



by Anita Micha-Shields

## Inspiring Journey—Adult Learner



### My family story

I am Belgian and was taken to the Belgian Congo when I was four years old. I was one of four children at that time and while in the Congo my parents expanded their family to eight children. Being five girls and three boys. My father was old fashioned and believed that girls should just grow up, get married and have a family. During that time our family experienced wars, artillery bombardments and saw many atrocities committed right in front of us and three times our homes and businesses were destroyed.

### How did I end up in the UK?

My parents immigrated to Rhodesia in 1974. However, Rhodesia was experiencing similar problems as we had encountered in the Congo. That fact did not put my father off. He bought a Bakery and French confectionery business out in a mining town in the African bush. This is where I met my future Scottish husband to be. We moved to Harare and 18 months after moving, there was an attack launched by Mugabe's army in the town. This frightened me so much that my partner Ken asked me what I wanted to do, and I responded that my wish was to leave Africa for good. We then returned to the UK, first to Scotland and then eventually to Northampton.

### Why did I decide to further my education?

In 1988, I had the good fortune to do an interim as a Senior Principal Accountant at Northampton County Council. During this interim period, I was asked to apply for the permanent post, and I was successful. After, about two years my Company Director encouraged me to pursue my education in Management Studies at Northampton College. These were evening classes as I was working full time. I was grateful for the offer. I was unsure that I could do it because my English was limited as French was my native language. I was 40 years old when I started my two years D.M.S. course mixing with others student half my age. In the beginning it was a bit scary but very quickly I found it exciting. I studied further at Birmingham University at Perry Barr for ACCA. Thereafter, I started my own Accountancy Business until 2000 when it sold. I pursued after that a career in Consultancy to 2010 where I was the Managing Director of a limited company until I retired.

### What advice would I give an adult returning to education?

I thought if my parents could start three times all over with eight children there was no excuse for me. Advice given by the university was when you consider improving your education there will be people who would resent it. This could be your partner or you could have co-worker feeling resentful. These are the barriers that you might come across. In my case I had the full support of my partner sharing domestic responsibilities and that make an enormous difference on the outcome.