



My advice to other disabled people would be, concentrate on things your disability doesn't prevent you doing well, and don't regret the things it interferes with. Although I was unfortunate enough to get motor neurone disease, I have been very fortunate in almost everything else. I was lucky to be working in theoretical physics, one of the few areas in which disability was not a serious handicap.

The Amazing Life of Professor Stephen Hawking

Growing up

Stephen Hawking was born in Oxford on the 8th of January 1942, the eldest of four children. When he was born, he was perfectly healthy. Although he was known at school as 'Einstein' he didn't learn to read until he was 8. When he started school, Stephen wasn't very good but he began to show a real talent for science. Interestingly, even Einstein was a slow starter and only began to speak when he was 3 years old!

In his garden on Summer evenings, Stephen would lie on the lawn with his family and star gaze. His mum said that; **"Stephen always had a strong sense of wonder... and I could see that the stars would draw him."** Stephen also loved playing board games, even inventing some of his own. When he was a teenager he also built a computer out of recycled parts to solve basic math problems.

College years

When Stephen was 17, he went to Oxford University but found the work...

“ridiculously easy.”

In his spare time, Stephen loved reading science fiction, going dancing and joined the University College Boat Club coxing the rowing team...he was quite the dare devil!

When he finished his first degree, he didn't think that the college thought much of him and said;

“If you award me a first, I will go to Cambridge. If I receive a second, I shall stay in Oxford, so I expect you will give me a First.”

In 1962, he graduated with 1st class honours from Oxford in natural science and went on to Trinity Hall, Cambridge to do a PhD. in Cosmology. His work included collaborating with Roger Penrose on gravitational singularity theorems within general relativity. Stephen predicted that black holes emit radiation, this became known as 'Hawking radiation' which was named after him. He also set out to find a theory that unified general relativity and quantum mechanics.

At a New Year's Eve party in 1963, Stephen met Jane Wilde who became his girlfriend.





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Getting Diagnosed

When Stephen was 21, a year after he met Jane, he was diagnosed with motor neurone disease. Stephen Hawking had a rare early-onset slow-progressing form of motor neurone disease (also known as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, "ALS", or Lou Gehrig's disease). ALS is a terminal illness that causes the neurones that control the brain and spinal cord to die.

In 1965 Jane and Stephen got married and had three children. ALS gradually paralyzed him over the next few decades. He wasn't expected to live past his 30th birthday. The diagnosis made him really depressed but luckily it progressed very slowly and Stephen actually lived until he was 76! He sadly died on the 14th of March 2018 after having the disease for more than 50 years. 14th March also happens to be Einstein's birthday.

Even after Stephen lost his ability to talk he communicated through Assistive Technology using a speech-generating device (SGD). This originally used a handheld switch, but as his condition worsened, it had to be adapted to make him able to communicate using a single cheek muscle.

Flying High

In 1975 Stephen became director of research at the Centre for Theoretical Cosmology and in 1979, Stephen was named the Lucasian Professor of Mathematics. In 1988, Stephen wrote a book on his theories called "A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes". It was a huge best seller and appeared on the British Sunday times best-seller list for a record breaking 237 weeks! Stephen won loads of awards for his work including Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Fundamental Physics Prize, the Wolf Foundation Prize, The Copley Medal and was awarded Commander of the British Empire by the Queen.

As he became more famous all over the world Stephen appeared in lots of TV shows including Star Trek, The Big Bang Theory, The Simpsons and Futurama.

In 2012, Stephen became the founding patron of Sky Badger, a charity for disabled children in the UK. He said;

“My advice to other disabled people would be, concentrate on things your disability doesn't prevent you doing well, and don't regret the things it interferes with. Although I was unfortunate enough to get motor neurone disease, I have been very fortunate in almost everything else. I was lucky to be working in theoretical physics, one of the few areas in which disability was not a serious handicap.”

