to important and exciting friendships, how past friendships bring about new opportunities and how things you've been involved in, in the past have been part of the process of development, shaping you just in time.

Of course, there's always going to be someone out there better at writing harmonies, better at singing, quicker at picking things up and perhaps less annoying... but who am I to filter the opportunities that come my way? Who am I to say that I am not good enough when there's someone out there who believes in me?

May I not continue to allow my insecurities to get in the way of growing and developing as a person and musician. Sometimes it's in these insecurities and 'weaknesses' that we find the most raw and passionate expression. This is what we, as musicians strive for.

May we no longer shy away or pretend to be something we're not but find that raw, passionate expression that's individual and special to each person and be brave enough to let it loose...

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Last year, I used to think that my studies were just 'getting in the way' of all the other wonderful things I was a part of. But now, I've finally realized that everything I'm involved in gives my studies true purpose; they give me the drive to put my heart into all that I do. Things like gospel choir, ultimate frisbee and writing and recording with bands gives me a reason to write a 6000 word essay, a reason to compose when I'm stressed and a reason to revise for exams. I wouldn't change that for the world!

## 2

I have always enjoyed working with children and therefore chose to engage in volunteer work involving children. As an educational volunteer, I visited a school in Guildford where I helped children with learning difficulties, to complete their school work. I was not very confident the first time I walked into the school, and when I heard I was actually to work with the children the teachers struggled with, I was not convinced I would be doing a good job. I see my ten weeks at the school as a journey. It was a journey both for me and the students. I started that journey as a beginner. I would hesitate in how much help to give each child and how to adapt to their difficulties, and I would doubt myself. For the children, the journey started out with a new teaching assistant, continuing with getting to know her, to finally trust and confide in her. I have always been very independent but what my educational volunteering showed me was that a journey towards learning cannot always be done on my own. I do not believe I would have benefited as much from teaching children who were not prepared to take the journey with me, children who would agree to get to know me, and be patient with me those weeks when I was not sure about what I was doing. The first time I came, some of the children would barely answer when I spoke to them and I would hesitantly suggest an assignment. On my last day the children knew me, and I felt confident in what I was teaching and how I was doing it. I saw educational volunteering as me coming into a school and help changing children's lives. I never knew how much we could change each other's. I saw it as me teaching them, however they ended up teaching me as well. And last but not least, I saw my own development through the teaching, but I never imagined we would develop together.

I continued my volunteering with Girlguiding UK, where I helped to lead a group for young girls, in games and activities. Even though my presence there was important for health and safety, I experienced that my most important role was being a role model for the children. Girlguiding is very focused on giving girls the courage to be themselves, and I realised that if I was to lead this group, I would need to know myself very well. In that way the girls inspired me to get to know myself better and to look into what I really enjoyed doing. I learnt how to lead a group of children, set and maintain boundaries, deal with stressful situations and improvise when something unexpected changes your plans, and even though all those are very useful qualities, I still believe learning who I was, through and with the children, was equally important.

When I started volunteering for Halow, helping young people with learning disabilities towards living a normal life, I learnt to take my knowledge from my previous volunteering with me, and to adapt this to my new volunteer position. I started out working with the young people at Halow as if I was working with children, and soon realised I was not doing it quite right. No one likes to be wrong or do their job in a faulty way, and I believe that a few months ago I would not have been able to see that my way was wrong and ask for guidance. However I did, and it was my previous

volunteering that had taught me how important it is to ask for help and guidance when you need to. It took me a while before I found a way of working with the young people in an appropriate way, and out of all the jobs I have had, this has been the most challenging one. I have learnt through doing, and I did find it quite scary sometime. Looking back I can see how I turned from clueless to very confident in my volunteer position. I started helping out leading an arts and crafts group, which was a lot of responsibility at first and very intimidating. It is now one of my favourite moments of the week, and inspiring the young people to paint and create has inspired me to do the same in my life.

Participating in this award has taught me how the learning I am doing today goes together with the learning I did yesterday, and how new knowledge comes from previous knowledge. I have seen how the things I engage with help me to develop, and I am enjoying growing and learning much more than before now that I can see the value of it. I have learnt to recognise an opportunity and take the chance. These insights make me feel certain that I will continue working on my personal and professional development even after I have completed the award.

Life wide learning happens everywhere and all the time. It does not have to be learnt in a special way or place, and most of the time it does not come from a book or lecture. It is the learning that happens when we go out in the world; it is the learning that comes with experience. It is the learning that will change us and our personality. Most importantly, I see life wide learning as learning who you are.

### 3

I took part in a trip to Uganda as a volunteer. When I heard about this trip I thought it was an opportunity not to be missed and I had been told that it would be a life changing experience. In the summer of 2010 I travelled to Mukono, Uganda for one month with three other students to volunteer in a Children's home and Health centre.

Before I went to Uganda I had already developed a great deal as a person; I was the project organiser and thus I was in charge of making sure that the trip did in fact take place. I developed skills such as co-ordinating a group of people that at times needed some motivation!! I sent regular emails to all group members, ensuring that everyone had had their vaccinations, applied for their visa as well as the many other requirements needed for such a trip. As well as this I had regular email contact with those in Uganda who we were to stay with for the duration of our trip. In addition to this, we had a lot of fundraising to do; I came up with fundraising ideas with the group and implemented them; organising a fundraising event is more difficult than it appears; I had to co-ordinate group members and assign roles to each person – I feel that this has enhanced my management and team work skills.

The reality of going to Uganda hit me as the time crept closer. I became worried and doubted whether I should go – however I had to have faith in myself and the trip that it would be a success and worthwhile. I was putting myself in to a completely unknown situation with trust that everything would run smoothly, this was very daunting for me but I feel that it has taught me that one must take risks in life in order to experience life to the full.

In Uganda we stayed on a farm in a village for the duration of one month. For this entire period we became completely immersed in African culture; this has made me so much more aware of issues around the world. Of course I have always known that there are 'starving people in the world' but to actually see these people is something else. We travelled to villages where families of 10 people were squashed in to a tiny hut, it was shocking. I am now so truly grateful for everything I have. I am grateful that when I go to the bathroom hot water comes from the tap and I can have a warm shower (something we dreamed of while we were in Uganda). On one occasion we bought 200 bananas and took them to the children's home and gave a banana to each child- the children were so happy. Here, in England we take things like bananas for granted, we may even throw half of it in the bin – seeing how the children were so happy with such a basic thing has really opened up my eyes.

In addition to this, when teaching in the children's home, we brought newspapers so the children could do group work and present a story from the newspaper to the class. I thought that this would be a nice, calm activity for the children to engage in; however I was very wrong, when we revealed the newspapers the children became ecstatic-they were literally fighting over the newspapers, craving to read them. I simply could not believe this reaction – here in England many children have daily access to newspapers and many do not want to read them. I believe that these children in Uganda, being in a children's home craved knowledge of the outside world-something they rarely experience. Again this has opened my eyes so much as I have never thought of a newspaper as a luxury however now I value having knowledge about the world as I have seen that many people in the world are declined this privilege. Experiences like those stated above have changed and developed me as a person; they have made me more aware of issues in the world and have truly made me value things that before I may have taken for granted.

I believe that as a result of this experience, I have become more selfless. I have promised those at Mukono Children's home that I will buy them a cow in order to provide milk and thus, nutrition for the children (the children eat their porridge with water and the food they eat on a daily basis is repetitive with very little nutritional value) as well as this the children will learn important agricultural skills as a result of caring for a cow. Therefore going to Uganda has inspired me to start my own project to continue to support these children.

In Uganda people were so friendly, those who had so little seemed genuinely happy. This has taught me that one does not need material things to gain happiness – here in the west so much is based on material objects, and there people had so little and were happy. I think this is because they appreciate the little things in their life and thus I have come to learn to also do so.

Going to Uganda to volunteer was the best month of my life – I met wonderful people who had little but were so lovely and welcoming. As a result of working in a children's home and health centre I learnt to appreciate the little things in my life. As well as this I have learnt practical skills such as organisational and teamwork skills. I learnt so much in one month and had a wonderful time! I would recommend such a trip to everyone!

To me 'lifewide learning' means learning in a practical way - It is gaining experiences which complement traditional learning styles. An example could be that at the University of Surrey we take part in a placement year, this year is solely practical and gives us experience that we could not gain from reading an academic book. I believe that the aim of 'lifewide learning' is to provide a more complete type of learning,

which will help one develop as a person as well as providing a variety of skills which will no doubt be useful throughout ones' life.

## 4

I believe that the key to success in life does not lie in how much marks one scores at University, but in how much they learn from the situations they're in. I joined UniS in 2007, hoping to get opportunities of development which are not just restricted to academia, and honestly I didn't find much. So I went out of my way, networked with people that I thought were smarter than me so I could learn something from them and every-time I stumbled upon some project or business proposition or programme which showed me a whole new life.

Since I joined this UniS, I have worked on a Moon rover project with European Space Agency, went on an year abroad programme in Singapore, travelled to Seoul to represent my ideas of globalisation to an elite gathering of UN and US Department of State representatives, pursued an industrial placement programme in one of the most competitive engineering companies and then went on to start my own business. Not just that, now I am also involved with Save the Children charitable organisation as their public speaker.

To someone who hasn't been through the situations that I have been in it might seem like a fairy tale, but to me it was a pursuit for survival – survival from financial and intellectual bankruptcy! Even before recession hit the world, somehow I quickly realised that if I ever had to be successful I will have to differentiate myself from the crowd, otherwise I'll end up serving those who did manage to do something unique in their life. As crazy as it might sound, I used to believe that in the future only two kinds of people would exist, the ones who are successful and the ones who serve the ones who are successful! And I certainly had no intentions of being the latter. I always wanted to be somebody and not just anybody!

In this essay I will share with you two of my most unique experiences, which would hopefully shed light on how I managed to do the kind of things I did without any major financial support from my family.

In summer of 2009 I got back from Singapore to join Qualcomm's highly reputed firmware team. Despite the fact that I had returned from Singapore I had maintained excellent relationships with all my friends and acquaintances in the network which I had formed there. And it was in summer of 2009, when a friend from Singapore visited me in London and introduced me to a piece of technology that he thought was "sale-able". After carefully researching the industry, I realised that by slightly tweaking the product we could address a big market gap, which could potentially makes us thousands of pounds. Once the product was ready, we faced challenges with paying UK manufacturers high cost, so leveraging upon my personal network I helped establish manufacturing contracts with companies in India. The point to note is that initially it was just a lab experiment and my friend wanted to do something with it! Just by fully utilising my skills, network and resources I connected the dots around the world by bringing in other Angel Investors and established a company jointly operating out of Delhi, Seattle, London, Istanbul and Singapore. Initially this was something I was pursuing out of interest, but once it turned into a success I faced with real challenges pertaining to time as I was already working ten hours a day on

my Industrial Placement. But using my effective time management and prioritisation skills, I found enough time on weekends and evenings to run this business, while working on University projects in daytime. The achievement is unique because when my peers were partying and enjoying sunny weekends in summer of 2010, I was hopping flights to establish a global contract between investors. It was unbelievably challenging to be on an industrial placement and at the same time trying to hold conferences on skype with people based in different countries to make imminent decisions. Most importantly, I have gained firsthand experience of the kind of risks my future clients might face while operating in a globally competitive marketplace and all the legalities that are involved with setting up an international business. But personally, it is quite satisfying and I am proud to admit that with the profit I made in that business stint I could pay off a portion of mortgage on my parents home right in New Delhi, the capital city of India.

Noteworthy is my experience at Qualcomm Inc. (company where I spent my Industrial Placement year), where I faced with an unusual challenge of working in a team with Principal Engineers, Vice-Presidents and Industry Analysts of various divisions, who weren't even based out of the UK office. The project that I was given ownership of was a pioneering automated environment which was initiated in the US offices and was being transitioned into the ones across Europe and Asia. To my surprise, I was given the full responsibility and asked to be the 'Point of Contact' for teams all over Europe and Asia. Using my effective communication and judgement skills I used to liaise activities across the company's offices in Seoul, Bangalore, Frankfurt, Shanghai and San Diego, which for the majority of my placement required me to come in the office before Korean colleagues left and leave not until the US office went on lunch. The developmental responsibilities I had were in line with my technical skills but the coordination/negotiation part was the toughest because even to communicate an issue that my team was facing I had to be fully prepared on a technology that I had never worked with. Preparation for coordination meetings required me to seek help from colleagues across different divisions/ranks, which is the only way I could've been fully prepared to intellectually discuss a problem with senior management of the company. It must be noted that I was advised not to "work so hard", but had I not done it I wouldn't have learnt as much as I know today about the business of the engineering world.

Today, in my final year I am leading a team of students to implement a professional networking initiative. The project has the potential of having lasting impact on the manner in which students learn at University because we're bring the professional world closer to the academic one. The project involves development of a website, but most importantly being able to understand the needs of students and implementing it.

I have utilised every single minute of the life I have lived in UK since 2007. Even in my first year, when I found myself with ample time in my hand – I used to help my father with his work by drafting legal work which helped me learn things I wouldn't have learnt otherwise.

Looking back, the single turning point of my life was when I chose to go on an exchange program in Singapore and that was despite multiple warnings from my lecturers that if I go I won't be able to get placement and many other difficulties. But honestly, exchange programme opened my eyes and helped me learn that my real interest lies in business and finance and not in Engineering. I get reminded of Steve Jobs famous speech which he gave at Stanford's commencement and said "You've got to find what you love doing and you have to do it even if that leads to you to opposition from the whole world". I learnt my interest, followed it and today I am at a position where I have been offered a position within a very competitive Investment

Banking industry and another job offer from a management consulting firm, even before I graduate. It's all good now, but had I not utilised those unique opportunities to develop myself personally, professionally and socially and had I not networked with smart people I wouldn't have been in such a good position.

Lifewide learning is all about utilising every single opportunity of development, while ignoring the difficult situations it might lead one into. One of the best things that I've learnt so far is that how successful a person is only partly dependent on the situation they're in but primarily dependent on how they respond to those situations. It's about understanding a life situation, quickly adapting to the changing world order and responding to it by engaging oneself in bigger challenges. Learning is not limited to educational institutions, learning is best accomplished from the grandest institution called Life, and one who succeeds at learning from that institutions, can achieve anything one sets his mind on.

## 5

I climbed out of bed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June, 2010 half hoping that the interview I had that day for a small business in London would be cancelled. As a friendly, day dreaming lazy young student 6am starts were never really my strongest point. Nevertheless, I jumped into my very smart, super stern yet uncomfortably feminine power suit and got on my way. As a Yorkshire bred girl, going to London was still an adventure for me and would conjure up memories from the past of sporadic day trips with the family to the mysterious capital (which always seem to end up in Dad boasting "see, you have to drive like a maniac in London, like they do" and Mum screaming at Dad for driving like a maniac). The nerves were disturbing but as I pulled up to the building an empowering thought entered my head. "Well you are here now so be yourself and if you are suitable they'll take you. If not...on to the next"

Unfortunately, I walked into the building to be greeted by a lovely young student only to be told that I was in fact a whole day early for the interview. Thankfully, my own lack of organisation worked to my advantage with me apparently appearing 'eager' and 'confident in my own abilities' – in reality I was early because I didn't check my e-mails and my 'confidence' was actually lack of care (I was certain this error had completely written my chances off). I walked away with a renewed faith in myself, feeling as though my abilities had been acknowledged and into an office (key card and all) two weeks later. Growing up as a closeted, Indian lesbian with a severe case of middle child syndrome this achievement meant that regardless of all of those rather unimportant facts about myself I had been acknowledged as an individual. I had even accidentally come out to them in the interview...the most empowering mistake I have made in my young working life.

Although the placement interview was a success, 2010 had started badly for me with my closest uncle passing away on the 9<sup>th</sup> of January. Funeral arrangements and my inability to cope meant my exams were pushed back until summer (leaving me to juggle a tasking new placement and revision) and I slipped into a world of denial and escapism. Eventually I came out of this and began to cope but a few months later another uncle died and I had to hear my mother's screams. No one had seen her blindly following someone in to the incinerating room, in her distressed and vulnerable daze. I have vowed never to attend a funeral again as no one should hear

those screams or see what I saw. I don't feel sorry for myself though, it's all a learning curve. 2010 was a never ending learning curve, one that I have chosen to empower me.

I have always been a positive, open minded and accepting person only ever wanting the best for everyone around me. Just like most people my age I had absolutely no idea where I wanted to go in life or how I was going to get where I supposed I wanted to be and this lack of ambition made me lazy. My first month working reflected my renewed happy go lucky but aimless attitude and soon realised that such an approach has no place in a professional environment. The lack of organisation which I once found funny was now my biggest flaw and I set about rectifying this by use of spreadsheets, calendars and diaries. I forced myself to wake up to my alarm rather than wake up, make an excuse to be late and turn up scatter brained. I trained myself by using my colleagues experience and ability to tutor me and through all of the pro-active behaviour began to realise my ambition. I was working in the heart of London, commuting to work and providing work for clients such as BBC, Orange and The Guardian and I *loved* that. I realised that I wanted this – the hard work with big benefits, a strictly black, gray and white dress code and a calendar with planned events pencilled in. I realised that this placement didn't just serve as a year out of university to make money but it was going to be my foot in the door moment. This placement was giving me invaluable experience in the City available for me to use at my discretion. Now I know I want to be successful so that I can provide a comfortable life style for my family who have never had such luxuries, and also for myself as my fulfilment comes from achievement, acknowledgement and taking care of those I love.

Sadly, I soon encountered another harsh reality – *you can't choose who you work with*. My supervisor had become increasingly rude and intrusive with his questions, once even telling me to tell my "girlfriend to pull her finger out" when I had expressed a desire to be at my rented flat helping her with household chores (I soon learned that separating home and work life is vital). I would stay awake late just to make the most of my time with someone who cared for me, dread the next day and cry on my commute knowing that I was going to face a sexist man who would belittle me and treat me like a slave in the office. I purposely walked into people on the commute home hoping somebody would turn around and hit me so I could do the same back and rid myself of the anger and turmoil. Maybe it's because I was a Londoner now, lost in a mess of people all wanting to be noticed. Or maybe it's because I needed to learn that hatred is never going to help and there will always be people that we do not get along with but we do not need to accept it nor must we resign our ability to pity someone rather than stoop to their level. It culminated with me losing all of my confidence and becoming so depressed I had to contact my placement advisor who saved me in every sense of the word.

*"Celebrate your success and stand strong when adversity hits...for when the storm clouds come in, the eagles soar while other birds take cover"*

My life is not a sob story, it is Lifewide Learning to me: It has taken me a quarter of a year to get my confidence back but I will never forget or regret 2010. I learnt how to use SPSS, excel and PowerPoint at expert levels but more importantly I have learnt that life is tough. For all of us. But what's matter is what you do with the tough times. Embrace adversity for it's not whether you fall, it's whether you get back up.

2010 = 3 deaths, 1 baby, a prison trial, both parents being made redundant, a bully at work and because of it all the strongest Me I have ever known.

2011 = completion of a successful work placement with outstanding references; the organised and well thought out start of a 1<sup>st</sup> class honoured dissertation; a month on holiday to let the sound of the sea take away the negatives of a somehow positive year and most importantly a youthful, organised, ambitious, still caring, still humorous, grateful, empowered me.

Oh and the power suit J See you in the city.

## 6

Audrey Hepburn once said *“As you grow older, you will discover you have two hands. One for helping yourself and one for helping others”* and that quote sums up my life. My past experience of suffering from Anorexia Nervosa has made me determined to help raise awareness about this debilitating illness which sadly affects approximately 1.6 million people throughout the UK and is responsible for more loss of life than any other form of psychological illness.

I never thought I would ever get to University, let alone use my past experiences to help others. The first year of studying Psychology at Surrey really changed my life; I met amazing friends, had a lot of fun, and for the first time in 4 years, I had the energy to really enjoy life and achieve my academic potential, and it was then when I really got a glimpse of what the future could hold for me. I now have an incurable sense of optimism and look forward to helping those with Eating Disorders.

My past has also encouraged me use my experiences to help sufferers. I am proud to say that I am a Young Ambassador for the Eating Disorder charity, Beat, training to become a volunteer Samaritan, give up my Christmas day to befriend drug addicts, alcoholics and the homeless, participated in a 10,000 feet skydive to raise money for Beat and meeting my local MP to discuss with him my views about healthcare professionals providing early intervention for people diagnosed with Eating Disorders.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2010, I jumped 10,000 feet out of a plane to raise money for Beat; I doubled my original target of £400 and raised an amazing £875. This will certainly be a day I will remember for the rest of my life, but what I'll remember more is the fact I overcame my fear of heights and jumped with a smile; giving something back to a charity that changed my life will be a feeling I will remember forever

As a Young Ambassador for Beat, I am involved with the development of their education prevention plan which is going to get send into schools to help staff spot the signs of eating disorders. In the future, I would love to set up and run a self help group for sufferers and their families and would like to write a recovery book to help others realise recovery is possible. I am also hoping to get involved with Eating Disorder Awareness week which begins on the 21<sup>st</sup> February and ends on the 26<sup>th</sup> February.

I am also in the process of becoming a volunteer for the Samaritans. A friend of mine sadly committed suicide 3 years ago, therefore this really encouraged me to work for the charity and give people who are in distress a chance to speak through their problems.

Giving up the morning of my Christmas day to befriend the homeless, drug addicts and alcoholics is really special. I feel too many people like to receive at Christmas, but I like to give. If I can make their Christmas day that little bit happier, that beats any Christmas gift.

I am also a volunteer with Great Ormond Street Hospital, and giving up my time to help in the Eating Disorder Research Unit at Guy's Hospital alongside Consultant Psychiatrist Professor Janet Treasure.

Through all my charity work I have gained an incurable sense of satisfaction and pride. I feel that we are all here for a reason, and I believe that reason for me is to throw little torches out to lead people through the dark times. I think 2011 can really be the year where I can start to put things into perspective. When I look back upon my life, the moments that really stand out are the moments when I have done things for others.

Lifewide learning to me doesn't just apply to my academic studies. My past experiences has made not only determined to achieve my dreams of becoming a Clinical Psychologist, but also determined to make life better for individuals who are going through hard times. I feel when you positively start to touch the lives of others is the time you truly start living.

I can honestly say that my charity work has really changed my life; it has helped my recovery in the sense that in order to help others, I have to help myself. When I look back on my past, it has only made me so much stronger and really appreciate the little things in my life. Having been held in Anorexia's grip for many years, if I can use my experiences to have a positive impact on others who find themselves suffering from this devastating and destructive disorder; my struggle then would have not been in vain.

## 7

I am in my final year of Law with International Studies and it was always expected that I should go into practice once university finished. Before university, I already had an interest in short story writing and comic script writing and it was only until taking a CSV course in journalism that I decided to pursue writing as a career rather than a hobby, albeit freelance. This freelance ambition has gradually turned into a passion for multimedia journalism which should result in the start of a NCTJ journalism qualification next year. Law has taken a secondary stance but I feel that my improvement in my writing skills have resulted in better researched and well written legal and political assignments. And so I will continue to balance this drive to become a journalist with my existing legal commitments as a court reporter and at the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Law Centres Federation.

For most people, journalism used to be just a profession. It was a job that required certain qualifications, experience, confidence and charisma. But due to the emergence of the internet, citizen journalism was born. Through free software, citizens are able to write or blog, without using any specialist knowledge or experience, about their preferred topic. Although some pieces of work are credible, many citizen 'journalists' seem to take news stories from popular websites and then

change a few words without implementing new thoughts or angles into the established storyline.

My interest in journalism and wanting to make better use of my writing skills in the wider public arena had begun in this way. One of my first opportunities was volunteering as a web based news writer which involved sourcing existing entertainment news stories with a rock, alternative theme from websites and then re writing the story for the relevant audience. Through this given list of websites, I was able to improve my skills involved in spotting a newsworthy story and in meeting the needs of a specific audience. Unfortunately, I was not developing my own writing style as I did not create the initial storyline and so could not take credit for my 'news writing' even though it was witnessed by an audience.

Following the above reality check, I started applying for the position of voluntary writer with online magazines who were willing to employ new writers and develop their basic ability to write. So, I learnt the process of sub – editing and entertainment feature writing whilst volunteering for Dr. Desi, the art of reviewing music and how to write persuasively through youlikewelike.com as well as blogging techniques through volunteering with the youth charity, Youth Net. In addition to these virtual 'online' opportunities, I was very excited about securing a placement with Life Fm, Brent's local radio station which highlighted that I was not getting the best journalistic experience by working from home. As a result, I developed an aptitude for conducting interviews, a vital skill in journalism, by interviewing the ex – CEO of the BBC, Tony Benn as well developing my experience in keeping to strict deadlines through working behind the scenes of a successful community radio station. Furthermore, I enjoyed interacting with and working with a diverse range of individuals, all passionate about their profession.

My next experience of writing came in the form of my legal affairs internship at the European Healthcare Fraud and Corruption Network, Brussels. One of my tasks was to track EU legal developments and then create a legal/policy based report using these findings. As well as improving my legal knowledge of the EU health care sector, this activity developed my ability to write concisely and I learnt how to implement a policy based opinion based on EHFCN's values and beliefs within sections of the existing news story therefore giving the story a different twist. In hindsight, my law degree also benefited from this placement as I was able to use this information to write my current dissertation on EU health care. The best achievement from this opportunity was that I was able to build a strong portfolio of articles that allowed me to get a paid freelance monthly job writing informative fashion articles with a UK marketing company. EHFCN also made me realise that after I graduate I wanted to pursue journalism as my main career. As a result of my writing opportunities, I have become more interested in current affairs and am able to integrate this skill into my debates present in my Politics seminars.

Although I have been successful in my 'online' writing, I still had aspirations to get involved in opportunities that allowed me to create and develop my own story that had particular significance in reality rather than just appealing to an editor's wishes. Thus, I was overjoyed to be chosen as the Amateur Swimming Association's Media Liaison Volunteer where my current task is to conduct interviews with young disabled volunteers interesting in participating in the Paralympics and then write articles which are featured on the ASA's website and their magazine The Swimming Times. I have learnt to adapt my interview technique to a situation as I have discovered you need to make young people confident about talking to you as well as liaising with media professionals to document these Olympic inspired moments. I am looking forward to future events with the ASA which involves writing about high profile sport events such

as the British International Disability Swimming Championships (Paralympic Trials) and the DSE Juniors.

Other forthcoming events involve a magazine project with Bauer Media Company on behalf of Great Ormond Street Hospital and being involved in the organisation of an Access to Fashion event to be held at the National Magazine Company headquarters. I will demonstrate my utmost commitment to both these confirmed activities and will strive towards creating a better future for myself within the journalism field. Perhaps, I will make that leap from being a writer to a journalist and learn that magic does not happen only when the pen touches paper.

Exploring life through varied experiences that enrich a person's physical and emotional being can be considered life wide learning. These experiences can be gradual and can change your career, your happiness, your enthusiasm for culture or your appreciation for new experiences as well as your attitude towards life. The phrase indicates that an individual should be pro active about their learning and realise that one life changing experience is useless if it does not have the help of other smaller experiences to shape it. Lastly, it means that one never stops learning and finding ways to captivate and discover.

## 8

Whilst, I have gained enormously from the academic work undertaken during the course of my MSc in Advanced Practice (Nurse Practitioner), I have also gained a greater understanding of the wider world and this has helped me to grow as a person as well as giving me greater empathy with patients and their families in the course of my work as a nurse. This greater understanding of the wider world came about as a result of difficulties I experienced in my personal life. Within a few weeks of commencing my MSc programme my mother's health deteriorated suddenly in Scotland. She was diagnosed with terminal cancer and died six weeks later. My father's health deteriorated progressively over the subsequent two years until he too died. I spent every second weekend in Scotland for two years as well as every holiday and was glad to be there in order to sort out the myriad of problems. This was however stressful as I was involved on such an emotional level, as well as trying to keep up with my academic work and the demands of my nursing job.

I do not want this to appear to be a sob-story as it is anything but this. Although, the deterioration and subsequent deaths of one's parents is difficult and sad, the experience has developed me as a person. Whilst dealing with all the problems associated with the situation, I went through a whole range of emotions and was able to experience first-hand all the levels of grief including anger, denial, bargaining and acceptance. Having been through this, I can now more easily recognise the pattern in my patients and their relatives and this gives me a far greater understanding and hopefully makes me a better nurse. As a lot of my work involves dealing with dying patients and their families, I now feel I have a truer understanding of what they are experiencing although I am well-aware that each person is an individual and has their own way of coping. When this life-experience is tied-in with the academic learning gained at university, it is indeed a powerful tool.

Watching my parents cope with their deterioration with good humour and pleasantness to all around them, made me proud of them and I would like to think I

too could behave like this. It is certainly a skill which could be applied to many difficult situations and indeed when the going got tough with my dissertation was a useful strategy! This is also relevant to many situations one finds oneself in while nursing.

A vital thing I realised during the course of my parents' illnesses was the importance of the way in which the health professionals treated both them and myself. Even though I am a trained nurse, I found myself hanging on to every word they said and feeling so grateful for and noticing every little kindness. I mentioned to a nurse one day while my father was unconscious, that he had been a great lover of classical music throughout his life. When I visited the hospital next day there was a CD player playing classical music next to his bed. I will never know if my father was aware or not of this, but it meant a huge amount to me and made me feel that the staff really cared about both him and me. This little gesture from them made me so very confident in their care and made me realise the enormous value of little personal touches as well as all the skilled medical care. In this day of staff shortages and an overstretched NHS, it could be easy to let this personal care go a little but I am determined to find the time no matter what it takes.

Whilst looking after my parents I became aware that I had a surplus of pent-up nervous energy and decided to channel this into running. This was an excellent decision and has benefited me enormously on many fronts. My fitness has increased and as a result I have more energy. More significant though are the psychological benefits. I always run alone and think while I do so-I think of it as "filing my head". I wrote many of my MSc essays in my head as I ran and came home to commit my thoughts to paper. Running produces a sense of well-being which goes a long way to dealing with difficult situations. Whenever I got to saturation point with my academic work, I went running and came home ready to try again! I have now completed three marathons and the feeling of achievement when you run over that finishing line is second to none. It is also gratifying to be able to raise money for charities related to my parents' illnesses.

I learned too that with careful time-management it was possible to deal with my personal life as well as the demands of my Msc. I learnt not to waste time and to take opportunities as they arose. Flight delays en route to Scotland meant I had time to read around my essay topics!

The support I received from family, friends, colleagues and university staff has also taught me a lot. I realise the value of sharing problems with others as a "fresh eye" looking at a problem can make a huge difference. It is easy to become overwhelmed by a lot of coinciding factors and sometimes a simple remark from another person triggers a new idea or a thought process which resolves the situation. I now make greater efforts to lend support to colleagues and friends-sometimes being there at the right time with a bar of chocolate is enough and that feeling that someone is there for you is very valuable.

I hope that this account has demonstrated that good things and valuable learning can come out of difficult situations. Whilst I would rather my parents were still alive, their deaths have made me grow as a person and taught me valuable skills such as increased empathy, understanding, problem sharing, time-management, marathon running and the associated "head-filing" and the realisation that with the right attitude most hurdles can be successfully jumped over.

Lifewide learning could be described as a process by which an individual's life experiences develop them as a person, increasing their understanding of the world they live in and the people they interact with. This process starts at birth and continues until death-there is always more to learn.

## 9

My story is the result of a girl...Not just any girl but the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. In getting to know her, I discovered that she was deeply catholic, worked in a hospice and was events coordinator for the universities charity organization (R.A.G.). Seeing she held this notion of charity close to her heart, I suppose it is to my shame to admit that I joined R.A.G. *originally* for the selfish purpose of trying to connect with a girl I had fallen in love with.

I helped out as and when I was needed, that help often taking many forms, from organizing the bands at the popular 'R.A.G. Fest' to collecting money on the door at the less popular 'R.A.G. Pyjama Party'. But it was during a 'R.A.G. Raid' that I can say my life changed.

A 'R.A.G. Raid', for those people who don't understand the lingo, is basically, members of R.A.G. taking to the town centre with buckets for any spare change people were willing to donate to the charity we were representing for the day. Towards the end of the day I was approached by two people, a man and a woman, saying they represented a company called 'Home Fundraising'. They both seemed very confident and charismatic and were asking me how I would feel going door-to-door fundraising for charities. Originally sceptical, (it being my third year with important exams pending) I decided to really push myself to see if it was something I would enjoy and it turned out to be the best decision I ever made.

The job entailed a group of us travelling to a destination decided previously (our region was anywhere between Oxford and Brighton) and knocking door-to-door and talking to people from 3-pm till 9pm about our charity, trying to get people to sign up to donate as much as they could each month. My few months working at Home Fundraising really made me grow as a person.

Fundamentally, my time at Home Fundraising taught me the importance of a basic human virtue, a virtue I profess to previously not showing the utmost of interest in, Charity. I think a reason for this was my being assigned to the charity Cancer Research UK. Going door-to-door for this charity converted what had been nothing more than statistics to me previously, into names and faces and people.

I'll never forget on my first day, knocking on a door and starting from my memorised script about how cancer affects 1 in 3 of us and thinking it was going well, and getting half way through when the woman I was talking to burst into tears and told me she had recently lost her husband to cancer. In a similar vein, at another door, I spoke to a woman holding a baby and as I begin to recite statistics concerning leukaemia and the improving chance of survival, the woman interrupts to tell me her baby has recently been diagnosed.

Watching adverts and being bombarded with constant statistics, it is easy to become desensitised to the issues. But talking to so many people each day either being personally affected or knowing someone who is affected was such a humbling, eye-opening experience that changed my immediate view on the importance of charity work.

As well as planting the seeds of charity within me my time working there literally changed my life. For a law student whose aim in life was to work for a law firm in London and earn a lot of money, talking to people who had lost husbands and children really hit home to me the real importance in life of family and happiness in what you do. After my time spent sharing stories with people on the street I suddenly found it hard to relate to the importance of dividends in Company Law lectures or how to sue people best in Family Law.

It completely changed the trajectory of my life and now I am on course to becoming a police officer. This is a goal awakened in me by my time talking to people from all walks of life and feeling as though I really want to communicate and help people every day for the rest of my life. My time at Home Fundraising further motivated me to move out of my comfort zone by giving me an urge to want to communicate, resulting in my successful application for a job teaching English in China for 6 months.

Also practically, my time there has tremendously helped my public speaking and inter-personal skills by strengthening my character. For example hurdles one would constantly have to battle and overcome would be things like walking around in the pouring rain all day, having doors rudely slammed in ones face or people being derogatory because they have been interrupted. Having all these things to deal with makes you a stronger person and when people are rude or ask probing questions it is up to your memory and quick wit win the confidence of the person over.

My new ability to talk confidently to all manner of people has recently been reflected in my Law LLM presentation grades where I received 74% and 80% in my two exams and I know in my future as a police officer these skills will certainly come in handy. All in all my love affair with charity work and meeting and talking to people has changed my life completely, from one that would have been concerned with profit and money, to one concerned with helping people and talking to communities. Although my reasons were selfish to begin with I soon found through meeting people, that there was a lot I could do through my job, by collecting monthly donations, and through R.A.G. events to help and crucially that I wanted to help people for the rest of my life.

...Oh and I'm not sure if your interested or not, but I got the girl as well!

Lifewide Learning means to me enriching yourself as a person by experiencing new situations and, most importantly, operating outside of your comfort zones. By experiencing new situations you can learn what path in life you want to take. This is possible through travel, experiencing new cultures, joining societies or taking new jobs.

Constantly operating outside of your comfort zone is the only way you can truly grow as a person. It is the greatest ability of all to show the courage to push your boundaries and can lead to the greatest results as you learn to stretch your capabilities.

## 10

Ever since starting University almost 4 years ago, I tried to fill my time with extra-curricular activities. I did not have any specific reason to do it, I just liked doing those

“extra” things and learning something new. I always had it in me, but it wasn’t until university that I realised how tangibly rewarding all those activities were.

Being a business student (previously Finance, now MSc Entrepreneurship), I wanted to develop primarily in this way: to become better in things such as project management or teamwork. Also, I wanted to quickly learn how to magically multiply money on the stock exchange. Hence, I joined societies to cater for that: SIFE and Investment Society. Unfortunately, the only thing I learned was how important good management is – since it was missing.

On top of that, I tried to participate in as many challenges as there were, mostly essay competitions. A particularly interesting was a competition for group essay on group dynamics – an immensely teamwork-oriented task. I put a team together, we worked intensively and learned a lot along the way – about the topic, and about our own characteristics. Unfortunately again... we won. Unfortunately, because winning does not encourage learning. Winners seldom think about what was it that made them successful, don’t do debriefings, and tend to enjoy the glorious triumph rather than make an effort to analyse for the future. Three years later, I took part in Surrey Sandpit Challenge. Just like back then, the team got together and did our best. We were very proud and confident about our entry. After all we worked hard, we paid attention to every single detail, and delivered what we thought of as a top quality piece of work. Contrary to what we had expected, we didn’t even make it to the Top 3. Feeling disappointed, I came back home and tried to think about what went wrong. And it only then occurred to me that all the effort and attention we put into our entry was about form, rather than substance. We’ve made a video which was entertaining and memorable, but which delivered very little information. We’ve lost sight of the core objectives of the Challenge and focused on making our entry beautiful rather than meaningful.

I’m pretty sure I wouldn’t notice it if we were finalists of the competition. Losing Sandpit Challenge also allowed me to gain further insight into my own personality: how do I cope with failure? Disappointment? Disillusionment? Wanting to be an entrepreneur, I will surely experience unsuccessful ventures – so is it really a right choice for me? When I think about it now, losing the Challenge has so far been one of the best managerial experiences I’ve gained.

Pursuing my goals, I’ve got an internship with a Mutual Fund after my first year of studies. To cut the long story short, I spent two months wearing business attire for 5 days a week and looking how the finance industry looks from the inside. The same thing, with a corporate finance firm, happened after my second year, and it allowed me to learn a crucial thing. It was not a magic formula for successful investments, nor how to ace every interview or become a CFO in five weeks.

It made me realize that my vision of myself was not true. I always imagined myself wearing a suit and a tie to work, sitting in wood-finish conference rooms and using my company cellphone while driving my company car (naturally hands-free). However, I dreamed about all those things never having to wear a tie or to do tedious work which had no immediate significance. I always imagined myself being free to decide what’s the best solution and knowing what the best solution is, and driving my company car to settle high-profile business deals all over the City. And thankfully along came the internships which showed me the more down-to-earth picture of the corporate reality.

It was a genuinely life-changing realisation. Firstly, because it made me reconsider my life choices. Having realised that I actually don’t like wearing a tie and how much

freedom means to me, I decided to set up a business in the future. I have discovered a passion for entrepreneurship which I didn't realise before. Secondly, it made me realise how many of my dreams were based on visions of things rather than realities – and there were plenty of those. Since teenage years, I've dreamed of owning a convertible. Now I realise that I've never ever driven one, and that it could possibly be very unpleasant to have the wind blowing in your hair all the time. It's not a perfect example, but I believe it depicts the idea very clearly: I have learned to distinguish between realities and visions of realities, and it allows me to make much better choices now.

This year, I'm still engaging in various activities. However, compared to my undergraduate days, they are of completely different nature. I teach Polish under the LACES programme, I participate in challenges, I attend a fitness programme at the Sports Centre and I'm on my way to set up a business. Instead of developing knowledge, I focused on developing character traits and skills. Teaching Polish allows me to improve my presentation skills, as well as my ability to communicate clearly. Sticking to rigorous exercise routine develops my resilience and endurance, characteristics which I value a lot. And last but not least, setting up a company is a "plunge" I'm taking in order to learn as much as possible, since I realised that no amount of courses, talks, lectures and guides will make me feel like I have "enough knowledge" to go.

Because without lifewide learning, there will never be enough. MSc Entrepreneurship course provides me with a vision of how entrepreneurship is like, but it won't tell me how do I fit into this vision. Thanks to my previous observations, I know I need to see it for myself first.

### **What lifewide learning is to me**

The term "lifewide" encapsulates a very important characteristic of learning process: that we have to draw conclusions from every phenomenon we can observe or experience, rather than taking comfort in limiting ourselves to formal knowledge. One real-life challenge will teach you more about the world, life and – most importantly – yourself, than any number of frameworks and theories found in textbooks. And it doesn't even need to be a challenge: as long as we remain observant and marvel at the world, we realize how interesting it is and many learning opportunities life has to offer in all it's width.