

Time to Think

Open University Journeys in British and Irish prisons during the years of conflict, 1972-2000

Oral History interview clip transcript

Name of Interviewee: Michael Atcheson

Interviewed by: Jenny Meegan

Date of interview: 14/10/2011

Important

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Clip title: Studying the Arts in a H Block cell

Duration: 00:01:42

Clip start point in full interview: 00:05:34

Clip end point in full interview: 00:07:15

I was sort of saying “Oh dear is this for me?” but I received great encouragement from The Open University tutor to actually have a go at this and the first one I did was A101 which was the Arts.

[00:05:45] *So what was it like doing the level one Arts course?*

Fantastic. You know I really, I still look at the religious one, I thought it was fantastic, it made me aware of the closeness of the Faiths in the world, certainly Muslims and Christians, it was just a completely new world for me. The other prisoners used to slag me because I got the LPs [vinyl records] in for the music and I really enjoyed it, I played it at night time, opera and War of the Worlds, it was fantastic. The literature part of it, it just opened up completely new avenues for me, even in regards as to how I looked at paintings and art and the different works. Other prisoners must have thought I was mad at that time because in my wing I think I was the only one doing it at that particular time, but slowly but surely other prisoners then came and asked me about that and a few others have followed in my footsteps from that, so it was fantastic, stuff that I had never seen before. I gained confidence throughout it because I found I could cope with the work, I could cope with the assignments. I spent hours making sure I wrote everything lovely in my handwriting and balls of white paper would have been scattered around the cell floor, where I was saying “No this isn’t good enough” and I rewrote again, and rewrote again until I was happy with it, but yes I found that I could cope with it, I found that I did have the capacity to learn at that level.

What were your study conditions like?

Atrocious, atrocious.