



Transcript: Liz - deciding against an academic career

Did your desire for an academic career change during your PhD?

From after I'd completed the masters year and I upgraded to a PhD, I could teach under the terms of my award from the AHRC. I think it was actually once I started teaching that gradually my mind began to change, not because I didn't like the teaching, I adored the teaching, the contact with the students was great. I was teaching in the cultural studies department, teaching cultural theory which the students found very demanding, I found it very demanding to teach but I just found it such a rewarding experience teaching. Of course once you are teaching, lecturers in the department start to treat you as a colleague rather than as a student and then you start to learn quite a lot more about the actual job on a full-time basis works. The cultural studies department was actually closed soon after and it was closed very quickly by the university as a result of a low score in the RAE, research assessment exercise, that's not to suggest that it was a poor department, there were other things happening there at the university inbetween the departments at the time. That began then to really diminish my desire to go into teaching because I thought 'well, two of those people have been doing the job of teaching in the academy for thirty years, they're professors, if their jobs can just be taken from them and all the work that they've put in go so quickly, do I want to do that?' Then of course you start to get towards the end of your PhD and you start to look for jobs and there weren't any in English literature unless I was prepared to move from the midlands to Aberdeen perhaps and because I had two sons still at home and an elderly mother who lives not thirty or forty miles away from where I am, I couldn't up sticks and move to the other end of the country. Because I was a single parent I wasn't in the position to take part-time work to keep my foot in the door of teaching in a higher education institution. That's what starts to turn, to change your mind but because heritage, I could see what it offered. Towards the end of my PhD I did get a job in heritage, a very low entry level admittedly but that was ok because the job was relatively easy so it left me mental energy to finish off writing up my PhD. Once I was in heritage, I could see that it could be developed to give you a lot of the advantages of an academic career, for instance, research, writing that kind of thing, communication. Also that it had some advantages of its own on top of that, I suppose, or in excess of that.

Do you ever have any regrets that you didn't pursue an academic career?

Oh yes. Yes, of course you do. I have contact now through my role in heritage as a curator, I'm involved in academic research and AHRC funded projects and I look at people who are doing an academic job and I do feel quite envious. Then by the same turn, they're very envious of me because I get to do research, I get to talk to people but I don't have any of the pressure that they have. Then I'm not paid as much as they are. I think what I'm trying to say is that 'yes I have regrets' but I'm also very glad by some other turns that I didn't pursue an academic career, I think.