Why I give

Leading psychoanalyst and writer Susie Orbach explains why she is supporting the Eric Hobsbawm Scholarships for Postgraduate History Students at Birkbeck

Education is magic. It explodes our minds and hearts, giving us ways to understand that we didn’t even know were possible. It changes our relationship to ourselves and to our world.

My experiences of academia, including 10 years as a Visiting Professor at the London School of Economics and Political Science, have shown me how education inspires and changes lives. Like love and friendship, it is one of the great gifts of living.

Adult education is an even more special gift, and this is why I applaud Birkbeck’s provision of evening education, enabling busy Londoners to combine work and study. When you consciously begin to know that you want to learn, it can be exhilarating, but it can also be difficult and scary. It means breaking out of the known and taking risks. It is an opening up of your own life and the lives of those around you to challenges that can be as perplexing as they are exciting.

In particular, studying history – the history of our culture, of political movements, of groups and individuals grappling with, and acting in, historical time – allows one to re-situate oneself both in one’s own life and times and in historical time, recognising the significance of the particular moment as well as the trajectories that it is both a part of and a break from.

Being able to give a small bit of support to a postgraduate History student in the name of Professor Eric Hobsbawm is to acknowledge the great contribution that he made throughout his 65-year association with Birkbeck.

Beginning in 1947, when he became a lecturer in History, Eric rose to the position of Birkbeck’s President. He was involved in College life until his death in 2012. As one of history’s greatest intellectuals, Eric helped to shape our thinking about history and touched many lives as a dedicated teacher.

The Eric Hobsbawm Scholarships have been created to encourage the next generation of talented historians. I’m sure they will inspire all adult learners to keep on learning and being curious, as did Eric for all of his life, discovering new interests and deepening accustomed ones.

I hope that any student who has the opportunity to become a postgraduate student in history at Birkbeck will feel immersed in the love of the subject that the Department of History, Classics and Archaeology holds. They will also be part of Birkbeck – a world-class research and teaching institution that I admire and respect.

Applications for the Eric Hobsbawm Scholarships for Postgraduate History Students are open for research degrees beginning in October 2014.

To donate to Birkbeck, to volunteer or to find out more, visit: www.bbk.ac.uk/alumni/
To apply for the Eric Hobsbawm Scholarships, or to find out more, visit: www.bbk.ac.uk/hobsbawmscholarships

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