

Maureen's unfinished PhD

In retrospect, the whole PhD was ill-advised from the start.

I started in 1986 and was an ESRC award holder. As a promising undergraduate, I had been persuaded by the Anthropology Department to apply for an ESRC grant to do an

much, but this didn't really help in my search for a relevant theory. Inevitably, I didn't finish.

I remember speaking of my problems to the individual who helped me write the research proposal for the ESRC. He told me 'I knew you would come into problems'. I wish he'd told me at the time.

The non-completion of the thesis has haunted me for all these years and I don't think I've ever got over it. It's affected my employment prospects, personal relationships and most of all my self-esteem.

For 17 years I have dragged my incomplete thesis with me wherever I go – the piles of notes, books and drafts – in the vain hope that I might finally finish. I have since resuscitated it at different points in my life and have managed to write a draft. It is written on my CV: 'PhD (pending submission)'. I have approached my Department at the College several times hoping to see if I could re-register to continue. On reading the draft they all thought it still viable, but the timing was never right and there was never a supervisor suitable.

Recently I have finally searched and found someone with expertise in my academic and ethnographic area working nearby at Barchester and I hope to meet her some time soon to see how I can use all the data I collected. But today, my thesis remains in limbo in a filing cabinet upstairs. I am plagued by the feeling of waste – of time, of money, of effort.

On reflection, I was immature; I chose too broad a topic, my research was poorly

Update

"Don't take this the wrong way," says my new young PhD supervisor, hand resting on