# Reflective Diary

## Not having a TV at home

My family have never had a TV in the house. The households they came from did have TVs, but they made the conscious decision not to include one in the first house they got together. As a result I’m quite bookish, and reading lots of books has accentuated my imagination. I ended up reading a lot of books when I was young, by such authors as Antony Horovitz, Brian Jacques, Roald Dahl. At school I was better at making up new stories than writing from personal experience, and I have always tried to write music. Writing good computer software also requires a good imagination, because one is more likely to see a more obscure solution.

## Learning to play the saxophone

Some of my earliest memories are of playing the saxophone. I work hard, sometimes too hard, and try to move too fast. As a result I am a good sight reader, but I get impatient. For example, I put greater emphasis on my progress through the ABRSM grades than building good habits, and when I got to university I had to unlearn a lot of bad habits.

Preparing for musical performances seems to come naturally to me. However, outside of music I do not prepare well. I was still one of those at university who was up past four in the morning of the deadline, and I even handed in a few incomplete submissions.

## My first job as a waiter at the Norton House Hotel

I really enjoyed my time at the Norton House. It forced me out of my comfort zone, and I am pleased that I rose to the challenge. I had to talk to new customers every day, and put them at their ease by making the first move. Waiting tables was not something I wanted to do for the rest of my life, but I learnt how to build up my savings, and so the experience was a good start to my working life.

## Not studying Computer Science

I distinctly remember the moment my parents told me we were getting a computer. Computers to me are not tools to get things done, or wastes of time, or computational machines. They are places to explore.

Getting a computer was the beginning of a long investigation I have made into how humans react to and interactive with computers. At school I had less interest in studying mathematical formulae and more interest in writing software that is natural for humans to interact with. My aversion to studying algorithms put me off studying computer science at university, and it remains an unexplored area for me. So I would like to develop this weakness rather than avoid it in the future.

## Leaving home to go to University

I was very keen to move away once I had decided to go to university. I wanted to prove I could fend for myself, and I think I wanted a bit more independence as well. I am glad I did, because it has made me more confident in my own independence.

My self-confidence helped me look after myself for the first time, but I feel that it led me to change too many things too quickly: my faith, my home, the distance from my parents and my responsibilities to look after myself and my home. All of these were distractions from completing my degree, and I feel I could have saved myself a lot of pain by taking a more gradual approach. Now I am living with my parents again, I feel there is a lot I can still learn from them about caring for a house and organising time to do chores.

## Hosting friends in York

I quickly made the discovery in school that I am not someone who enjoys drinking parties or going to clubs in city centres. Fortunately at York I made friends with people who held a similar opinion, and we would often take it in turns to host a dinner or games night at our flat. This helped build my social confidence, as I moved from being a fairly detached attender of other people’s parties to an active host. I have learnt to cook from my mother, and I enjoyed organising the food for these events.

## Leaving my job at Gear4music

I started working for Gear4Music in 2011, just after I completed my degree. I was pleased that I had managed to get a job immediately after completing my degree. It was by no means a graduate position, but it was a start, and I really got along with the people there. It is amazing how much having friendly colleagues helps my job satisfaction. I experienced my first promotion, after I wrote some product descriptions for the company website, I was offered the position full time. While I was not able to keep the job during my nervous breakdown, I learnt that adapting to new requirements outside the prescribed job role will often be rewarded.

## My experiences at a call centre in Ipswich

I worked for two months in a call centre in Ipswich. I needed a job to help me recover from my nervous breakdown, and I was carried along in the hype created by the recruitment process, which that led me to believe it would be a worthwhile place to meet similarly aged people, and to help customers over the phone. This reminds me that I am as susceptible to sales pressure as anyone else, but what carried me through was meeting lots of new people, working as part of a larger team where there was a sense of belonging, and solidarity against the harder and more relentless parts of the job.

## Using skills as an amateur or as a profession

I have had the privilege of playing music and writing software both professionally and as an amateur. When I left home for university I was keen to become a professional musician, because I thought being an amateur was somehow worth less than being a professional. I now know this to not be true: it is an absurd generalisation. I met musicians who regarded themselves as professionals at university who were not really emotionally invested in their music – it was simply their easiest way to make money. I have met plenty of amateurs who invest less time in their craft and who are not paid, but yet produce amazing music.