

“A Reason for Living”

A Story that Shocked the World!



by
Billy Casper.

WARNING:

THIS BOOK IS BASED ON A TRUE STORY, CONTAINING DETAILS OF SOME HORRIFIC EVENTS THAT SOME PEOPLE MAY FIND DISTRESSING. IT ALSO CONTAINS LANGUAGE AND REMARKS THAT SOME PEOPLE MAY FIND OFFENSIVE.

THIS STORY MAY BE CONSIDERED UNSUITABLE FOR PERSONS UNDER THE AGE OF 18 YEARS.

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First Published in 1995 - by - Defiance Publishing via the Internet, the biggest computer network in the World. Presented with Six International Internet Awards.

Second Edition - PDF Ebooks.

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A Catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-0-9530374-5-2 **Second Edition (PDF) Ebooks**

Published in Great Britain by:

Defiance Publishing

Defiance Publishing House

67 B33 0BJ

England

Preface:

Someone once asked me why I wrote "A Reason for Living." At the time the question took me by surprise and I was unable to answer the man.

"Why do you ask?" I said. Suddenly the tables were turned and he was unable to answer my question.

I thought long and hard about his question. I guess there are many reasons why I wrote this book. Firstly, I needed to tell my story and set the record straight about how various agencies and authorities failed to provide proper care for a child so desperately in need of protection. And, more importantly, to educate people into the true consequences of ignoring child abuse and cruelty. This story contains some very powerful and important lessons for anyone with children or anyone who cares for them.

No child should ever be expected to suffer in silence. My siblings and I suffered some of the most horrific acts of cruelty and torture, on an almost daily basis, for a length of time which far exceeded the length of the Vietnam War. . .

In 1995 I subscribed to the Internet, the biggest computer network in the World. Today, I help support other victims and survivors of child abuse and cruelty and attempt to assist in the education process of the child care authorities from various parts of the World.

It's a far cry from my early childhood days, when I lived in fear of speaking out and struggled to open tins of food with little more than a few stones and brute force. . .

I am a Survivor
Billy Casper

Acknowledgements:

***My thanks to my son, Shayne, who from the very start of his life
has given me a reason to continue with mine.
Without whom this book would have never been written.***

And to my siblings; "I hope you understand,

It's time to break the silence. . ."

"A REASON FOR LIVING"

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"A Reason for Living"

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"A Reason for Living"

Introduction:

Most children live within a family unit with at least one caring, loving and responsible adult, but not all children are so lucky. . .

Many children suffer in silence the heartache, misery and pain of child cruelty, abuse and neglect and this is the harrowing true story of one of them.

This story will take you on a journey through your emotions as I uncover the full horror and pain of a child fighting for survival, at the hands of brutal and evil parents, a child living like a wild animal on and under the streets of England. The story also takes a look at the uncaring world of the institutions and uncovers some of the brutality and suffering endured within some of them.

This story may be considered blunt, direct and shocking with a sprinkling of humour that may take the reader by surprise, but only by doing this can I get the message across and let you, the reader, feel the full impact of:

"A Reason for Living"

The most difficult part of writing this book was typing the words with the tears rolling down my face as I relived my nightmare. But it had to be done, for it is the victims of today and yesterday that can help save the victims of tomorrow!

"A Reason for Living."

Prologue:

The Crimes detailed in this book may cause emotional distress.

The Crimes; Child abuse & cruelty, Theft, Robbery, Grevious bodily harm, Cruelty to animals and possibly Manslaughter.

The book looks at the possible reason for the start of the child cruelty and goes on to describe in some detail, some of the events themselves. The story continues into the tragic consequences of the cruelty and the effects it had and still has today, including the irreparable emotional and psychological damage caused.

A 'rough hand written copy' of this book was read by the NSPCC in London, some years ago. They described the book as:

"A gripping and powerful horrendous story."

This book may be of interest to other survivors of childhood abuse and cruelty and those who have spent 'time' in institutions of some kind. It is also believed that it may be of an 'educational value' to those in the Child Care, Legal, Medical and Psychology professions.

Hopefully, and God willing, it will be an education to all who have the courage and strength to take this journey. . .

“A Reason for Living”

Chapter 1: Misery and Pain

The Vicar stood upon the old wooden platform, reading from the Bible, looking down onto the highly polished dark wooden coffin which lay across two planks of wood above the hole in the ground. Arrangements had been made for the coffin to remain unsealed, to be sealed by the family at the funeral. Ten people stood round all dressed in black, my father stood to the right of the Vicar. The rest of the family stood with emotionless faces in a line of age descending order, myself, being the eldest son, nearest to the Vicar, the youngest grandchild farthest away. The Vicar read from the Bible but nobody was listening, nobody was crying, there were no flowers, nobody was sorry she was dead.

The Vicar had never seen a funeral like this before. He turned to the ageing man to his right, "Would you like to say a few words?" he asked.

My father raised his head and looked at what remained of his grown family. "No. I don't think so... No!"

The Vicar said a short prayer, then turned towards me, "Maybe you would like to say a few words."

I gave no verbal reply. The Vicar moved aside as I made a move in the direction of the platform. He offered me his Bible but there was no need for a Bible and I had no reason to take it, I was holding a thick wad of paper in my hand.

"Lord God, have mercy on her soul, for here lies the most evil woman who has ever walked the earth. Suffer the little children to come unto me... Amen."

I got down from the platform and approached the coffin, holding the wad of paper. "Lord God, forgive me, for I do not want the life this woman gave me. I wish for her to take it back."

I placed the wad of paper on the ground, ready to place inside the coffin and lifted the lid. I looked inside and overcome by sudden panic, turned and tried to run, "She's still alive. She's still alive!" The coffin was full of dead animals. "She's still alive," I yelled, as I fell face down in the mud.

The woman who lay next to me woke me up. . . "Who's still alive? You've been dreaming, face down in your pillow. You look terrified, look like you've seen a ghost. What were you dreaming about?" the woman asked.

I was trying to put the pieces together in my mind. It all seemed so real. 'Was it a dream or a nightmare?'

I looked across the room to where my manuscript was still sat, waiting to be published. I went downstairs and made some coffee, returning a few seconds later to ask how many sugars, failing to remember the name of the woman I had met the night before.

"Just promise me two things," I said, "Don't judge people by what you read and if it gets too much put it down." My voice made her jump as I silently returned to the room unnoticed, placing her coffee on the dressing table.

She did not raise her head. "OK," she said and continued reading...

My family were never very close. I guess my mother did have a lot to cope with right from the very start of her married life.

She was born in London and lived her childhood days through the devastation of the second world war. Her mother was said to have been an alcoholic, who spent most of her time either drunk or asleep. My mother was the eldest of four children and had to fend for herself and look after her younger sister and two brothers.

She married during her early twenties in August 1958 to an ex-army gunner, who was just a few years older than herself. My father was born and raised in Birmingham. He had seen most of the world with the army and had fought with the British forces during the war. The newly married couple decided to settle in Birmingham.

Michele, their first born, arrived in May 1959. Michele was born with a hole in the heart and it was said by my mother was dropped down a flight of stairs, while only a few months old, by her sister, our aunt Doreen. This fall resulted in Michele having brain damage for the rest of her life.

My parents were under a great deal of stress and tormented by feelings of sorrow and failure. Michele was constantly in and out of hospitals, enduring open heart surgery and neurological surgery. Our anxious parents sometimes had to wait several hours worrying and wondering, while their young daughter was in the operating theatre. Our mother had learned to read the emotionless faces of the surgeons as they left the surgery after completing an operation and had seen the faces of surgeons who had failed to bring their patients through. She had heard the cries of other anxious parents who weren't so lucky, after they had been informed that their child had died under surgery. Our mother, like many others, just went cold as the surgeons left the theatre their child was in.

Next to be born was myself, named Billy, born in March 1961. My mother often said I was a problem at birth and have been ever since. She was probably right.

My father had been employed in a few different trades since leaving the army and started a new job at about the time of my birth. He started working as a factory worker at the Midlands Electrical Manufacturers (MEM.) in Tyseley, Birmingham. He worked long hours to keep a decent wage coming into the house.

A few years past by, the doctors had done all they could do for Michele. She would remain handicapped for the rest of her life. All the operations that could be done had been done, there was nothing more anyone could do.

My younger brother, Laurence, arrived in October 1964. Very little is known about his birth, apparently our mother fell into labour while taking a bath and Laurence was born very soon after her arrival at the hospital. Laurence was born without any problems, that is, he like me, was born 'normal'.

The last to be born was Beverley, who entered the world in June 1967. Beverley was born at home, whereas Michele, Laurence and I were all born in hospitals. A neighbour from across the road helped to deliver my sister.

Mrs Murphy took control and instructed my father, "Fetch me some pans of hot water and tear up a few sheets. They will be needed any time now."

We, that is my brother, elder sister and myself, were trying to enter our parents bedroom. The screaming from our mother had woken everyone.

"You children can go back to bed," Mrs Murphy stated in a calm but firm voice.

She glanced towards my father, "Can you try to calm them down and get them back to sleep?" she asked, referring to us, as we were none too quick to move when requested the first time.

Mrs Murphy stayed with my mother for several hours, even after the baby had been successfully delivered.

This is where the story begins, with the birth of the last child. For most people the birth of a child is a happy time and a joyous occasion, but in this family, what was to unfold was an undiagnosed insanity and a reign of terror beyond belief.

Beverley was born totally blind. At first nobody realized that she was blind but as the first few weeks of her life passed it became obvious to my parents that their daughter could not see.

Beverley was taken to the Birmingham eye hospital where my parents spoke with one of the top surgeons. "I'm very sorry," he said, "Your daughter has cataracts in both eyes. She is completely blind."

"We cannot attempt an operation to remove these cataracts until your daughter is at least fourteen years old," he explained.

"You can't just leave my daughter blind. There must be something you can do," my mother said anxiously.

"I'm sorry, but there is nothing we can do until she is much older," the surgeon replied. And so, my parents believed their daughter would remain blind for this time.

"You must understand, that it will not just be one operation. There may be several operations before your daughter gains any sight. Even then, there is a possibility that she may not gain any sight at all, or even lose any sight that she does gain." The surgeon added, "You must accept the fact your daughter may be blind for the rest of her life." The harsh words devastated my mother.

We all lived in a prewar terraced house in Carlton Road, Small Heath in Birmingham. The house was built of brick and had a slate tiled roof. It had a green entrance door with a single digit number attached. The rear of the property was accessible via the long, dark, arched passageway at the side of the house. The tall wooden gate at the bottom of the entry was always locked from the inside. This was a two or three bedroom house. The spiral staircase lead directly from the front living room to the upper floor. There was no bathroom and the toilet was outside next to the coalshed, where my father had hung a child's wooden swing in the door frame. The old tin bath was used in front of the open coal fire, filled by saucepans of hot water to bath the children.

My mother would boil Beverley's nappies in the old boiler, which stood upon the bare concrete floor in the cold bare brick-walled kitchen. There was no washing machine, no fridge, no luxuries. Food was kept in the stone shelved pantry. Milk was delivered daily and was often kept in buckets of cold water to help stop it from turning rancid. The rock hard blocks of margarine kept cool in the pantry in winter but in the summer months they melted and oozed all over the shelves. The rusty old mangle stood outside and was used to squeeze the water from the washing before it was pegged out to dry. My mother had to stand outside in all weathers turning the huge handle of the heavy mangle, and as she fed the wet washing through the rollers, the water would pour out and soak her slippered feet. The small brick-floored yard, where the mangle stood, lead onto the long, uneven and wildly growing garden, with its single washing line travelling its entire length.

My family were never great believers in God, in fact as children we often wondered if there really was a God at all, I guess nobody really knows for certain one way or the other. When Beverley was only a few months old, my father insisted that the family went to church one day. He insisted on one particular church, the Elim Pentecostal, in Golden Hillock Road in Small Heath. It was a modern church, very smooth and posh looking, standing

directly opposite the classical, old style church which looked abandoned in comparison to the modern day counterpart. The congregation all stood in the best suits and ties. My family felt quite out of place but were made to feel very welcome by these people whom we had never seen before.

During the service my mother was called to the front of the church by an elderly looking man, the Pastor Canty. He didn't call her out by name but stood staring directly at her from the front of the church and announced, "Would the mother with the blind baby kindly come to the front of the church?"

She didn't move from her seat but started looking around, not knowing he was referring to her.

Pastor Canty called again, "Would the lady with the blind baby please come to the front of the church?" My mother looked at the man.

"Yes, you madam, please." He outstretched his hand to make the gesture, beckoning her to the front of the church.

Pastor Canty placed his hands on Beverley's head and he prayed for her sight. My father took Michele to the front of the church where she too was prayed for. The family understood this was a faith healing service and yet, I knew that no member of my family had faith in anything.

That same night my father claimed he saw what he described as a ghost and said, "It just seemed to float through the living room, pass through the closed door at the bottom of the stairs and proceed to Beverley's cot. It just seemed to hover over the cot for a few seconds before leaving in the same manner that it had arrived."

Beverley was taken to Birmingham eye hospital where it was confirmed that she had gained some sight. Nobody could explain how or why she could now see and nobody believed my father, except maybe himself. He believed what he saw was real. The hospital found that Beverley could see through one eye but was still blind in the other.

My mother didn't believe that this was a miracle from God. She remarked, "If this is Gods work, then why has he only half done the job? She's still half blind."

My mother was only slightly impressed by the sudden change in her daughters condition. The years of worry and stress had taken its toll on my mother. The feelings of failure had turned to anger and the anger had turned to hatred.

While living in Carlton Road, I attended Marlborough School, in Small Heath. I started running away from home when I was about six years old, shortly after

Beverley was born. This was when the nightmare began. I usually ran away after getting a beating from my mother. These were no 'ordinary' beatings, not by any interpretation or understanding of the word. My mother seemed to take great pleasure in her work and that included beating me.

Each day before going to school I had the majority of the housework to do, making all the beds with hospital corners on the sheets and blankets had to be correctly tucked in. Hoovering and cleaning all had to be done. If any of this was not done to my mother's satisfaction I was in for a whipping. She would whip me, without mercy, with curtain wire or electrical wire, she would claw at my face with her finger nails, ripping at the flesh. She would smash me about the head with saucepans or repeatedly smash my head against the brick wall until I could no longer see daylight.

On one occasion my mother sent me out to school early with seven shillings and sixpence for a week's school dinners. (That's the equivalent of about 37p in modern day British currency and was only shortly before the change to decimalisation.) There had been no trouble on this day and I didn't understand why, it was so unusual.

I tried to explain to my mother, "There is no school today as we broke up on Friday. It's the seven-week holiday now." The long school summer holidays had just started but my mother would not hear of it.

She opened the back door, "School," she ordered, as she assisted me out.

I walked the streets and spent the dinner money on small toys and sweets. Later during the day I walked out of one shop and bumped straight into my father, who was not at all happy about me spending his hard earned money. I tried to explain what had happened to him.

"Just go home," he said angrily, "I'll sort things out when I get back." I went home, my father returned within a few minutes.

"Has Billy said anything to you about this school holiday?" my mother was asked.

"What holiday? He's said nothing to me about any holiday," she replied, with an innocent look about her face.

My father turned round to me, but said nothing. He picked me up and carried me horizontally into the kitchen. I realized what he was about to do and started struggling to get away, crying out in fear, struggling to free myself from his powerful grip. He turned the gas off on the cooker, which had been on all morning, and started pulling my arm towards the cooker. I was kicking out, struggling desperately, screaming at what he was trying to do. He stuck my hand on top of the cooker, pressing it down and I let out an almighty cry in agony as my flesh sizzled with the excruciating pain penetrating through to

the bone. I was screaming, struggling frantically to get away. He mercilessly pulled my other hand across and I let out the most horrific cry in agony as he pressed it down onto the red-hot metal sending the sickly smell of my burning flesh into the air.

I stared at my throbbing, burning hands, through tear-filled eyes, 'You Bastard!' I couldn't believe what he had done. I didn't know what to do to make the pain go away, to make the burning stop.

'You Bastard!' My thoughts remained silent, only my sobbing could be heard. The pain and shock were beyond description.

My father left me sobbing in the kitchen while he went to tell my mother about me spending the dinner money. I stood shaking my hands about, blowing on them, trying to cool them down, trying to make the burning stop. My mother came into me and started belting me with the belt. I curled up into a ball on the kitchen floor, with my arms wrapped round my head, trying to protect my face as the belt kept crashing down onto my body. I could do nothing. She just kept belting and belting and wouldn't stop.

My father came into the kitchen, removed the belt from my mother and held out his hand to me. I flinched away from him in fear and looked at his hand. It was four times the size of my own. I was terrified. He put 'Acraflavine' burns cream on my hands and bandaged them up. I just stared at the floor with the tears stinging in my eyes and my hands still burning, throbbing, and the multiple lash marks starting to swell.

Through hate-filled eyes, I slowly glanced across the floor, in my mothers direction, 'You Bastard, you Evil, Lying Bastard.' This was all my mind kept saying.

My father did seem sorry for what he had done but said nothing. I wanted my dad to say he was sorry and to love me, to hug me, but he didn't. My hands were badly burned and blistered and I was unable to use them for several weeks.

My father stayed off work and remained at home for a while. He fed me with a spoon, like a baby, as I was unable to use a knife and fork, I just couldn't pick them up. I couldn't even use a cup. My father changed the dressings on my hands each day and slowly and very painfully helped me to use my hands again, which had blistered in a half-open position, I couldn't open or close them. My father was upset about what had happened and he tried to help me, but still, he said nothing.

I really appreciated my fathers help and felt close to him for the first time in my life. I felt safer with my father at home. My mother was never as bad when my father was at home, she was like a completely different person. As soon as he returned to work, she reverted back to her usual self, whipping me with

curtain wire and ripping at my face with her finger nails, often for very little reason and at times for no reason at all.

When I first started running away from home, I was usually only gone for the day. I was often caught by my mother while wandering the streets or on occasions I would return on my own, as I had nowhere else to go.

Once I had run away from home and was still missing when my father returned home from work. As far as my father knew this was the first time I had ever gone missing. My father went out looking for me but did not find me and I walked the streets all night, unaware that my father was searching for me.

The following day I returned home on my own. My mother grabbed me around the throat and held a knife to my face, "Your father has been out all night looking for you, you little bastard," she said through her clenched teeth. "Get out and find your father. Come back without him and I'll kill you!"

With her hand round my throat and a knife being pushed up my nose I found no reason to doubt her words. I went out looking for my father but was too afraid to return home when I could not find him.

I stayed away from home for ten days and nights, miserable and afraid. I stole milk from peoples doorsteps and tins of rice pudding and packets of biscuits from shops. I would eat apples and sticks of raw rhubarb from peoples gardens. At night I would either walk the streets all night or sleep rough in someones coal shed. I was seven years old. I had no money and nowhere to go, with nobody to turn to for help.

Stealing tins of food created a few problems. I knew I could eat cold beans and rice pudding straight from the tins but getting into them was a real problem. I would sit, sometimes for hours, trying to bash my way into a tin of rice pudding with a few stones. It was so irritating, the tins just dented into every possible shape, never allowing me inside to eat the contents, so I had to go hungry. This was something I was going to have to learn the hard way, just like everything else, or I was going to starve. After ten days on the street I was very cold, dirty, tired and hungry and I went home.

My father had taken an overdose of tablets some days earlier and after having his stomach washed out had been taken to Highcroft Psychiatric hospital in Erdington, Birmingham. Obviously my mother thought it was all my fault and at the time, so did I. I felt so guilty and so afraid. My mother was very upset, the whole family were, but we did not fully understand what had happened to our father.

I was starving hungry and so weak I could hardly stand up. There was no time for sitting down to eat and there was no time for my mother to give me a good beating.

"Get washed and change your smelly clothes," she demanded. "You're going to see your father and hurry up about it." She threw a handful of clean clothes at me.

"If your father can see you are all right it might help him to get over his nervous breakdown and you need to see what you have done to your father anyway. He's in a terrible state," she said.

When we arrived at the hospital I saw my father walking around in the hospital grounds, but neither my mother nor I recognised him. He was walking around as if he were on another planet, immune to all around him. He was heavily drugged and did not respond to anything at all. It was as if he were in a different world, without emotion or feelings. He clearly did not recognise my mother or me. I didn't really understand what had happened to my father but I had been told it was my fault he was in this zombie-like state. I just accepted it was all my fault and was very hurt and upset at what I had done to my father.

"I'm sorry dad," I said, "I'm really sorry, I didn't mean to do all this." My words weren't getting through. There was absolutely no response from him, as if he hadn't heard anything I was trying to say, while trying to hold back my own tears and heartache.

My father remained in hospital for several months. My mother took my sisters, my brother and me to see him about once week and visited her husband alone whenever possible. Gradually my father got better and my mother got worse.

While my father was in hospital the beating continued, almost daily. I was going to school very late with a clawed face, in blood soaked clothes and painful whip marks covering my back.

I believed and said to my brother, "It's mother who belongs in the nut house, not dad." But Laurence was too young to understand.

Eventually my father was discharged from hospital and sent on a two-week convalescent holiday, to Llandudno in Wales. My kid brother and I were also sent on holiday, to an old peoples home in Weston Super Mare. Nine year old Michele and baby sister, Beverley, remained at home with my mother.

My brother and I got rather bored on this holiday as we had to spend most of the time in the grounds of the old folks home. We did manage to see the beach once or twice, but generally speaking we just got up to all sorts of mischief. We spent much of our time running up the stairs so we could slide down the stair banisters. We managed to make our own fun and our antics seemed to somehow brighten up the days for some of the old folk. Some of them encouraged us in our silly antics while others cursed and muttered things under their breath. The staff obviously just wished either they, or we,

were somewhere else. We managed to turn this peaceful and quiet home into a circus.

Our main outside interest was playing the game of `splits' on the crazy golf course, with a steel spiked flag. We made our own rules up as we went along, one of which was that if either of us were at the 'splitting stage' we could try and stick the spike in the ground between the other persons feet, to bring ourselves back up to the starting position. This did work quite well, providing there was a big enough gap between the other persons feet! On one occasion there obviously wasn't and I accidentally stuck the spike through my brothers foot. This brought the holiday to an abrupt end and we were returned home.

My father returned after his two weeks holiday and seemed much better. He was never told about our holiday. He soon returned back to work and again worked very long hours, the family really saw very little of him.

At times, people at school asked me questions about the marks on my face but they rarely saw the marks on my body. I was simply too afraid, terrified, to tell people the truth.

My mother always had stories planned for anyone who asked questions, usually she would say that I had fallen out of a tree or had been fighting or had been attacked by a dog. I just told those same stories. On occasions I did tell people the truth but in those days nobody believed the word of a child. People would nearly always believe the stories that my mother had made up. I was generally too afraid to tell anyone the truth and when I did it made no difference anyway.

Sometimes when my father was at home, he too would ask what had happened to my face when he saw it clawed, at times, almost beyond recognition.

My mother would tell him the same stories that she told everyone else, "Oh, he's been fighting at school again. He never takes any notice of me. You know what he's like." I had no choice but to go along with these stories.

I lived in constant fear and was absolutely terrified of my mother. I continued running away from home and started to find places to sleep at night. These would usually be in someones coal shed or in an empty garage or a dirty derelict building. I would steal food from shops and milk from peoples doorsteps. I soon stopped returning on my own but was usually still caught by my mother within a few days. My mother knew I didn't usually venture far from home. She didn't know that at times I even slept in the families own coal shed, burying myself in the coal to avoid being seen and in a vain attempt to keep warm.

In August 1969 the family moved house. Everything was packed up very carefully, crockery wrapped in newspapers and packed into tea chests. We moved into one of the newly built maisonettes located in Nevada Way, Chelmsley Wood in Birmingham.

Chelmsley Wood was still being built and much of the area was under development, many of the roads did not exist and footpaths were simply dirt tracks. There were building sites everywhere. We moved into the ground floor of the two-storey building. I started going to the local Coleshill Heath school, which was no more than a five minute walk from the family home. Despite the distance to the school I don't think I ever arrived on time, sometimes I never arrived at all.

My mother had no stairs to throw me down at this house, as she regularly did while living in Carlton Road. She made up for this loss in other ways.

Shortly after moving into this property she found it necessary to punish me. I had already been beaten with the curtain wire which left multiple whip marks across my back. Chunks of flesh had been ripped from my face, leaving deep cuts and scratches that had all scabbed over. She had torn the flesh from the inside of my cheeks, which stung like crazy when I ate or drank. I was a real mess. I ran away from home.

Eventually I was caught by my mother. She locked me in the brick built shed, she then rounded up seven stray cats and locked them in the shed with me. She just left us there for over a week with no food or drink, in almost total darkness. She gave me a piece of dry bread and a cup of water once a day. The cats were given nothing. I cried and begged my mother to let me out, with no response. I hammered on the door until my hands were so sore I just couldn't hit it anymore. I sat in the corner, in the darkness of the shed, with my head bowed down, battered and unwanted, with seven somewhat wild and hungry cats. I couldn't see anything at all. All I could hear was cats, all I could smell was cats, all I could feel was cats. That's all there was, just cats.

In the darkness the cats cried, they fought and they spat, they hissed and snarled and they jumped and they scratched. I was terrified. I sat crying most of the time but eventually the tears all dried up. My continuous pleading with my mother had been ignored, she would not let me out. The stench from the cats was horrendous. They were starving and so was I. The cats fighting and scratching all over me turned the terror into madness.

'I'm going to die, the cats are going to eat me. That's why they're fighting, they're all starving to death.'

As the thought went through my head another cat jumped onto me, hooking its claws into my skin. I grabbed it in sheer terror and squeezed the life out of it and dropped it to the floor, dead. I had no idea how many there were, it seemed as if the shed was full of them. I sat in the corner, head bowed down

and grabbed the cats as they jumped on me and I smashed them into the walls of the shed, killing them all. I sat crying, no more cats. I had to escape or I was going to die right where I sat, in the shed. When my mother next opened the shed door to pass me my bread and water, I raced at the door in a desperate attempt to escape from my captivity. I managed to force my way past her and out of the shed. Looking back into the shed, as I stumbled to the ground, I saw the dead animals. I turned my head away, back to the ground and sobbed. I was eight years old.

With very little strength, damp and freezing cold, I was shaking in terror. I grabbed the spade from the shed and started digging a grave for the cats.

Praying was something I had done before but I had little reason to believe in God, "Please God, if you're really up there, forgive me for what I have done..."

My prayer was interrupted. "Get that bloody shed cleaned up, you disgusting little brat," my mother snarled, as she passed a bucket of hot soapy water from the back door and placed it quietly on the path.

"Sorry God, gotta go."

I slowly placed my hands in the bucket and found the warmth of the water so soothing. I frantically tried to wash some of the shit and piss off myself before tackling the shed. The disinfectant stung my open wounds but this was the best I was going to get. Then I had to face the shed. I was very afraid.

'That evil bastard might lock me in again, I bet it's a trap. I bet she's waiting for me to go in there so she can lock me in, ' I thought.

I jammed the handle of the spade in the door trying to secure the door in an open position the best I could. I entered the shed, keeping a watchful eye behind. I gently picked up seven cats and placed them softly on the ground, ready to be buried. The stench was so intense it made my stomach feel sick, my stomach churned over and over but there was nothing in my stomach to vomit up.

My mother came to check that the job had been done properly. "Would you like a cup of tea?" she asked.

'Are you bloody mental or what?' But I already knew the answer to my silent thought.

"Yes please," in a quiet voice was the only answer I dared give.

I very cautiously entered the house, too weak, too thirsty to refuse the drink. My mother knew that I loved animals. I wanted to bury her in the garden. I just felt so weak and helpless, so alone and battered. I returned to bury the cats, but they were not to be buried. I had to put them in the dustbin.

The kids at school usually just took the piss out of me but mostly they just kept away altogether, afraid they were going to catch some scabby disease. Some did ask questions, so did some of the teachers. Fear and terror are very powerful deterrents, which meant telling the same lies my mother told everyone else. Usually I would say that I had fallen from the top of a tree or had been attacked by a dog or sometimes I'd say that I had been fighting with a big gang of lads. I was simply too afraid to tell anyone the truth.

Each day was a constant nightmare from which there was no escape. I continued running away from home, usually climbing out of a window during the night, but still nobody realized what was going on.

Chelmsley Wood was a new area for me and I had to find new hiding places, there were no coal sheds around Chelmsley Wood for me to shelter in.

I often wandered the streets for several days and nights trying to find somewhere to sleep or just hide at night. I often spent several days hiding in the woods itself. My mother soon got wise to this hiding place but had great difficulty trying to catch me running through this thick wood. I got to know the woods quite well and knew which track paths lead to some escape route and which ones lead to a dead end. There was no chance that my mother was going to catch me in the woods without help. At night the woods was quite safe and I learned how to walk through the woods in the dark. Nobody ever entered the woods after dark, except me, but there was little shelter from the weather in the woods.

I pinched a 'jackknife' from my father's coat pocket to open tins of food. I stole tins of rice pudding, beans and tried other tinned foods, in order to see what could be eaten straight from the tin. Packets of biscuits and loose fruit were always favourite as there was no messing with these. I would just eat them without stopping or having to worry about stomach cramps. There were very few apple trees in Chelmsley Wood and I only ever found one garden with rhubarb, which I ate straight from the ground after dipping each stick into a bag of sugar that I had pinched from some shop. Some greengrocers kept fruit outside their shops and I would steal an apple or some other fruit from their displays. I wasn't stealing through greed, I was stealing anything and everything I needed in order to survive.

I still needed to find places to sleep or hide at night or somewhere I could go to shelter from the weather. I was running away in all sorts of weather conditions, often with nothing more than the shirt on my back.

I found one place to hide that nobody would think of looking or even if they did, would not want to look. I spent weeks living in a large drainage pipe on the bank of the river Cole and I returned there time and time again. About fifty yards along this tunnel, which seemed to go for miles underground, there was a sort of 'bench' which was directly below the road and a few feet off the ground. Rats lived in this tunnel and I could see them in the darkness

scurrying passed on the ground below the bench. I was very frightened of the rats and just tried to avoid meeting them on the ground. I tried to sleep in the tunnel, constantly aware of the rats and other dangers, like being caught by my mother.

As daylight started to appear through the gaps in the manhole cover above my head, I thought, 'Hope it doesn't rain.'

It was essential for me to keep dry. There was no way of getting freezing cold, wet clothes dry and my bones would dither, my teeth would chatter and regardless of where I had found to hide I could feel the cold nibbling away at my bones, biting away at my fingers and my soaking, freezing cold feet felt like they were melting and rotting away. I waited for the sound of the clinking of the bottles of the milk float, travelling on the road above.

'Time to get up, ' I thought. "Could do with a bloody clock down here. Well, at least it's not raining today."

I would cautiously emerge from the shelter. Sometimes, full daylight had not appeared. I would look up towards the sky, sometimes it was too early for me to consider if it was likely to rain.

"Morning Cruel World."

I would listen to the birds chirping merrily. "Morning birds, lucky bastards." But the birds never seemed to chirp very much in the winter months, just the occasional sound was all there was.

'Must be about 5.30am, ' I thought. "Milkman's early," I muttered quietly under my breath.

There never was anyone to hear me talking to myself, cursing, commenting and praying outloud. 'Was God listening to me, was he ever going to help me?' I wondered.

I had heard people say that if you pray for yourself it never gets answered. I often prayed for my sisters and brother and I prayed for my mother to get better. Most of all I prayed the pain would go away and I prayed to die.

Each day I listened for directions of the clinking bottles and continued on my way, observing the doorsteps for my breakfast. I tried to steer clear of the milkfloat itself, while observing it from a safe distance. I thought about the old folk and people who weren't so well off and would only steal milk from the doorstep of a house where several bottles had been delivered, never from a flat. I knew if the person only had one bottle delivered and I pinched it they may have to go thirsty, but if they had four or five bottles delivered they could almost certainly manage on one bottle less.

Chapter 1: Misery and Pain

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It was far easier for me to estimate the time of day from outside in the street, as opposed to being in the tunnel. It was an important part of my ability to survive on the streets. The birds provided my morning call which allowed me to catch the milkman. Very often bread was also delivered to 'rich peoples homes'. The delivery vans would appear on the streets at about 11.00am. The vans delivered fresh bread and a selection of cakes, leaving them on people doorsteps, luxuries they could manage without. A cake was not a luxury to me, it was sometimes all I had to eat for several days.

I was living like a wild animal and developing the same instincts for survival. Roaming the streets for days on end, constantly aware of the dangers, constantly on the move and constantly looking for somewhere to hide, somewhere I could feel safe.

Chapter 2: A Greater Fear

By the time I was nine years old my parents had got fed up with me running away from home. On several occasions the police had been called out to find me, sometimes the search lasting several days. I often stayed away from school as I knew this was the first place the police would look for me. One day after being caught by police, after running away, I was taken home to be greeted by a strange man.

"Hello," said the man. "You must be Billy."

"This is Mr Ryecroft, the school truancy officer," my mother interrupted. I noticed a suitcase packed by the side of the man.

"Can you tell me where you have been for the last week?" Mr Ryecroft asked.

"Billy, can you tell me where you have been for the last week?" he repeated.

The police were leaving. - "We'll leave you to it then!"

"Thanks officers," Mr Ryecroft called, as my mother showed them out.

Mr Ryecroft turned to me again, "Why haven't you been to school?"

"Because it's the first place the coppers look for me," I said, with my head bowed down.

"Where have you been?" Mr Ryecroft asked, "Been staying at a friends house have you?"

"No," I said. "I've been outside all the time, just sleeping rough, like I always do."

"Would you like another cup of tea Mr Ryecroft?" my mother asked. I could sense she was getting worried.

"Can I have one please mom? I haven't had one in over a week," I said politely.

Mr Ryecroft shook his head, "No thank you. I need to get on with this."

My mother had her evil, 'I dare you' look in her face, as she passed me my cup of tea.

"Could you tell me why you keep running away, Billy? I would like to help you if I can," said Mr Ryecroft.

"You can't help me. It's too late, and nobody believes me anyway. What's the point?" I answered bitterly.

"Just tell me why you run away this time, forget all the other times!" The man was starting to get irritated.

I took a mouthful of tea which hit the bottom of my empty stomach like a stone dropped down a well. I stood up and lifted my shirt, exposing some of the bruises that were still highly visible more than a week old.

"She beats the hell out of me every day, for no sodding reason!" I yelled, in a desperate cry for help. I moved quickly away, in the direction off the toilet.

I could hear my mother shouting, denying everything. "He's always like that when he comes back. He climbs trees and gets into fights, you can ask anyone."

"I know, I know, don't worry, it'll be all right," Mr Ryecroft said, trying to calm my mother down.

I stood listening, wishing someone would do something to make her stop, to make her better, to make the pain go away. I could hear every word she was saying and I could hear Mr Ryecroft accepting everything she was saying.

'I'm really in the shit now, ' I thought. "She's gonna kill me when he's gone!"

I started climbing out of the toilet window and was suddenly grabbed around the waist by the pursuing Mr Ryecroft.

"I can manage thanks," I said.

"Come on, we're going now," Mr Ryecroft said. "I said I would try to help you."

I carried my suitcase and walked with Mr Ryecroft to his car. My mother shouted goodbye as I was lead away but I didn't answer. I didn't know where I was going and neither did I care, this was one beating I was going without!

I was taken to River House Boarding School, Henley-in-Arden. The school was situated just outside a quiet and peaceful little village in the countryside. The air smelt different. I looked at the building as I was driven through the open driveway to its entrance.

'It's huge!' I thought.

When I arrived at the school I felt very lost and confused, but for once in my life I felt safe. The school seemed very large and very old. It was an all boys school with age ranging from about eight to sixteen years. The main building

was built of stone and I thought the place was fascinating, like living in a castle. I had never seen such a building before.

The main building was used for eating, sleeping and generally living in. Some of the lads played with their toy soldiers, which they had bought from a shop in the village. They spent hours standing them all up, arranging them in various battle formations, and then spent minutes knocking them all down with marbles. Some lads had massive collections, which probably indicated the length of time they had been at the school. The classrooms were separate to the main building and my classroom was like a large port-a-cabin.

I didn't really mix very much with the other lads in the school and can now only recall one lad from the school, who actually lived in Chelmsley Wood. I still recall a few of the staff. Mrs Wagstaff was my teacher and was the first person I ever opened up to and told about my home-life who actually believed me. She was very sympathetic and understanding and reminded me constantly that I was safe at school.

The bed was warm, comfortable and dry. There were no thorns sticking in my back and I sighed with relief. I was able to close my eyes and go to sleep. Luxury. Food I didn't have to steal, dry, warm clothes and people I wasn't afraid of.

I could hear the high-pitched sound of the bats, but nobody else seemed to be able to hear them. One of the teachers pointed to one as it flew above our heads in the dark of the evening. "Are you afraid of bats?" he asked.

I looked up at the bats, flying in the air, "No. I've never met any to be afraid of them, but I can hear them. Can you hear them?" I asked.

We stood still for a few seconds. . . "No. I can't hear anything," he said. I listened with curiosity to the high-pitched sounds of the bats.

"I can tell if the ground is wet or dry, even if I'm blindfolded and have my shoes on," I told him. It wasn't quite true, I could simply feel and smell the damp air and that was how I knew.

Mr Deadman seemed very old, his face wrinkled with age. He seemed a very kind and patient man and he taught me to swim. This was no easy task for the elderly man, who had problems just getting me into the water in the first place. Mr Deadman could see the fear in my face but he had no idea. I was determined, I was not going in the water.

Mr Deadman spoke to Mrs Wagstaff about the problems he was having with me. I listened to them talking from outside the room.

"He's really petrified. I thought he was just playing up at first, but he's not. He is really petrified," Mr Deadman said to Mrs Wagstaff.

"Show some patience with this one, he's told me things that would make your hair fall out. Has he told you about when he was scolded?" Mrs Wagstaff asked.

"No. He doesn't really talk very much. He keeps saying he will go in on his own, without me being there," Mr Deadman explained. "I've told him rules are rules. I just can't leave you to go in on your own. You might drown. I've even tried leading him in by hand, but he grabs hold of something and will not let go."

Mrs Wagstaff told him a little about some of the things I had told her. "Try not to persuade him to go in the water. Try to find out why he doesn't want to go in. But be prepared, his mother is one real cruel bitch!" she explained.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Go and talk to him. He's in the recreation room, I saw him on my way in just a few minutes ago. He's a good kid really. I'll come with you if you like, he talks to me now," Mrs Wagstaff suggested.

"Hello Miss," I said, greeting my teacher as she entered the room with Mr Deadman.

"Mr Deadman would like to talk to you about your swimming lessons. Will you talk to him?" she asked.

"Tell him what you told me, about why you block the bathroom door so no-one can enter," she suggested.

She turned and spoke to Mr Deadman, "I've explained to Billy our reasons for not allowing the boys to lock themselves in the bathrooms. Billy has told me why he does and there's only Mr Edwards who tries to stop him now. The rest of us are prepared to turn a blind eye under the circumstances. You'll understand why, if he talks to you." I remained quiet for a few minutes, not really wanting to talk to him.

Mr Deadman tried to encourage me to open up and talk. "Why are you so afraid of the water?" he asked.

"I'm not afraid of the water," I stated, feeling as if he were accusing me of something I hadn't done. "I just have to be on my own when I go in it," I told him.

Mrs Wagstaff walked out of the room as she was already starting to get upset, just at the thought of what I was about to say.

"When I was six years old, I was badly scolded. My mother had just finished boiling my sisters nappies in the boiler and was emptying it into a metal

bucket, like that one over there." I pointed to the red fire bucket, filled with sand.

"I was getting ready for school. I had got my shorts on and all my school clothes and was trying to get some breakfast from the kitchen, where my mother was working. I guess I must have got in her way. She pushed me and I sat in the bucket of boiling water. My backside was wedged in the bucket, which was so hot I was burning my hands trying to pull myself out of it. The water scolded all my arse and my bits, from my waist down to my legs and I screamed the fucking house down," I said bitterly.

Swearing was never heard at this school but Mr Deadman remained silent as he listened to what I was saying.

"I spent months in bed, lying flat on my belly and every day a nurse had to come and change the dressings on my arse. She would give me a piece of leather strap to bite on, so that I wouldn't bite off my tongue with the pain. My arse was all infected because of all the piss in the water. The dressing always stuck and I had to grab hold of the wooden headboard while the nurse ripped the gauze dressings off and half my skin would go with it. There was all green and yellow puss coming out of my arse because it had all turned septic," I explained.

"Can you imagine that Mr Deadman, having layers of skin ripped off while you try not to bite your tongue off in pain?" I asked. There was no reply.

He appeared to be listening, so I continued. "While I was living at home my mother would always put me into scolding hot baths, every bath time. She would hold my head under the water until I was fighting for breath. When I got out of the bath my skin was red raw and if I moaned or cried she would bash my head in with a saucepan. Every single saucepan in our house is full of dents, all the handles are broke, as a result of being continually smashed over my head. When I got out of the bath, I would nearly pass out because of the sudden, massive temperature change. My blood felt as if I had been partly cooked, boiled alive."

"How do you feel about your mother now?"

I raised my head and looked at Mr Deadman. I couldn't believe the question he had just asked. His voice had changed. Mr Deadman was fighting to hold back the distress but I could see it written all across his face.

"How would you feel if someone did all that to you? You don't know the half of it," I told him.

"Would you like me to teach you to swim?" he asked. "I'm not going to push the issue any further if you say no." Mr Deadman obviously wanted to do something.

"Maybe one day," I replied, "but no-one will ever come into a bathroom with me. I really don't give a shit about the rules. I'm not afraid of water. I just don't trust people, not anyone."

Eventually I did enter the water of my own accord. I waited until Mr Deadman was at the far end of the pool and climbed in without being noticed. Mr Deadman turned as he reached the far end of the pool and looked at me holding onto the side. He said nothing, his smile said all he needed to say. He showed a lot of patience with me and eventually taught me to swim breaststroke. For some reason I found I could swim better under water than on the surface. It was a case of 'sink or swim' so I learned to swim, with a lot of help from Mr Deadman, I had mastered one of my fears.

After about six months at this school I was put in the position where I had to face a far greater fear, my mother.

"We have arranged for you to go home at the weekend. Your parents have been in touch and requested that you should be allowed occasional weekend leave from school," I was told by one of the staff.

"Have you thought about your family since being here?" I was asked.

"I've tried not to," I replied. "I guess I do still love my family, I miss my brother and sisters and I miss my dad."

"They miss you too, so we have arranged for you to go home this weekend," the staff member announced.

The weekend came and very nervously I went home. I gave my family all a big hug and they appeared glad to see me. I looked around the kitchen and noticed the curtain wire was no longer hanging up in the place where it used to hang.

'Where the bloody hell is it?' I wondered. I looked at my brother and sisters. 'You've grown, ' I thought.

My mother made a drink and I sat at the table with her. She looked as if she were about to cry and calmly walked round the table and stood next to me. "I've missed you son," she said.

She stood in vain, waiting for some response from me. I was far from at ease. I lifted my cup and started to drink my tea. My mother sat back down.

"I've changed. Look, no curtain wire, no belt. I don't loose my temper anymore. Things have really calmed down now. I've learned from my mistakes," she claimed, as she started crying.

I walked round to my mother but didn't say anything, I put my arm around her and gave her the hug she had been waiting for earlier. My eyes still wondering around the kitchen looking for the curtain wire.

"She isn't so mad anymore," Laurence said, later in the day. "She does get mad but she doesn't beat us like she used to and she doesn't use the curtain wire at all anymore. She just uses the belt sometimes."

"Well, your mothers little pet anyway. She never beats any of you like she fucking beats me. She's just lost her punchbag, that's the only difference," I told him.

"No, honest, she really has changed. She's all right now, most of the time," Laurence stated.

"I bet you don't say that when you're being roasted alive in the sodding bath and I bet you'll go and tell her all this when I'm gone as usual," I said, remaining unconvinced.

The weekend passed by peacefully, without event or pain and I started to believe what Laurence had told me. I returned to school and continued to go home every other weekend. I liked the school and got on reasonably well with everyone.

I often had talks with Mrs Wagstaff, but never really spoke to any of the other staff or lads about anything serious and was not really the type to enter into idle chat. I took part in various activities at the school but mostly kept myself to myself.

I continued going home for weekends and started going for the occasional holiday. On the whole the weekends went fairly well but the holidays seemed rather long. Although my mother had stopped the beatings, the tension and atmosphere was unbearable at times.

"Why don't you come home to stay?" Laurence asked me. "We all want you to come home, don't we?" He put the question to his sisters.

"Yeah, we all do. You've seen mom's all right now. Why don't you come home to stay?" they asked me.

"I can't," I replied.

A few more visits passed without incident and then my parents put me on the spot. "We would all like you to come home to stay. It cost us a lot of money to keep you in luxuries at that school of yours, so we're asking you if you would like to come back home to stay?"

I was happy and content at the school and would have liked to have been able to stay. I didn't want to go home, not at all.

"Well? We're waiting for your answer," my mother demanded, waiting impatiently for her reply.

"Yeah, I'll come back home," I sighed, afraid to keep my mother waiting for her answer.

"Are you sure that's what you really want, because we can sign you out anytime providing you agree?" my mother said.

"Yeah," I sighed. I was lying. I never wanted to go home, but was afraid to say any different.

After fourteen months at the school I was discharged and returned home. When first returning home it seemed as if my mother had really changed for the better, but it didn't last.

I returned to Coleshill Heath school, but this stay was fairly short as I had reached the age to attend comprehensive school. I started going to Whitesmore Comprehensive in Chelmsley Wood. After only a few weeks back home my mother reverted back to her former self.

I was sat at the breakfast table, which was a great privilege at any time, as I often had to go without food for days even while in the family home. I sat eating some porridge with my younger brother and younger sister. Michele was still getting washed and dressed. She would get no breakfast as the table would be cleared at our mothers command. I accidentally knocked my cup over and the tea poured all over the make-shift table cloth, an old ripped up sheet.

I started panicking, frightened of what my mother may do. I tried not to upset her and got down from the table. "Sorry mom," I said remorsefully, "I've spilled my tea. Can I have the dish cloth please?"

My mother turned, looked at the table and went berserk. She grabbed me by the hair and dragged me back across the kitchen. "Look what you've done to my bloody table cloth," she snarled furiously, as she rubbed my face in the tea stain, upsetting all the other breakfasts and cups of tea.

"Get it cleaned up and that stain had better come out or your really in trouble!" she ordered. She bounced my head off the table and I fell on the floor.

She reached down and sank her finger nails into my face and dragged me across the kitchen floor. I could feel my face being distorted from her grip and tried not to resist but could feel my flesh being torn and the blood running

down my face, dripping onto my shirt collar. I could feel my face swelling as I removed the table cloth and placed it in the washing basket, which was standing by the kitchen sink with its contents waiting to be washed.

"That was only polished yesterday," my mother insisted angrily, as I cleaned the wet table.

'I know, I bloody polished it, along with the rest of the bloody house, that's why I was late for school, ' I said silently to myself.

I went to walk out of the kitchen after cleaning the table. My mother dragged me back by my face with her nails hooked into my cheek again, more blood running down new wounds.

"You forgot something, haven't you?" she said, as she stuck my head in the washing basket, the blood now dripping onto the table cloth.

"If you think I'm cleaning up your bloody mess, you've got another thing coming. Get it washed," she demanded.

I took the table cloth to the bathroom and put some hot water in the bath, with a little soap powder. My mother entered the bathroom and saw the blood was still running down my face and dripping into the bath.

"Wasting all my bloody hot water now, are you? You little brat! About time you had a wash isn't it?" she snarled.

My mother grabbed me at the back of the neck and stuck my head in the water with all the aggression and strength she could find. The water was as hot as I could stand to put my hands in. I emerged dripping wet and half cooked, gasping for breath.

"No bloody school today... Bastard," I muttered behind my mothers back, as I reached for the towel after she had left the room.

Nothing had really changed. I continued going to school very late and the beatings continued almost daily, often for very little reason, if she needed reason at all. The misery was beyond description, the heartache beyond repair. I wanted someone to shoot me through the head to make the pain stop. The curtain wire was brought back out of hiding. I squirmed around the kitchen floor with my arms wrapped around my head and face, trying to protect myself from the rain of blows from the steel whip. I prayed to God that she would lose the wire. I often tried to hide it but she just took another one down and used that until she found the wire with half its thin plastic coating missing. The part- bare steel spring was her terrorist weapon. Her mind, so evil that I believed she was the devils servant. I just wanted her to go back to hell, but hell had come to live with me and I was the devils servants prey.

I regularly missed days off school as I was very often in such a terrible state after being ripped to pieces that I needed to be hidden away at home, out of public view.

My mother gave me no chance to do any homework set by the school and often tore up my school books. I would not tell my teachers at school about my home life and was regularly caned at school for not having my homework done without giving any excuse.

"You have the worse time-keeping record in the history of the school," the headmaster told me. "School starts at 8.45am, not 10.30am. Have you no excuse laddie?"

"No Sir," was the usual reply I gave.

"Well bend over that chair, let's see if a little reminder will help you," he said, as he proceeded to cane me across the backside.

'Few more bloody stripes won't be noticed, ' I thought. 'The cane doesn't hurt that much anyway. Curtain wire is a real killer and besides, at least you can count, which is more than my bastard mother can do.' I quietly took the punishment for being an hour and a half late.

It was very rare that I could take part in any physical education lessons, due to the fact I could not take my clothes off and let people see the state of my back and body. I was covered in painful deep bruises, of various colours, according to age. Bruises covering over 70% of my body and an additional 10% covered in claw marks. I often had to forge my mothers signature to excuse me from P.E.

One particular day my mother was beating me when someone knocked the front door of the house. As my mother opened the door I tried to run passed her and out. She grabbed me before I could get out. She closed the door, swung me around by my arm and smashed the top of my head into the corner of the wall. My head split wide open and I fell to the floor, unable to get up, completely dazed, almost unconscious. Nobody really knows who it had been at the door, it may have been the dustbin men trying to find out what all the screaming was about. The neighbours never took any notice of my agonizing screams.

My mother made an attempt to stop the bleeding but had to call for an ambulance. The blood was pouring down my face, the dishcloth and the teatowel were completely saturated in blood. She came with me in the ambulance to East Birmingham Hospital where I had eight stitches to the gaping wound. My mother told the hospital, so convincingly, that I had tripped up on some carpet while running around in the house and had hit my head.

On that same night, as I lay in bed, my mother came into the bedroom, grabbed me by the top of my pyjamas and started bashing my head in with a heavy cast-iron frying pan. "Your bloody snoring is keeping your brother awake," she yelled fiercely.

I wasn't even asleep before she came into the room. I was lying in bed, silently thinking about the days events.

My head opened up again and I could feel the blood pumping out of my head. I was too afraid to get out of bed. I lay there with the blood pumping, my face saturated in the pool of blood that was soaking into my pillow. I just lay helplessly in my bed sobbing, bleeding.

'At least if I bleed to death my problems will finally be over, ' I thought. I heard the front door opening. 'Dad's home! He's early tonight, it's only about 10.00pm.'

I climbed out of bed. "He might help me," I whispered to myself.

I went to my father with the blood pumping out of my head, pouring down my face and into my eyes. My pyjamas were saturated in blood.

"What the bloody hells happened to him?" my father asked, in an alarming voice as I collapsed at his feet.

"You better have a bloody good answer for this, you bitch," he aimed at my mother, as he picked me up.

My father took me to hospital to have my head stitched for the second time and carried me for most of the five-mile journey home. He accepted a lift from a stranger who stopped to help the man who had, unknown to him, only just got home from a fourteen- hour work shift. My father was grateful to the stranger and gave him his last packet of cigarettes, with no money to buy anymore.

When we finally arrived home I went back to bed. I was very tired and feeling very sick. I could hear my parents in the room at the other end of the hallway arguing.

"You know how clumsy he is, always running about and fighting at school," my mother offered, unremorsefully.

My father was very angry. "I know there is something going on behind my back," he said. "I can't understand why it's always him getting hurt. The other kids don't look like him, do they?"

"I can't even go to work in peace. You better start taking better care of them kids, I'm telling you!" he exclaimed. My father was mad, I had never heard or known my father so mad before.

I was listening and could hear the lies my mother was telling him. I wanted to go into him and tell him the truth. I stayed in bed. I knew my father would have to go to work the next day and I would have to face my mother's anger alone.

The next day my father left for work at about 6.30am and my mother came straight into me. She took me outside in my pyjamas and locked me in the shed. She kept me locked in this cold, dark, dirty shed for three days and nights, each day giving me a piece of dry bread and a cup of water. I sat in the corner of the shed, wishing I was dead. After the third day she let me out.

"Your first job, clean the shed," she demanded. She did not let me out in three days, not even for the toilet.

"If you run away I'll lock you in there again. Do you understand? Now clean up your mess," she demanded maliciously.

My father had not noticed that I had been missing from the house. The school and the police had been told I had run away from home.

Knife throwing also became another pass-time for my mother. The chip pan was very small and so when chips were cooked for the evening meal they had to be made in two batches. Michele had peeled some potatoes for the evening meal and my mother cut up the potatoes and cooked the chips. The children sat around the table eating egg, chips and peas.

My mother was cutting the second batch of chips, when suddenly and without warning she turned and threw the knife. The blade hit me straight in the head. "Can't even offer your own mother a chip," was the statement that left her mouth.

I left the table and walked out of the house. When I got halfway up the garden path, the blood started streaming down my face. I didn't run away this time. I just sat on the doorstep, with the blood running down my face while my family sat round the table eating their food. My mother had not gone mad enough to warrant running away this time. I tried to take such minor incidents in my stride.

As I sat on the step the thought suddenly struck me, 'Why didn't she just dish herself a few bloody chips up? She was in control of the bloody things.'

By the time I was eleven years old, I had a large scar down the centre of my head and three knife scars in the side of my head, where my mother had thrown knives at me. Staff from my schools had taken me to hospital on more

than one occasion to have wounds stitched or treated. I had lost count of the small scars in my head.

Once after running away from home I was caught by police while looking for somewhere to sleep in the farmlands area of Coleshill. The officer cringed as he saw the state of my face and asked about the marks. At first I told the officer that I had fallen out of a tree.

"I know you're telling me lies and suggest you tell me the truth," the officer said. "You've nothing to be afraid of and I want to know what the hell's happened to you."

The officer noticed more marks on my neck. He took me over to the police Landrover so that he could see more clearly and lifted my shirt. I was afraid to say anything but so desperately wanted to say something to make it all go away, to make the nightmare stop.

The officer called his colleague over, "Just take a look at this," as he exposed my back to his colleague in the beam of the headlights.

"Tsss, Jesus... I've never seen anything like it. He's as skinny as a rake." The copper was trying to make me laugh but it didn't work. I had nothing to laugh about and didn't find much to laugh at. I was so very desperately in need of help and so very miserable.

"I think he's been on a pirate ship. Have you been on a pirate ship?" he asked.

"No. I told you, I fell down a tree," I replied.

"It must have been some savage tree to do something like this. Come on, let's go and have a chat and a cup of tea," the officer offered, as he helped me into the Landrover.

At the police station my back was photographed and some of the wounds treated against infection. I was questioned further.

The police started talking among themselves. "He's not saying anything and we're ready to arrest his father."

"It wasn't my dad," I shouted. "He doesn't know anything about it. It's my mom that does it," interrupting their conversation, trying to defend my father. The police took me back home and questioned my mother.

"He's always doing things like this. He goes running away every time he's told off and always comes back in a state. He gets into gang fights," my mother told them, trying to sound convincing.

"We're not idiots," the officer told her. "He's told us what you do to him and we're warning you, if anything like this happens again, your children will be put into care and you will be arrested."

Within minutes after the police leaving the house she started all over again. The steel curtain wire came whipping through the air, repeatedly crashing down onto my back. My cries ignored, she had no mercy, only hatred drove her on. She sank her talons into my face, tearing deep gashes and chunks of flesh. She bounced my head off the walls repeatedly until I could no longer get to my feet. I didn't really understand what it meant for the children to be put into care but I did not run away this time.

My desperation had reached its peak. I just couldn't take the pain any longer. I waited until everyone was asleep, then went into the kitchen. I heaved and my stomach churned as I swallowed down a hundred little tablets, that continually popped back up only to be swallowed again. I left a note on the kitchen table saying, "I just want the pain to stop, I'm sorry but I can't see any other way."

I really hoped I would be dead by morning but woke up in East Birmingham Hospital the next day, after having my stomach washed out. I was returned home but the nightmare never seemed to end. I was eleven years old and I hoped and I prayed to God to die.

In 1972 the family moved house again, to a four-bedroom house in Ely Close, Chelmsley Wood. My mother arranged the furniture, hung the pictures and hung the curtain wire behind the kitchen door. The beatings and whippings continued almost daily and I was running away constantly. While living in this house a neighbour who lived two doors away heard my agonizing screams and came to investigate. I had already been whipped. I was lying on my stomach, face down on the floor, holding onto the back doorstep trying to pull myself out of the house. My mother had got her claws hooked in my face and was trying to pull me back inside the house by my face. The heavily built neighbour ran up the path, physically picked up my mother, sat her in a chair and sat on top of her. My mother had still got pieces of my flesh hanging from her finger nails.

I ran out of the house, slamming the door behind me so hard that the reinforced wire mesh glass fell out of the door. I hadn't even got a shirt on my back. My body covered in severe whip marks, the blood dripping down my chest from the gashes in my face, pieces of flesh still hanging, which hadn't completely been torn away. In severe discomfort I wandered to the river, near to the woods. I sat and tried to bathe my wounds in the cleanest part of the river that I could find. There weren't many building sites left on Chelmsley Wood by this time. The building sites had provided a supply of clean water, but now there were all gone. The river was the only other readily available water supply. I was so grateful to the neighbour who had saved me some skin. Nobody had ever done anything like that for me before. The neighbours

generally just turned up their television sets to drown out the agonizing cries and horrific screams, of a child who was so clearly and desperately in need of help.

Shortly before Christmas 1973, my mother sent me out to find a job to start earning my keep. I tried for several weeks to find myself a paper round or milk round so that I could earn some money. At twelve years old I was very small for my age. Nobody would give me a job. I really tried my best to find any kind of work. For about three weeks running I returned home without any job or money. My mother was not prepared to listen to any excuses. She grabbed me around the throat, rammed my head against the wall and held a knife under my nose, pushing it hard under my nose.

I pleaded with my mother, "I've been all over ..."

"I'm not interested in your excuses, you lazy bastard, I'm telling you to get out and get some money and not to come back until you've got some. Do you understand, am I getting through that thick skull of yours?" she questioned, as she bashed my head against the wall a few more times.

I tried to explain, "I've tried..."

"Didn't you bloody hear me?" she said, "I told you, Get some money, not try. I don't care how you get it. Just get it!" I knew exactly what she meant by this last comment which she had stressed so strongly.

Again I went out, licking the blood that was running to my mouth from the minor cut under my nose. After walking the streets in the freezing cold weather for several more hours, I went into a shop to steal some biscuits to eat. While in the shop I saw a young boy come into the shop to buy some things and noticed he paid with a £10.00 note. I left the shop and waited for the boy. I punched the boy in the face, stole his money and went home. I gave this money to my mother.

"I've found myself a job on the milk round, that's my wages for today and tomorrow," I told her.

I really was sorry for what I had done and it played on my mind. 'At least I can just walk the streets tomorrow and try to find a real job, without having to find any more money.'

"Sorry kid, I wouldn't have done it if I had any choice," I muttered quietly to myself.

The following day I went out again, but still no job was to be found, and the same the following week. I knew I could not return home empty handed, so I returned to the shop where I had robbed the boy the previous week. I followed another boy into the shop and robbed him when he came back

outside. This boy had less money than the one from the previous week and started to panic.

'What the fuck am I going to do now? Mother's never going to accept this as a weeks wages, ' I thought. I returned to the shop the next day but the shop was very quiet and the customers too big for me to rob.

'I've got to think of some other way of getting some money and damned quick, or she's gonna kill me.' There was no doubt in my mind... Only fear.

I knew that a lot of people had extras delivered by the milk man on Sundays, like eggs, bread, potatoes and pop. I had stolen some of these goods before for my own consumption but now I had to steal for another reason.

For about six weeks running, I waited outside the same shop each Saturday and robbed boys of the money they had. On Sundays I followed milkmen and stole anything and everything I could find. I sold the goods cheaply to people on the streets, telling them it was fresh farm produce and each week giving the money to my mother, in varying amounts. By this time I had got into the habit of stealing, even when there was no need. I began stealing things I simply wanted rather than things I needed, which was something I'd never done before.

After about six weeks of robbing kids outside the same shop I was caught by the shopkeeper with large Alsatian dog. I was arrested by the police and charged with 'Robbery with violence'.

The police told my mother that I had committed a very serious offence and would have to go to court. My mother phoned my father to come home from work. I was terrified. When he arrived home she told him what had happened but my father did not hit me, he was too angry.

My father glared at me, the anger clearly visible in his eyes. "You had better keep right out of my sight," he said. "Because if I start, I'm likely to kill you stone dead, you little bastard."

I thought about the time when I was seven years old and my father burned my hands on the cooker for 37pence. The thought of what he was likely to do for the robbery of a possible £40.00 made me a nervous wreck. A few days passed, my mother continued whipping me and ripping my face to pieces and I ran away.

Walking the streets of Coleshill in the freezing winter weather, I knew of a car in the area which was regularly covered by a full size tent-like car cover. I had slept beneath this cover before. I went to the car that was parked in the driveway of a house, removed the car cover and took it to Chelmsley Woods. I erected my new tent in the woods, covering it over with brambles to hold it down in the winter winds. The brambles also provided some very good

camouflage and protection from intruders. I packed my clothing with newspaper and wrapped my feet in tin foil in order to try to keep warm. It was the middle of December, frost lay all around and it was bitter cold.

This time I was caught by my father who took me home and unleashed his anger. "You're going to know how those kids felt that you robbed, you thieving little bastard. Did you punch 'em in the face, like this?" - Bang!

"Did you punch 'em in the guts, like this?" Another punch sent me sailing backwards across the room.

"Did you kick 'em in the back, like this?" Thud! After about six or seven punches and kicks from my father it stopped, but it was not over yet...

My father held my hands over the flames of the gas cooker while I was screaming in pain and struggling to get away from him. He tried to sit me on the top of the cooker but somehow I managed to struggle free, but I couldn't get away as he had locked the doors. Then it was my mother's turn. She sat me in a chair and sat on top of me while she tied me up. I screamed in agony as she put lighted cigarettes on my finger nails, the pain was so intense it felt like all my raw nerve endings were being burned. I let out the most agonizing screams that the whole street must have heard but nobody came to help. I was completely helpless, there was no possible escape and there was no mercy. I was trapped in hell.

My father then made me stand on the spot for nearly twenty-four hours. I was stood in the living room while my father was sat on the settee. His eyes were closed and he was tired but fully awake.

"Can I go to the toilet?" I asked.

"Stand there," he ordered coldly.

"I need the toilet and can't wait," I stated desperately.

"Stand there," he replied, not bothering to open his eyes.

I couldn't hold it any longer and thought my bladder was going to burst. I sighed with relief as it ran down my trousers but I felt so humiliated and ashamed. I stood in my wet trousers with the puddle in my shoe and I started to fall asleep while still standing on my feet. My father gave me a crack with the belt to wake me up. Each time I started to fall asleep he gave me another crack with the belt to wake me up. I was so tired and exhausted that I could hardly stand up, but I had to stay standing and had to stay awake.

This punishment lasted for two days and one night with one form of torture after another. I had suffered before but this was without doubt the longest two days of my life.

Chapter 3: Five Years

I soon ran away again and was gone for several days. I was still on police bail, awaiting the court appearance. I had returned to my hideout in the woods. My tent was still in place, hidden from general view. I stayed out in the freezing, icy weather for several days before being caught by police. I was taken home to collect my things and taken to Myton Park Assessment Centre in Warwick.

I was twelve years old. I arrived at Myton in the middle on the night and was not told where I was going until I had actually arrived at the place.

I was shown a heavy ball and chain in the office, "We put that on our runaways," the man said jokingly. I was not amused. "Go on, pick it up," he suggested.

I went over and attempted to demonstrate my strength but the heavy steel ball appeared to be rooted to the spot... It wasn't and I just managed to clear it from the ground.

I laughed at the man, "It wouldn't stop me! I'd drag the bastard thing around until I could chop the fucking thing off."

The man took a padlock out of his drawer and padlocked the ball and chain to my ankle. "Come on, I'll show you to your unit. You'll like it here," he said.

I followed behind, dragging the heavy weight behind me. 'Wish I'd kept my bloody mouth shut now, ' I thought as I struggled across the main hall.

The man showed me to my bedroom, "You're in here. Good night!"

"Hey, what about this bloody thing?" I enquired, trying to remind the man about my heavy burden.

Seriously straight faced, the man looked at me, "In your own words, you said you would drag the bastard thing around until you could chop the fucking thing off. Well, now you've got your chance... Oh, by the way, it's hardened steel. Good night."

The next morning everyone got up and went to the main hall for breakfast. One of the other lads started laughing at me dragging the ball behind.

"I see you've met the boss. I'm 'Rags' and I've been here forever," he stated.

"I'm Billy..."

"Not here, you ain't," Rags stated. He looked at me struggling to get up the steps.

"You're Scar face," he declared.

"Yeah, ok, now how do I get this bloody thing off? It weighs a ton," I said. "I've only been here three hours, and I've already decided I don't like the place!"

"You'll have to ask the boss and you'll have to apologise for your manners," Rags explained.

"I don't even know his name and I haven't seen him yet anyway," I explained anxiously to Rags.

"His name is `Boss' and you call him 'Boss.' Yes Boss, No Boss, Thank you Boss. I really don't know his name so I just call him Boss. I had to wear that bloody thing when I arrived here because I played my face. I wore it for two days before I gave in and apologised properly," Rags explained.

I sat down to my breakfast and smiled quietly as I noticed this was a mixed sex institution. There were males and females with ages ranging from about eight to sixteen years. The main building was divided into three units, the male wing, the female wing and the junior wing for the younger residents. I was placed on the male wing. Before my first day was over, I spoke to the Boss and after a mutual understanding the ball was removed. The solution was simple, I agreed to call the man Boss and promised not to refer to him or at him by any other name and he took the bloody thing off.

During the days everyone mixed together in the school rooms, and after schooling in the dining room, which was the centre piece of the main, modern, brick building. After school lessons, residents could return to their units and watch television or play table tennis in the room adjoining the dining room. The old juke-box stood against the wall and played the same records over and over again.

I learned many things at Myton Park, like how to get passed guard dogs, how to break into buildings, how to steal from cars or maybe the car itself. Some of the older girls were also keen to teach me about some of lives pleasures. Myton Park was a depressing place full of sad-faced and unwanted kids, awaiting decisions on their futures.

I spent Christmas at Myton Park and went to court in February 1974, just before my thirteenth birthday. I pleaded guilty to the charge of `Robbery with violence'. My father was in the court and was asked by the Magistrate if he could stop his son from running away from home.

"No, Your Honour, I can't," my father replied.

I was placed on a care order until I reached the age of eighteen. I left the court in tears. It felt as if I had been sentenced to five years imprisonment. My father said that he was sorry as I was taken passed him and out of court.

Back at Myton, some of the girls aged between fifteen and sixteen thought they would have some fun with me when my birthday came around. They stripped me naked in the middle of a disco and left me standing there, totally humiliated, with everyone laughing at me while I tried to hide my embarrassment. I promised myself I would get revenge. It took me a little time and a lot of patience but I had promised myself I would get them back, so I did.

There was a large log construction in the middle of a field, known to the residents as, 'Bobs Bunker.' I tricked two of the girls into taking their clothes off in the bunker and then ran off with their clothes. I threw their clothes up into the trees. I had no real problem persuading the clothes off the first girls, who obviously thought I had other things in mind. I did have a slight problem with the third who had heard about what I had done to her friends but I still managed to leave her as they had left me, totally embarrassed. The other residents watched from the windows and found it rather funny, the sight of grown women climbing trees in the nude and I thought it was absolutely hilarious.

One night I went out with a few of the other lads while everyone was asleep. We broke into a cash & carry warehouse in nearby Leamington. We stole a box of 5000 Consulate cigarettes and a case of whisky. On the way back to Myton we stole a Landrover, just for the fun of it. One of the other lads drove us back to Myton Park and we all returned to our beds, leaving the Landrover parked outside next to the Jenson Interceptor which belonged to the 'Boss'. The staff did become curious when everyone in the place started smoking Consulate cigarettes and they could never figure out why they were having so much trouble waking everyone in the mornings. They never realized half the residents were drinking whisky after light out. My stay at Myton was a short but eventful one as I still managed to get into a fair amount of trouble. There was one lad who was much bigger than me, who kept pushing me around and booting me under the tables at meal times. I knew that in every institution there was a known 'hardman' and in here, it was Frankie, also known as 'Face Ache'.

"He's a real nasty piece of work, I wouldn't mess with him if I were you. He's likely to rip your sodding head off," Rags said, warning me of Frankie.

"I haven't done anything to him," I explained. "He's just taken a disliking to me for some sodding reason, but if he thinks he's just going to bash me about for no reason he's got another thing coming. I'm gonna try and sit at another table if I can, see what happens then."

The next mealtime came and I quickly sat at a different table, hoping to steer clear of Frankie. Frankie sat at the same table. I knew this was it. Frankie started booting me in the shins and messing with my food. I looked at Frankie, but tried not to provoke him.

"You fucking lost something, you Scarface bastard?" Frankie asked.

I said nothing and tried to eat my food. Frankie booted me again a little harder and repeated the question. I moved my legs and tried to ignore him. So Frankie started messing with my food once again. I was sat nervously at the table holding my knife and fork.

"Move your fucking hand out of my dinner or I'm gonna stick my fork through it," I demanded.

Frankie tried to give me another vicious boot under the table. "Come on then you Scarface bastard, try and stick your fucking fork in me," he said angrily.

I attempted to leave the table, still holding my knife and fork and Frankie got up. I threw my knife down towards the table, which shattered Frankie's dinner plate. He was furious and chased me across the room. I ran down the steps into the games area and I went mad. I swung a snooker cue, breaking it round his head and followed up by smashing a wooden chair across his back. Rags was right, Frankie did want to rip my head off! It was a violent battle with things flying in all directions. I was throwing things at Frankie, trying to keep him away, hoping to split his head open, or preferably knock him out, but there was little chance of that. I was pounced on and brought under control by staff and from then on tried to keep well out of Frankie's way although he never really bothered me again after that.

I disappeared once from Myton. I didn't exactly run away, I simply went a.w.o.l. (absent without leave). I had been working with one of the staff, chopping down a few small trees and decided to go for a walkabout.

The police were notified immediately as I had taken a hatchet (small axe) with me. I hadn't really run away, I just went for an unauthorised stroll through the 'spinney' (small woods) which was still officially on Myton Park grounds. A policeman tried to catch me running in the spinney and I turned round to face him, still holding the hatchet which I refused to put down. The police officer picked something up off the ground and threw into my stomach, causing me to keel over with the wind taken out of me. The officer then removed the hatchet and hit me once in each arm and each leg with his truncheon. He sunk the hatchet in a tree, out of my reach but he didn't take me back. He just left me lying on the ground, groaning in pain. I later went back on my own and told the staff I had thrown the hatchet in the tree. It just seemed more heroic than all the residents knowing I had been disarmed by an unarmed copper. I think the 'Boss' knew what had happened but nothing was ever said. Shortly after

this incident I was moved from Myton Park and taken to a childrens home in Chelmsley Wood.

Woodside childrens home was only home to me for a very short time. While at the home I returned to Whitesmore Comprehensive school, just for the duration of my stay at the home. Shortly after arriving at the home a fire broke out and swept through a few of the dormitories causing a lot of damage. Nobody was hurt in the fire or had any idea how it had started, but I was the newcomer and the blame fell on me. I was a known cigarette smoker! I had absolutely nothing to do with the fire but some of the staff had other opinions.

I was therefore moved from the home to The Hermitage in Solihull. The Hermitage was a huge, prewar, brick building and was being renovated at the time of my arrival. I was the only resident living in the place, as the building was officially closed. Decorators were working inside the building and a few staff were helping out. An ex-police officer was the officer in charge of the Hermitage and the only other member of staff regularly drove to work in a hearse. I had met this man a few years earlier, at River House School. I had taken an instant disliking to the man. There was just something about him that sent me cold. He had never done or said anything wrong but there was just something about him that spooked me and it wasn't just his chosen style of transport. After a nights sleep in this new home, I had breakfast then went to help with the painting. I painted a few doors and skirting boards, mainly to pass some time. Occasionally I played table tennis with the ex-copper. He seemed o.k. but he had figured that I was none too keen on the police. We told each other stories about incidents involving the police and I told him about a few of the `smacks' I'd received from police officers who considered me too cheeky for my own good or simply got mad at having to chase after me on cross-country jaunts. We often put each other to the test to see who could run the faster. On the flat road the ex-copper always won, but on rough ground he nearly always lost.

During my stay at the Hermitage, I started going to the local school in Solihull but before I even had chance to find my way around the school it was time to be moved on yet again. My social worker came to see me at the Hermitage.

"Hello Billy, how have you settled in?" the social worker asked.

'This guy is a real waste of space and thinks I'm bloody stupid, ' I thought. I looked at my social worker through suspicious eyes, knowing he hadn't called for a social visit.

"What brings you here?" I asked politely. I wondered what happened to my previous social worker as she was much better than this two-faced idiot.

"Just come to see how you are in your new home. Heard anything from your family?" he asked.

"No. I haven't seen or heard anything since leaving Woodside. My mother came up, trying to cause trouble. You must have told her where I was. The boss told her to bugger off or he was going to phone the police and she just went. Why what's happened?" I asked.

"Nothing's happened. I just wondered how you felt about your family and I have something I need to talk to you about," he said. "You can't stay here forever, this was only meant as a 'stop-gap' until we could arrange something more permanent."

"Just get to the point," I said, interrupting him, knowing that this social worker was inclined to go miles around everything.

"You have two choices, you can go back home to your family or go to Quinta School. It's a . . ."

I interrupted again. "Quinta!"

"O.K. Billy, we leave tomorrow. It's a long way, so we will be leaving early. See you about 8.30am," he stated.

"Just one question. Where on earth is Quinta?" I asked.

The reply came as he was walking out of the door. "Wales, North Wales."

On 14th October 1974 the social worker drove me to Quinta School, Weston Rhyn, North Wales. The journey was very long and seemed to take forever. The social worker explained about Quinta along the journey. He tried to lead me to believe that this was going to be some sort of holiday camp, which I soon discovered for myself was total and utter bloody nonsense. I had no real idea of what really lay ahead of me, only what the social worker had told me. I felt very apprehensive, as I always did when being moved from one place to another.

There were no gates to the long driveway which lead to the main building. The old, large, stone building stood like a monument in the middle of nowhere.

'It's fucking Colditz, ' I thought.

The social worker took me through the heavy arched door, leading to the small hallway. Old bottles, which had been dug up within the school grounds were on display in the wall mounted glass cabinet, behind the huge entrance door. After meeting the head master, I was lead through the church-like building to the extention which had obviously been built much later.

A full size snooker table stood in the middle of the room upon the wooden floor. Long wooden benches were fixed along the lengths of three of the walls.

I waited outside the office, looking through the open door at the man at the desk. "I'm Captain Dowling," he stated.

'It is fucking Colditz!' I said to myself.

Captain Dowling took me to the cellar to be kitted out with shirts, jumpers, jeans and heavy workboots. This was standard school issue, the school uniform. I was weighed and measured. At thirteen years old, I stood 4'10" tall and weighed just 4st 5lb, I was the smallest kid in the school. The school was divided into three house units, each housing around thirty lads. Severn-house was the oldest and largest of the three houses and this was where I started 'my sentence'. This was another all boys school with ages from thirteen through to sixteen years.

I learned very quickly that the older lads were really in control of the younger and smaller lads and I learned very quickly to keep my eyes open and my mouth shut. It was very foolish and sometimes could be dangerous to trust people at Quinta. Most of the time I tried to keep myself to myself. I had always had difficulty in mixing with people and being at Quinta made it a hundred times more difficult. In reality there was no such thing as a friend at Quinta, there were people you trusted a little and people you didn't trust at all.

One of the staff told me the facts of life, "You're nobody in here. You're all nobody in here and I'm nobody and nobody gives a fuck about nobody else."

Cigarettes were like gold dust and 'Inmates' often tried to smuggle them into school after any holiday or weekend leave. Inmates were generally searched back at school after any leave. There were always a few lads caught trying to smuggle cigarettes or tobacco into school but there were always the same faces who managed to get through without being caught. At times cigarettes changed hands at between ten and fifty pence each and anyone who failed to pay up at the end of the week was usually beaten up. The smaller lads often had their cigarettes taken by the older and bigger lads. Smoking was allowed at the school at fixed times and fixed places and the staff would hand out the cigarettes at these times.

I settled in Quinta very quickly as usually if any of the lads caused trouble it would result in privileges being stopped for everyone in the house-unit or at times the whole school. If any of the lads absconded or failed to return after any home leave the next weekend leave would be cancelled for everyone in the school. This would make you very unpopular with the other lads. Lads who absconded or failed to return from leave would be forced to wear long shorts and looked absolutely ridiculous with their heavy work boots on. It was done as a sort of deterrent but also so that everyone knew who was to blame

for the weekend leave being cancelled. The culprit would walk round a nervous wreck, like a rabbit in a dog's home.

Most lesser offences were generally dealt with by the headmaster fining the offender. Inmates caught smoking wrong time, wrong place, were usually fined and stopped from smoking for a day or even a week. Abusive behaviour, causing damage and most other offences were dealt with by fines. Any damage had to be paid for by whoever caused the damage or in cases where the culprit was unknown everyone had to pay. There was no such thing as 'benefit of the doubt' at Quinta. This was standard school policy, school justice!

Wake-up was at 7.30am and each of the staff had a different way to get the lads out of bed. One member of staff would come round chanting, "Wakey Wakey rise 'n' shine," who would then open all the windows and pull all the bedclothes off everyone, which did work, but not very well.

Another member of staff would simply come round tip the body and the mattress on the floor and then say, "Good morning," which had a slightly better effect, or another would come round and just tip the whole bed upside down. This was how inmates were taught about respect and courtesy.

After washing and dressing the inmates made their beds, which were inspected by the staff and had to be made again if not done properly. Then it was time for breakfast and breakfast was porridge. The porridge often had a strong resemblance to cement and at times lads would put their spoons in the plastic, unbreakable dish, lift the spoon and the dish would leave the table. After breakfast we all had work duty and each lad would be given a job to do in the house or in the grounds of the school.

These jobs would vary from polishing wooden floors or stairs, cleaning toilets or washing dishes. Everyone had a job to do and after all the work was completed the morning cigarettes would be handed out by a member of staff.

Each day all three house units went to assembly in Severn-house, where the headmaster would hand out any fines or cancel any leave for anyone or everyone. Schooling followed assembly, with each class holding about fifteen lads, five from each house.

An elderly man taught maths and English. Most of the lads had played truancy regularly from their previous schools and were being taught primary school basics.

The teacher wrote a whole blackboard full of various words before turning to face the class. "Can anyone tell me what this word says?" the teacher asked.

"Just put your hand up if you think you know." The teacher stood pointing at a word on the board. The class just sat there, nobody moved.

I looked at the blackboard and frowned. "Excuse me Sir, I think I'm in the wrong class," I said, "I learned these words in Infant school."

"Stand up lad," the teacher ordered. "You, tell me, what does that say?"

He asked me to read the one word but I started to read the whole blackboard, "This, that, they, then, there..."

The teacher was amazed at my reading and furious at the time he had wasted in writing on the board. The inmates started laughing and the teacher wiped the blackboard clean. I sat back down in my seat.

Suddenly, I was tapped on the shoulder by some kid who handed me a letter. "Will you read this for me?" he asked. I looked at him and looked at his letter and started reading it quietly to him.

"Stand up," the teacher ordered. "Bring that here!" I went to the front of the class, taking the kids letter with me.

"Now read it so we can all hear," the teacher demanded and sat down, ready to hear me read the kids letter.

I looked at the kid whose letter I was holding. He didn't seem to object. I started reading the boys letter. "Dear Son..." I suddenly stopped reading as the letter was very personal.

I raised my head and glared at the faces sitting around the classroom, "This isn't for you lot to laugh at." I gave the letter back to the lad. "I'll read it to you later."

The teacher was not amused. "Maths books out, come on quickly."

The teacher turned to the blackboard and commenced writing. "Start writing these down and we'll go through them in a minute," he said.

The class started copying the sums from the board. When he had finished he turned around and started showing the class how to do the sums. I put my head on the table and closed my eyes. The teacher just ignored me.

"O.K. you can all start answering the questions now. When you have finished you can go to break," he said. I stood up and handed my book to the teacher.

"Where do you think you're going?" he asked.

"You said when we have finished we could go. I have finished! 1×2 is 2, 2×2 is 4, 3×2 is 6..."

"This school is a total waste of fucking time, it's like going through infant and junior school all over again," I said.

I continued to pay very little attention in the classes and was continually fined for disrupting classes. I hated P.E. as this was usually a good excuse for the bigger lads to batter the smaller lads and get away with it. I tried my hand at boxing and soon found the difference between boxing for sport and boxing without any rules.

The P.E. teacher told the fighters, "No kicking, no head butts, no holding and no biting." Then he'd stand back and watch two kids try to beat each other half to death.

Very few head butts were thrown and only a few used their teeth but in this ring there were no rules. I was stupid enough to have a go a few times but soon found there were a lot of tough nuts at this school.

The P.E. teacher called out, "Everyone, make a line across the room. Right, you lad, out here. We're going to play a game called British Bulldog. The idea is you run through that lot and get to the wall behind them. They're going to try to stop you from getting there." Some helpless young hooligan would face fourteen other lads he was supposed to get passed.

The teacher turned to the line of lads, spreading out across the room, "No kicking, no punching, no head butts, no smacking in the bollocks and no biting." Nobody ever seemed to hear the teacher. This wasn't a game. It was more like a riot!

Only one kid ever made it across the room, he was a big black kid, the 'knock' at the school. Nobody moved to try to take the hardman down. This fourteen year old kid also entered the boxing arena and was never seen to lose a single fight. The strange thing about this kid was, he was really boxing, abiding by boxing rules, in that he only hit you with his fists. One of the staff who had done some amateur boxing entered the arena with the young black kid, nearly half his size. As a result of this fight, boxing was banned at the school... Everyone lost.

There were other lessons at the school like woodwork and metalwork where a variety of weapons were made, mostly primitive type knives and 'kung fu style' throwing stars. Some less secretive things were also made like decorative steel plant holders and wrought iron gates and lathe turned wooden fruit bowls and wooden magazine racks.

During one lesson, in the woodwork class, one of the bigger lads came over and started shoving me around which he had been doing for several days. On this occasion I was working on a wood turning lathe. The lad crept up behind me and I felt the sole of his boot land heavily in the middle of my back, knocking me into the lathe.

I turned to face my attacker, "Fuck off you fat bastard," I said angrily.

This upset the lad who turned and went to kick again. I held out the chisel I was using, just as the lad delivered his rising toe kick towards my groin. The chisel went deep into his leg and the lad fell to the ground but didn't let go. While still holding the handle of the chisel and pushing it deeper into the kids leg, I turned and picked up a mallet. I was real mad.

I looked down at my attacker, "I'll cave your fucking head in if you don't leave me alone," I said. "I'm nobodies punchbag anymore. Do you understand, you fat bastard?"

I pushed the chisel a little deeper into his leg just to make sure the kid had got the message, then viciously pulled it out. After dropping the chisel and the mallet on the workbench, I casually walked out of the class.

This lad never did pick on me again but quite a few of the other lads did and I was getting fed up with being knocked about. It was standard practice at Quinta for the bigger lads to pick on the smaller lads, it happened all the time. There were three or four of the toughest and most feared lads who were never very quick to test each other in battle and put their reputations at risk.

There were activities after school lessons, which included darts, snooker and table tennis. The television room was fairly comfortable and on occasions inmates would be allowed to watch a late film in relative peace. Other activities were mostly limited to the weekends, including pony riding by the select few. There was also canoeing and fishing. Fishing was a fairly popular pass-time on the school lake. Most of the lads would throw back any Perch or Roach caught but there were always the exceptions to the rule. On one occasion one of the lads had caught a fish and took a large bite out of it before throwing it back into the water. Canadian geese also occupied the lake and goose feathers were to be found all around the bank of the lake. Feathers were often used by inmates for making floats for fishing. Some of the lads would insert these feathers into the fishes mouths and push until it came out of the other end.

I hated to see such unnecessary cruelty. I had a real respect for animals and did not like to see them hurt or killed. One of the lads liked punching the ponies in the head, while they were tied up, until one of the biggest horses smashed his foot. While fishing on the lake I found a baby Heron, it was covered in slime and tangled in fishing line, it appeared to be in a very poor state of health. Animals were certainly not allowed in the school buildings but I took the needy bird under my care. I smuggled the bird into the school, took it in the shower room and bathed it and tried to feed it, with porridge. I kept the bird in a large cardboard box in the boot room and nursed the bird back to health. One of the staff had discovered what I was doing for the bird, both of us knew if the other lads found the bird they would kill it. The member of staff

decided to turn a blind eye, until one day the bird managed to get out of the box.

"Billy, your friends out and you better find him quick. Come and look in here, he's shit all over the place," the staff member announced.

I entered the boot room. My stomach turned and I began to heave. "Bloody typical, help someone and they shit all over you," I muttered under my breath. "I'll kill the sodding thing."

I went in search of my feathered friend and released him back to the wild. I then had to clean thirty pairs of boots and wash out the boot room.

"Bloody thing, how the hell can such a lot of shit come from such a small bird? It's bloody green. It must have swallowed half that slime," I cursed, trying not to bring up my dinner.

As Christmas approached everyone was preparing for the holiday, all except me. I wasn't going home for Christmas and as the school was to close I wondered where I would be sent. I regularly helped out in the kitchen on weekends and got on really well with Mrs Poole, the weekend cook. Just before Christmas Mrs Poole asked me if I would like to spend Christmas at her house with her family. I accepted the invitation, trying not to show how excited I really was.

I felt a bit out of place at first, at Mrs Pooles house. I felt as if I were intruding and as if I shouldn't have been there but the whole family made me feel welcome and we all got on really well. Mr Poole took me shooting with his two elder sons, Chris and Billy. Having two lads in the house with the same name did cause some confusion but did not create any real problems. They also had a younger son, Damon, who was about two years old and two teenage daughters, Karen and Dawn. Everyone had a nice Christmas and I felt happy as if this family had accepted me as one of them, although in my heart I always knew I wasn't and never would be. The Christmas passed by very quickly and I was very sad when the holiday came to an end and I had to return to school. I was a little surprised and very happy when Mr and Mrs Poole asked me if I would like to go to their home on weekends. When I returned to school, I tried very hard to keep out of trouble as I now had something to look forward to and somewhere to go at weekends.

Shortly before Easter 1975 I received a letter from my mother. This was the first I had heard since being put away, in care. My mother said the family were missing me and they wanted me to come home for the Easter holiday. I was very confused. I knew I could go to Mrs Pooles house and that I would be well-treated and have a good time. My mother had invited me home but I had no idea what sort of response I would get from my family. I did miss my brother and sisters, I had always missed my father and deep down I also missed my mother. I did love my family but lived in constant fear of what

would happen next. I decided to give my family a chance and went home for the Easter holiday.

As soon as I arrived home, my mother offered me a cigarette. At first I thought it was a trick and refused. I had cigarettes of my own which had been hidden away.

"Things have changed here now," my mother said. "I'm much calmer than I used to be. You can smoke if you want to and I know you do smoke. Just two things, you don't smoke in your bedroom and not in front of your father." I took the cigarette and later offered her one of mine.

When my father returned home from work, he too offered me a cigarette. "I'm really sorry about what I said in court, about not being able to stop you from running away from home, but it was the truth. I feel responsible for you being in care," my father explained.

I looked at my father who looked as if his heart was breaking. "It's not your fault and I don't blame you," I said. "You only told the truth. You couldn't stop me running away because you never understood why I was running away."

I never told my father that I felt safe or at least safer at school than I did at home. I did feel very lonely, unwanted and depressed but I never felt suicidal as I always did at home.

During the holiday I asked my brother to go to the local shop for me but Laurence was afraid and refused. "Every time I go to the shop, there's this kid who beats me up and pinches the money off me and then mother beats me up for losing her money," Laurence told me.

"You go to the shop and I'll follow you," I told him. "If you see the kid let me know and I'll have a word with him."

Laurence agreed and I followed fairly close behind. The kid tried to strike again, he grabbed my brother but before he had chance to do anything I grabbed him.

"I strongly suggest you leave my brother alone," I said calmly. "You beat him up and pinch his money and then he goes home and gets beat up again. I want to know where you live."

The frightened kid showed me where he lived and I knocked on the door. "Excuse me Missus, could you have a word with your son? He keeps beating up my kid brother and pinching his money," I said.

"My son wouldn't do something like that. He's not a thief. You get your bloody hands off him... Come on son," she replied angrily.

"I've asked you nicely to stop him. If you don't, I will. I won't ask again, I'll just drop his body on your doorstep next time," I said and calmly walked away.

A few days later Laurence was told by my mother to go to the shop and fetch a few things. "I've written a list. And hurry up," she said.

Laurence could not refuse our mother, despite his fear. The kid struck again. Laurence was thumped about by the kid and then by our mother for losing her money. My mother turned and punched me in the mouth, for not stopping the kid.

'I'm gonna fucking kill that kid. Laurence has been beaten up twice and I've had a smack in the mouth for no reason, he's had it now, ' I thought.

The next time Laurence went to the shop, I followed from a distance. The kid grabbed my brother from behind as he left the shop, pulling him to the ground. I marched up behind the kid, tapped him on the shoulder and lined him up for my best shot. The kid turned his head into the direction of the tapped shoulder to find a steam-train coming towards him. - Bang! My fist landed hard in his face and the blood poured from his nose.

I turned my attention to my brother lying on the floor to make sure he wasn't injured. "Go home," I told him.

The kid had ran off, but it was not over for him yet. His nose was bleeding quite bad but I knew if I left it at that, the kid would just give my brother a worse beating the next time. This kid had to be taught a lesson.

I was still looking for the kid when suddenly I was hit in the back by some missile, a partial housebrick. The kid was on the garage roof, trapped! I climbed onto the roof. The kid was still throwing but had no way of escape. I ran at him, thumping him with open hands straight to the chest with such force that the kid flew off the roof. - Thud!

'He's dead. I've bloody killed him, ' I thought.

I looked down at him, lying flat on his belly on the tarmac, only slightly groaning, fighting to get his breath. I lowered myself over the side of the garages and dropped to the ground.

"Are you all right?" I asked, but it was a really stupid question.

"Looks like a broken arm job to me and your nose by the look of it, you poor bastard," I declared.

I picked up the kid and carried him to his house and kicked the door until it was opened. His mother stood there, obviously not very happy to see me

again. I dropped the boys injured body on the doorstep. "I did warn you!" I stated, before walking away.

After this incident the holiday settled down and went fairly well. There were a few uncomfortable moments but there were no more serious beatings at all. Michele, Laurence and Beverley kept asking me to come home to stay. They told me that mother really had calmed down. Laurence told me that mother no longer used the curtain wire but that he was getting more beltings, although he added they were never as bad as what I had received.

After the holiday I returned to school and really wanted to continue going to Mrs Pooles house but was never asked again and didn't like to ask. They had invited me for the Easter holiday and were a little upset when I went home to my family. I continued going home for the occasional weekend and on the whole the visits went well. There were no more serious beatings, although I was still pushed down the stairs from time to time. My brother and sisters kept asking me, begging me to return home to stay but I was not ready for that at all.

At school I tried to keep out of trouble, but at times trouble just came round and you had to face it. Occasionally someone would just push me a bit too far and I would retaliate. I did some crazy things at school as most of the bigger lads simply would not leave me alone.

At night, I placed a thin board full of nails under my bedside mat so that if anyone came to tip me out of bed they would stand on these nails. My little security mat worked more than once and some sneaky sod would howl, chant and wardance around the room. One night one of the other lads and myself carried a bed with someone still snoring in it, out of the room, down the long corridor and put it on the fire escape and left him there. Many of the lads would sneak into other dormitories and throw boots at people sleeping. Another trick was to rewire the night lights, so that when the lights were turned on, they blew, or the operator would be electrocuted. My favourite trick was to remove the majority of the bed springs from the base of the hospital style beds. Many of the lads would just run and belly-dive onto the thin mattress of their beds, and with the springs removed, they landed on the floor, splat!

I was constantly getting into scrapes in Severn-house and I would usually let fly with a snooker ball across the room or smash a snooker cue around someones head. I regularly walked around with two snooker balls in a sock which I kept concealed and always handy. I knew the weapon could be used to devastating effect and carried it for emergency use only, luckily I never found need to use it. There were some real head cases at Quinta and that included some of the staff.

One of the lads used to climb the trees and swing and jump from tree to tree. He was either very brave or a complete nut case. He was like a trapeze artist

without a catcher. One day he leaped to another tree and missed the branch to which he was jumping. He slid about fifty feet down the tree, being torn by the branches and miraculously escaped with only a few dozen superficial cuts and bruises. One lad looked very much like a prehistoric man, his nickname was Caveman and his real name was not much different. This was the kid we left on the fire escape. He was as strong as an ox and had the capability to pick up a person twice his own weight and size and throw them bodily across the room, and did so whenever he got upset. He was a force not to be messed around with. He regularly went into mad rages and was known to have dived through unopened windows head first. I was told that the Caveman had wedged the knee of one of the other lads down the side of a radiator pipe and held him there with the pipe burning into the kid's leg while the kid was screaming in pain. A member of staff pulled the screaming kid out of the pipe and the Caveman threw the member of staff across the dining room. The burned kid was probably scared for life.

After being in Severn-house for about twelve months I asked to be transferred to another house and was transferred to Ceriog house. The staff in Ceriog house were much better and the lads were not generally quite so quick to pick on the other lads, although there were a few who got a little heavy handed at times. I was much happier in Ceriog house as generally there was not quite as much aggravation and the staff remained in control most of the time. I continued going to lessons but still paid little attention to what was going on as I simply wasn't learning anything.

I started going home regularly for weekends and at times even looked forward to weekends at home. I still went over to see Mrs Poole whenever I could. I went home for the Christmas holiday of 1975 but after only two days at home just couldn't take anymore. I wasn't beaten but the constant nagging and the tension became too much to bear, so I started back to school. I had no money and so had to walk and hitch lifts for the ninety miles back to school.

I started my journey and was offered a lift by a taxi driver soon after leaving the house. I explained to the taxi driver that I had no money and could not afford a taxi.

The man told me, "Jump in, don't worry about the money. You look as if you could do with a lift."

I accepted the lift and stated, "You can drop us anywhere on the route to town, if you don't mind, and thanks."

The taxi driver started along the road and was heading towards town. I was sat in the front of the cab, with my feet resting on a pile of tools. When the driver placed his hand on my leg, I suddenly became very nervous and pushed his hand away. The driver turned off the main road and I was getting really worried. I knew the way to town and this wasn't it.

"Where are you going? It's straight on to town," I remarked. The driver put his hand on my leg again. He didn't answer. He drove on and turned the corner of another road.

'I'm in the shit here, ' I thought. My heart was pounding so much I could feel it beating in my head.

I started trying to plan an escape but he was driving too fast for me to just jump out. The driver drove to a secluded area in Garretts Green and stopped the taxi. The pervert tried to put his hand down my trousers but he'd picked on the wrong one.

I grabbed the mans arm and sank my teeth in it and wouldn't let go. With my teeth still in his arm I folded myself in half, reached down between my feet and picked something up. The man tried to grab me with his other hand. He groaned in pain from the dull hollow thud as I hit him in the chest with the cold steel wheel-brace. I opened the taxi door to make my escape from the man but the battle wasn't over yet. I managed to scramble out of the taxi but the man was climbing out also. I knew this man was dangerous and I had to stop him. As the man tried to get out, he lowered his legs out first, struggling to get up from his seat. I ran at the door, slamming it against his legs, and I slammed it again and again. The man was groaning in pain. I picked up the wheelbrace and smashed it into the blokes feet and he slumped back into his cab. Clang! The sound echoed in the night-air as I dropped the wheelbrace and started to run.

Then I suddenly thought, 'What the hell am I running for? He aint going nowhere.'

I was still psyched up, muttering to myself, "Fucking dirty bastard, mess with the wrong one this time... He'll probably never walk again... The bastard."

I continued on my way, still hitching lifts whenever I could but using a lot more caution. Ninety miles is a long walk. When I eventually arrived back at school, it was bloody closed, so I wandered around the grounds, trying to think how I was going to get into the school, preferably without smashing any windows. I was spotted by one of the staff who lived within the grounds. I spent Christmas at the home of Mr and Mrs Bartley, who were both house staff at the school. The Christmas went ok but Mr and Mrs Bartley made it clear that I had disrupted their holiday and they were none too pleased about that. I never went home again after that. I simply remained at school and may have been the only lad not to go home for any leave. I regularly went over to Severn-house to see Mrs Poole and really hoped to be invited to her house but never was again.

Generally speaking, I managed to keep out of trouble in Ceriog house. There were a few minor incidents but nothing too serious. I continually got into trouble in the classrooms. On one occasion I had been arguing with a lad

from Severn-house in the art class and walked out of the class still holding the lump of clay that I had been working with.

The teacher shouted after me, "Oi, let's have the clay in here." So I let him have the clay back, throwing it straight through the window, aiming for the lad I'd been arguing with.

Life at Quinta was just a routine, just like anywhere else. At times it was hard, but for me living at home was much harder. When a person is being brought up by strangers in institutions there are no real emotions. There are no feelings towards other people, there is only doubt and the unknown, distrust and suspicion. Like the man said, 'you're nobody, I'm nobody and nobody gives a fuck about nobody else'. As a general rule, I believe what he said was true.

Another Christmas passed by as just another day and I began to wonder what 1977 would have install for me. I wondered what would happen when my time came to leave Quinta, my time was nearly up and I was getting worried. It had seemed like a lifetime at this school but I knew it would have been much worse living at home.

Shortly before my sixteenth birthday my case conference was held at the school. My social worker and members of staff were to reveal what options there would be for me, now I was due to leave school.

"You can return home to your family, you can go into a hostel and later into your own flat or you can be fostered by Mr Bond."

Mr bond was one of the staff from the school and a real headcase. I thought the options over but there was really very little to think about.

"I certainly don't want to go home and if Mr Bond wants to foster me, why offer now? I've been at the school for two and half years, he could have offered before, but being honest I would have still refused," I said. "I would like to go into the hostel please," I replied, thinking this my best option, thinking I would soon have my own flat and a new start in life.

A few days before I was due to leave, I received a letter from my mother. In the letter she said she wanted me to return home and was threatening to kill herself if I didn't return. I didn't want to be responsible for my mothers death, although I had, many times, felt like killing her myself.

I had already started making plans in my own mind for my own future, 'I'm going to go into the hostel, get my flat and a job and get the flat done out nice. Find myself a nice girlfriend, get married and have a couple of kids.' I wanted to settle down to something I'd never had, a happy family life.'

At the last minute I decided to go home and told a member of staff, "I know I'm making a terrible mistake but I don't want my brother and sisters to end up in a place like this. It would destroy them. I have no choice but to go home now."

Chapter 4: Betrayed

When the actual day for my leaving arrived I said a general and casual goodbye to the lads and most of the staff and then went to see Mrs Poole. I had to say goodbye. I could feel the sorrow in my heart and see the sorrow in the face of Mrs Poole. She told me that she would have liked for me to be able to come to her house for the weekends but she had been told by the headmaster that he thought she was becoming emotionally involved and it therefore could not be allowed. I had suspected something like this for quite some time, it hurt but was no surprise. I gave the woman a hug and fought to hold back the tears, it was time to go.

Within days of leaving school my mother started nagging me to get a job and earn some money. It started me thinking about the last time she started going on about work and money. This time I was lucky and found myself a job in a factory in Tyseley, near to where my father still worked. I was feeling very proud and told my mother the good news. I wanted her to be proud of me. She took me to the pub to celebrate with a quiet and peaceful drink, almost treating me as an adult. I was no longer her little boy and could see straight through her ploy of caring parent. I never trusted her.

On the way back from the pub the questions started. "How much money are you thinking of giving me each week?" she asked.

"My basic wage is £21.50 per week. I was thinking of about £11.50 per week, if that's ok," I replied.

She went berserk. I thought she was going to push me under the passing bus. "I want £15.00 per week to start and £17.00 per week when you get some overtime."

'You haven't changed. I knew I was making a mistake in coming home. No wonder dad's working himself into an early grave, I can see why now,' I thought as we walked down the road, trying not to be intimidated by the look of hatred in my mothers face.

I started my job and soon managed to earn extra bonus pay on piecework. At times I walked out off work at the end of the week with £29.00 in my pay packet and felt really good, until I got home. My mother would see my pay slip each week and would usually leave me with about £5.00 per week. She would just take the rest. Out of this remaining money I was to buy my bus pass to get to work costing £2.10 and my cigarettes and clothes. When I got home from work, my brother or elder sister would usually be washing up from the evening meal.

"What's for tea?" I asked.

"Meat pie and mash spuds. It's in the oven," Laurence told me, "but try not to eat it." I looked in the oven.

"Burned again," I observed. The following night was meat pie and chips.

"Do you realize we've had meat pie every day this week?" I remarked to my brother.

"Have you looked in the cupboard? It looks like we've got them all next week too," Laurence suggested.

The week continued with meat pie and . . . Each night I was coming home to burned offerings and was sick of the sight of meat pie. I left it in the oven.

"Don't you want your dinner?" my mother asked, surprised at my reaction to her cooking. "There's nothing wrong with meat pie. Your father's got the same and he's not complaining."

I actually thought that I was eating my father's dinner from the night before and that my mother must be cooking him a fresh dinner, but things just didn't make any sense. I started to get suspicious about all these pies.

"Do you remember when we were little and dad bought Michele a rabbit for her birthday? I asked my brother. "Well, it only lasted for a few months and it died. Mother told us the neighbours had poisoned it."

"Did you believe her?" I asked.

"No. I think mother killed it because she couldn't be bothered to clean it out," Laurence replied.

"Then dad bought her another rabbit to replace it and that also died," I said. "When that rabbit died do you remember what mother told us?"

Laurence remembered, "She said the next animal we have, when it died we were going to eat it."

I opened the oven door and looked suspiciously at my dinner. I looked back at my brother, "Where's the dog?" I asked. We both suspected the same...

I often had the mysterious burned offerings for my tea, if I had anything at all. Although the beatings and whippings had stopped, my mother still knew how to make life unbearable. I knew I had made the wrong decision on leaving school but my mother realized I was a bit bigger now and thought twice about beating me in the way she so obviously wanted, but still the nightmare continued.

I couldn't face the nightmare any longer. A determined mind over-ruled my churning, weak stomach as I swallowed the two hundred tablets to end my miserable existence. No goodbye note this time, I just left the house with my stomach feeling very heavy. Life seemed so very empty and meaningless. I was found floating face down in the river and woke up in East Birmingham hospital. I couldn't remember anything, not even my own name.

"We are taking the matter very seriously," the doctors told me, "This is about the third or fourth time you have attempted to take your own life. This time you very nearly succeeded. You were in fact dead on arrival but we managed to bring you back. You've been in a coma for the last ten days and we didn't think you were going to make it."

I was taken to Highcroft Psychiatric hospital and labelled 'a high suicidal risk'. They were right. I had absolutely no interest in living at all. I simply wanted to die. I wanted people to leave me alone so I could decide where and how I was going to die. I didn't care about anything anymore. I had only one thing in mind, I had failed another attempt and would try again. I really wanted to die.

When first admitted to the hospital I was put on ward B1, where I was kept on drugs and given Electro-Convulsion Therapy (E.C.T.)

ECT is where, after having a general anaesthetic, electrodes are placed over the temples and electric currents passed through the brain. When I woke up all I knew about was the headache, nothing more. This was no ordinary headache, it felt as if a bomb had been exploded inside my head. The sort of headache you never forget. I knew I was walking around like a zombie because I was so heavily drugged. I could see other people wandering around aimlessly, without any apparent feelings or emotions, as if in a permanent hypnotic state. Whatever the purpose of the ECT treatment I don't believe it had any effect on me, apart from the horrific headaches. If this treatment was supposed to help stop the suicidal feelings it didn't work. I was sixteen years old and had no wish or any reason to live. I wished I was dead and this wish was constant.

After a few months on this ward I was moved to ward F3, a therapeutic ward, where patients were encouraged to talk about their problems. While on ward F3, I was taken off all medication and was no longer given ECT. I telephoned my father while on this ward, just to see how he was and I guess to apologise for what I was doing and intended to do. We started talking and told him why I kept trying to commit suicide and I told him about the way my mother had treated me for years. I told my father I was still having nightmares from when I was locked in the shed with the cats and I told him what happened. I had been having recurrent nightmares for years about that incident and had an uncontrollable fear of cats. This fear resulted in me being given the nickname 'Budgie' but nobody knew why I was so terrified of cats.

"Why have you never said anything to me before about all this?" my father asked.

"It was mainly out of fear. I was simply too afraid to say anything most of the time and you were never around anyway," I replied.

"You always believed the bloody stories mother told. If I had told you, I don't think you would have believed me," I said.

"I might have done," my father replied.

"That only proves my point," I said. "You, might have done!"

"Do you remember the day when you came home from work and I got out of bed and came into you pouring of blood?" I asked. "You took me to the hospital to have my head stitched up. That was my second visit to the hospital. I had already had eight stitches in my head earlier that same day, thanks to mother. Then she tries to bash my brains out in the middle of the night with a bloody frying pan, for no sodding reason." I said.

"I remember you had to carry me home and I remember what you said to mother when we got back home. I heard all the lies she spewed out. I wanted to come in and tell you the truth, but she would have killed me. Do you know what she did about that? She locked me in the shed. I was in there for days and you didn't even notice I was missing," I said bitterly.

My father didn't really know what to say. "I'm sorry. I'm really sorry," he said. "I had no idea." I found it impossible to believe he knew nothing about what was going on.

"I think you did know, I think you just didn't want to believe it. You just couldn't accept what was going on behind your back. I think that's why you were never at home, always too busy working."

On ward F3 I never talked about my problems but listened to other people each day in the 'therapeutic' morning meetings. I didn't see what good it would do talking about my problems now. As far as I was concerned I only had one problem, I was still alive. I had no feelings or emotions for anyone or anything anymore, my own life meant nothing and neither did anyone else's.

Patients on this ward were allowed out of the hospital grounds. Each day I went out with two of the other patients from the ward and we would stay in the Queens Head pub until we were thrown out. I regularly staggered back to the hospital drunk and spent most of my time staying drunk. If I had no money, which was usually the case, I would steal bottles of cider from a local supermarket. My depression had hit rock bottom, I could see no way forward, no turning back, I just wanted it all to end. I tried not to think about things and the only way I found I could do this way to stay drunk. I often started drinking

soon after the supermarket opened in the mornings and I would drink until I passed out.

One of the female patients on the ward had been admitted for very much the same reason as myself and we regularly went out drinking together and regularly got drunk together. We started having a sexual relationship while in the hospital and were caught having sex in the male dormitory during the night, by nursing staff. We really couldn't believe it when the next day this was brought up for discussion in the morning meeting. We started laughing. We just couldn't believe they wanted to discuss what we were doing, we walked out of the meeting and went to the pub.

Shortly after this incident I stole a bottle of whisky from the local supermarket and took it back to the hospital. I woke up the next morning in a padded cell. I was stark naked with dried blood on my feet. I started shouting and hammering on the door. Two muscular male nurses came to the door, unlocked it and stood in front of me with their arms folded across their chests.

"Where the hell am I and where are my bloody clothes and what happened to my feet?" I asked.

"Don't you remember? You drank a bottle of whisky last night and went a bit mad. You smashed the bottle on the floor and walked over it, in your bare feet. That's why your feet are covered in blood, and you attacked three guys with a meat fork and that belt of yours. It took four male nurses to disarm and restrain you. You were like a wild animal."

My belt was a really dangerous weapon. It was over 4" wide and covered in studs from one end to the other. The huge heavy buckle had been ground and was quite capable of splitting a skull.

"Why am I stark bollock naked and where are my clothes?" I asked.

"You threw up all over the place, so we had to take them off you," the nurse replied. "You will get them back later, now stop your thumping on the door and get some sleep or we're gonna to stick a straight jacket on you!"

The hospital psychiatrist paid me a visit and gave his diagnosis. "We do not think for one minute that you are insane, although you have a very violent temper. We do not think there is anything more we can do for you, unless you are willing to talk to us and co-operate. We cannot tolerate your behaviour any longer. Unless you are willing to tell us why you are having these problems we cannot help you. You are going back to the ward and will be discharged and sent home later today."

'You're the one who's mad if you think I'm going back home, ' I thought. 'I've got other plans.'

I packed my things together and walked out of the hospital. I was picked up by the police and taken back, where I was locked in a padded cell until my social worker arrived. My social worker took me to a childrens home in Chelmsley Wood.

"This is the place you could have come to when you first left Quinta," the social worker said.

"I thought you said it was a hostel," I replied.

"I lied!" he said coldly.

"This will have to do for now, just until I can find somewhere else for you," he said callously.

"Does this mean I will get my flat now?" I asked.

"What flat? There never was a flat. Don't you understand yet? We knew all about your mothers letter and we knew you would go home. Blood's thicker than water," the social worker laughed.

"You bastard! You bloody set me up," I said angrily. I really felt betrayed.

In early 1978, my social worker called at the home again. "So where are we going today, my trusted friend?" I asked sarcastically.

"Have you ever heard the saying, 'You've been sent to Coventry?' Well that's where you're going. You're going into a hostel," the social worker replied.

I arrived at the hostel in Davenport Road, Coventry and soon reached the conclusion that this was a sort of 'Dumping ground' for persons who had been in care, those that Social Services had, or appeared to have, given up on.

I soon found myself a job in a DIY shop in Coventry on a youth training scheme but by now I had a serious drinking problem. I was drinking a bottle of whisky a day which I usually stole from shops.

I only stayed at this hostel for a few months before finding myself lodgings in a large prewar house. I continued working in the shop and Tony, the owner of the shop, had his mother and sister running two fruit and vegetable stalls on the nearby market. Each day I would get these stalls stocked up and ready for trading from about 7.30am until I started work in the shop from 9.00am. I was employed as a basic shop assistant. I made tea, served customers, cut timber and did anything that was required. I worked each day until about 6.00pm and did overtime if required. I liked the job and the people I was working for. At the weekends I would work on Tony's farm in Claverdon, near Coventry. Tony had cattle, horses, chickens and a few other animals, including three dogs and three cats. I still had an uncontrollable fear of cats

and felt very uncomfortable with cats sneaking around. I loved working on the farm. I enjoyed being around most of the animals, some of whom had a habit of trying to walk into the farmhouse, including one of the horses and a cow.

I continued living in the lodgings for a while and was soon joined by two other residents from the hostel. One night I returned to my lodgings to find at least six of the residents from the hostel, in addition to the two who had moved in. They were all just roaming around the house as if they owned the place. I was very angry and half drunk at the time. I started arguing with them and had a hot cup of tea thrown in my face, then the fight broke out. I was beaten up fairly bad and thrown out of the house with my belongings.

The next day I went to work as usual, this time wearing a black eye, swollen face and a thick lip and carrying my suitcase. After work Tony and his wife June, asked me if I would like to come and live on the farm. Tony and June were nice people and had always been good to me, so I went to live on the farm. Tony had always called me by my nickname 'Budgie', but knew nothing of how I had come by the name. I still had the memory and the fear of cats. I would never deliberately hurt them, I just had a nervous reaction to them and jumped every time one came near to me. I told Tony that I was afraid of cats, but did not explain why or how bad the fear was. Tony couldn't understand how anyone could be afraid or nervous of a little pussy cat. At meal times I could be eating my food and the cats would roam around and I felt very uncomfortable. I tried to watch them but I could not watch them all at the same time. Sometimes one or more cats would jump up onto my chair and I would jump up, my plate of food going onto the floor. Tony soon lost his patience with my nervous reactions to his pets and wanted some answers.

"You're going to tell me why you're so afraid of cats," Tony said angrily. "I'm fed up of your food ending up on the floor every time a bloody cat comes near you."

I told him about being locked in the shed, starving hungry, with seven starving wild cats and I told him about the nightmares I still had. I told Tony I would never deliberately hurt an animal but in my dreams I can still see the shed with blood splattered everywhere and dead animals lying on the floor. I still see the empty grave that I dug and I still see the lifeless bodies of the animals slumped in a dustbin. Tony was a big-built bloke but I could see the effect of horror in his face.

"My cats, like most cats, are not wild, they are not half starved, and you are not locked in total darkness with them. Cats do not normally fight to try to kill each other but cats do have a natural hunting nature. Like you, they were fighting to stay alive. Face your fear and you will overcome it," he said.

Tony was deeply distressed by what I had told him. He helped me to overcome my fear, the cats were not allowed into the house all together, so

that I did not have to watch all three of them at once. Tony helped me a great deal and my recurrent nightmares become less frequent.

I worked long and hard, sometimes from 5.30am until midnight. I enjoyed every minute of it, until one day I had an accident. I had driven the tractor many times but on this occasion I ran up from behind the tractor and sort of leap-frogged onto the seat. As I did this, the loose cushion slid off the seat and I landed on some tools underneath. I fell to the ground and was unable to get up. I could not move. I had damaged the coccyx at the base of my spine. I had to spend months in bed, lying flat on my back on a door, which had been placed in my bed, at the farm. It felt as if I had been lying there for years. I was determined and kept trying to get up. At first I could not sit or stand and was in terrible pain. Tony's daughter, Maxine, became my nurse. She would bring my food and help me with anything I could not do myself, which was nearly everything. Maxine was a real help and had a habit of making me laugh. I liked to try and have a laugh with Maxine who was very grown up for her thirteen years of age, both in mind and body. The only problem was, every time I laughed it bloody hurt. I was very grateful to Maxine for all she was doing to help me and for brightening up my days with her cheerful ways. Each day I tried and eventually managed to stand up but still could not walk and when I tried to sit back down regretted standing in the first place. I had never been one to give up easily, I kept trying and after months of lying in bed I started to walk again. Walking was really very painful, but I was very determined and was not going to lie down and just rot.

Once back on my feet I returned to work almost immediately, despite the fact the coccyx had set in the wrong position. I still tried to work and Tony tried not to ask too much of me. I rarely complained about the pain and discomfort. When Tony could see I was having problems he would stop whatever he was doing and help me. Tony told me that he had always wanted a son. He had two daughters, whom he obviously cared for and loved very much and treated me as his son. He really was a good friend.

Soon after returning to work my social worker turned up in the shop. "Can you tell me where you are living these days?" he asked. "You seem to have forgot, you're still on a care order and are therefore supposed to keep me informed of your whereabouts," he explained, as if I didn't already know.

I told him where I was living and explained that I wanted to try to stay out of institutions and wanted to start to make a life of my own.

The social worker took me to another hostel in Willenhall and I hated it. There was a main building used for eating and watching television and several separate buildings for living in. These buildings were like deserted army barracks. There were separate rooms for each resident and each room was identical. Each room was about six feet by four feet in size and contained a bed, a chest of drawers and had a wardrobe built into the wall. These rooms were freezing cold, it was like living in a shed. At night rats would run about in

the corridors and around the main buildings. I was very angry and bitter at having to pay rent for this. I had slept with rats before free of charge and here I was paying rent for their company.

I made a few friends while living in this hostel, who lived in a nearby council maisonette. I started visiting this maisonette regularly as this was a lot less depressing than my own accommodation. There were three guys living in this flat and I would go round the local pubs with them. We managed to get mixed up with about six or seven girls from the area, who turned out to be a whole heap of trouble but they were good fun.

I bought myself a good racing bike to travel to and from work and for general running around which gave me a sense of freedom. I locked up my bike to some railings one day while visiting the maisonette, but when I returned the bike had gone. I knew one of the guys from the maisonette had pinched it and I planned to get it back. They denied any knowledge of where the bike was or of who had taken it, but I just knew it was one of them. I didn't get angry or start making accusations but I had no doubts they had it somewhere.

My social worker came to see me at the hostel and brought my mother with him. My mother saw a cat, outside the main building, having a fight with a bloody big rat.

"This place is disgusting," my mother told the social worker, "I want my son out of here and I mean now!"

They decided I should return home. Needless to say, I was not over enthusiastic about living in this hostel but I was fairly happy living on my own away from home. I was still on a care order and had to do as my social worker said even if this was under pressure from my mother. I had no say in the matter, I was taken home.

After being at home for about a week I went back to get my bike. I knocked on the door of the maisonette and as soon as the door was opened I just walked inside. My bike was standing in the hallway. The guys could see I was mad and they knew I often carried throwing knives up my sleeves. While they were watching me, waiting for me to start trouble, I watched as a large piece of chipboard caught fire, in front of their open coal fire. By the time any of them had noticed the fire, it had taken hold. Billy picked up the board and as he turned quickly, his sleeve caught fire causing him to drop the board on the settee. Billy tried to put the flames out on his sleeve and I picked up my bike and walked out, as the settee was now on fire.

Within a few days, back home, I started a new job in a greengrocers shop on the main shopping centre in Chelmsley Wood. While working in this shop, I started getting friendly with one of the girls who worked there on a part time basis. I asked Tina out for a drink one night after work and we spent the night at her sisters flat, having sex in the living room, on her sisters settee.

The following day I went to work as usual and my mother came into the shop. "Where were you last night?" she asked nastily.

"I stayed at a friends house," I replied coldly.

"At some girls house, I suppose," she added.

"I don't sleep with men! Of course it was a girls house," I laughed.

My mother started shouting, "He's handling food and he's been sleeping with all these tramps in here. Just look at the dirty little sluts."

The customers started walking out and all the female staff had gone red with embarrassment and disgust. I went to the top of the stairs and shouted down to the manager. "We need some help up here. We've got a mad woman in the shop."

"Can I help you, madam?" the manager asked. My mother ignored him and continued shouting abusive remarks at the staff.

"Obviously not," he said. "Excuse me madam, I must ask you to leave my shop. You are disrupting my business. If you persist with this type of attitude, I will phone the police and have you removed."

That night I went home from work and explained why I had not returned on the previous night. I tried to keep things calm and spoke to my mother with respect and quietly. My mother started shouting her mouth off and came towards me with a kitchen-knife. This time I did not back away. As she raised the knife towards my face, I grabbed her wrist and twisted the knife from her hand. I glared coldly into her eyes and put the knife on the kitchen worktop. This time my mother was more afraid than I was. I turned and slowly started to walk away. I could feel the tension and knew she wanted to stick that knife in my back. I sensed her movement as she hesitated to pick up the knife.

With my back towards her, I stopped and stood very still, just waiting for her to make a move. "I wouldn't, if I were you," I dared, ready to defend...

I went upstairs and packed my bags. I went to live with Tina at her house in Kingshurst, Birmingham. Tina was divorced and had a two year old son, Kenny, named after his father. Tina was a few years older than me and far more sexually advanced. She taught me things I had read about in girlie magazines but had not experienced first hand. I considered her a good teacher. It was great fun learning sex education in this manner and I was always prepared to listen, learn, experiment and co-operate with this teacher. We both continued working in the shop. My mother came into the shop regularly to buy her vegetables and the manager watched her closely. She never said anything to me and didn't know the girl who often served her was the girl I was taking sex lessons from.

While working at this shop, I was trying very hard to find myself a different job. I didn't really like working at the greengrocers and didn't like the manager. The manager was a real irritation at times and often had the same job done four or five times for no apparent reason. I was just chief dogs body, to keep all the fruit and vegetable displays stocked up. It was my job to keep the shop clean and do any errands that needed to be done and I was a good, hard worker. I had often worked the fruit and vegetable stalls in Coventry and I knew what was what. I understood the trade that Tony had taught me. I enjoyed working for Tony, but this guy... The manager often tried to touch up his female staff, including my girlfriend and I didn't like it one little bit.

I tried talking to the manager, who had about as much sense as a bag of King Edward potatoes. "I know you're only messing and don't really mean anything by it, but do me a favour, don't keep touching Tina's arse," I said. "You wouldn't like it if someone kept touching your Missus arse."

The manager took no notice and continued sexually harassing the female staff. Shortly before Christmas the inevitable happened. I had just finished stacking 180 sacks of potatoes up a flight of stairs, when the manager told me I would have to stack them again as one of the bottom sacks had been stacked wrongly. This meant taking all 180 sacks back down the stairs and starting all over again. The manager tried to point out the fault that he had noticed, trying to make me out to be some sort of idiot. Stacking bags of potatoes was a job I could manage blindfolded. Without the blindfold, I could see nothing wrong with the stacks and saw no reason to restart the task.

"You've got a nasty habit of doing this sort of thing and I'm sick of it. Stack 'em yourself," I said.

The manager started to climb the stairs angrily towards me and I just stood waiting for him. As he reached about halfway up the stairs, I pushed the stack of potatoes and dozens of sacks started falling down the stairs. I left the manager buried on the stairs, amongst his beloved potatoes and walked out of the shop and went home to Tina. At the time, I thought it was rather funny, I had got my own back on the manager.

'He'll have to stack 'em himself now, ' I thought.

I told Tina all about it and she too thought it rather funny, until the reality set in. "I hate to tell you this Billy, but if you have no job, you can't live her. There's no way my wage alone would keep us both and my son. You're going to have to move out," she said.

I attempted to change her mind, explaining that I could soon find another job and that I cared for her and young Kenny, but my grovelling techniques were never very effective.

"I might be getting back with my ex', anyway," she said. "He's coming round on Sunday to pick Kenny up and I have agreed to have a talk with him."

I knew her ex husband. His brother had been at Quinta at the same time as me and I had met her ex husband through the brother. I didn't want any trouble from him or cause any upset for Tina, so I did as she asked. I packed my bags and left the house.

I was totally sickened by the days events and went to the pub. By chance, my father was in the pub already having a drink. I joined him for a few drinks and told him about what had happened. I had never been to the pub with my father before, I had often thought about asking him but somehow the time never seemed to be right.

After the nights drinking my father took me home. He looked at my mother, who was a little surprised to see the two of us enter the house, "I have told him the same as I'm telling you, he can stay for as long as he wants. The matter is not open for discussion, I have said he can stay."

"Oh, just one more thing, those knives in the drawer are for cutting food, not sticking up peoples noses, ok." My father didn't wait for any comment from my mother before turning his attentions back to me.

"Well, don't just stand there, go and unpack! Just one thing before you go, we do have every right to know where you are at night. Our worrying days are over. So if you go shagging some girl at her house at least have the decency to let us know you won't be back."

I agreed with my fathers request and looked at my mother, who was none too happy with me being brought home in this manner. "I'm sorry about all the trouble I've caused mom," I said. "I didn't mean to cause any trouble for anyone. I just liked Tina a lot and wanted to be with her. I know you don't agree with sex before marriage and I will be going as soon as I can find somewhere else to live."

I left home again in the early part of 1979 after staying at my parents house over Christmas. I found some new lodgings and started a new job in a restaurant in the City centre. I was employed as a comi-waiter, but also worked in the kitchens and in the takeaway. I worked seven days a week, often working for twelve or sixteen hours a day. I enjoyed the work, the wages were not very good but it didn't really matter that much as I never had to buy any food at all as I ate all the food I needed at work.

The restaurant was owned by a Greek and specialized in Greek food. The staff were of various nationalities. There were Turkish chefs and waiters, a Spanish manager and cleaner, an Italian waiter, an Indian chef, a Chinese cleaner, a South American cashier and two Jamaican cleaners. The

restaurant owners wife was British and the managers wife was British, a Greek restaurant with multinational staff.

Throughout 1979 I drifted from place to place and had lived in at least four or five bedsits by the end of the year, not settling in any one place for more than a few months at a time. Towards the end of the year I moved into lodgings in Castle Bromwich, Birmingham, at the home of a young couple, Angela and Henry. Due to the type of work I was doing I often did not get back to my lodgings before 1.00am or 2.00am. At times when I returned from work Henry would be sitting in the living room while Angela would be crying in the bedroom. Henry often beat up his wife and Angela often came into me asking for help. I refused to interfere between husband and wife, especially considering they were usually all lovey-dovey the next day.

There were two young children in the house. They were not ill treated in any way but I often heard them crying at night, after being woken up by their parents arguing and fighting. I tried to comfort the children, who were too young to understand, and I often sat with them for as long as the trouble went on, for hours sometimes.

I tried to keep out of the way during their fights until one day I walked in the house and found Henry punching Angela's face in while she lay helpless on the kitchen floor. I had walked in right in the middle of this and felt that I had to do something. I dragged Henry off, kicked his legs from under him and held him down on the floor. Angela went into the living room, picked up a heavy brass bar and came back into the kitchen. She tried to take advantage of the situation and tried to bash her husbands skull in with the bar.

"Put the bloody thing down!" I yelled, "Or I'm gonna let him back up."

She wouldn't put it down, so I let Henry back up so that he could defend himself. She ran into the living room and he followed. She threw the bar at him, which missed and hit a full size wall mirror, which made an almighty crash as it smashed, showering the room with glass. I heard the crash but stayed with the children in the next room, trying to keep them out of harms way.

One night Henry had gone to the local pub, drinking with a few of his mates. I had finished work early and was resting on my bed when Angela entered my bedroom. I raised my head from my pillow to look at her while I listened to what she had to say.

"I want him out of here. Will you help me get him out?" she said, "I've packed his things all ready to go. I'm sick of him knocking me about."

"You can keep me out of it," I told her, "You have thrown him out before and took him back two days later. You're playing a game with him and he knows it."

"I mean it this time," Angela said, "I have really had enough. I want you to move in with me, and I don't mean as a lodger." I looked at her.

She started undoing the buttons on her blouse. "Make love to me," she invited.

"I'm flattered, but not today," I smiled. "You're married and this isn't the way to get things done. I've tried to help you before but you just start everything off again. I suggest you go back in the other room before he comes back and finds you in here."

Angela started taking his things out of the house, to a house in the next street. She had made several trips with bags of his clothes and other items and I had noticed her struggling.

'Bloody hell, not again, ' I thought and went to help.

"He's not coming back into this house and I mean it. You can sod off back to your room if you want, I can manage myself," Angela snapped.

"I bet within a week he's back," I told her. "Now where are we going with these?" I asked, as I picked up a few bags.

Henry later returned to the house to find it all locked up. "Angela, Angela..." He shouted through the letter box.

"You're not coming in. I've moved all your stuff to Kevins, so you better sod off. It's over and I mean over, you're not coming back in here, not now or ever," Angela said loudly.

Henry banged on the door in defiance, "Open this bloody door or I'll break it down," he yelled.

"Come away from the door," I suggested to Angela, "You don't need to say anymore, if he breaks the door he breaks it, you've told him. You don't need to wind him up anymore, just leave him now. He can't do anything from out there."

Henry banged the door for a while before getting fed up and tired and he went away. I sat in the living room, watching television.

'Maybe she means it this time, I thought. 'She's better off without him.'

A few days later, I returned from work earlier than usual and the house was peaceful. Angela was watching television so I went in and sat down. I had always been allowed to watch the television in the living room and usually only left the room when the arguing started.

"Do you want a cup of tea?" Angela asked, as she rose from her seat.

"Yes please, if you're making one," I replied.

"Have you had any more trouble off Henry?" I asked.

"No. I think he's got the message that I really don't want him back," she answered.

I started to relax. Angela came in with the cup of tea and placed it on the carpeted floor. She went over to her hamster cage and took the hamster out and sat down next to me. She had been sat in the chair at the other side of the room when I had return from work. Angela started playing with the hamster and put it on my lap. I just ignored it at first, until it started trying to crawl up my crutch. I picked up the fury little rodent and gave it back to Angela. She put it down the front of her T-shirt and it started crawling all over the place. Suddenly she gave out a scream.

"The sodding thing's bit me," she yelled. "Get him out. Get him out!"

"Get it out yourself," I laughed.

She removed the hamster from her shirt and put it down her jeans. I watched as the hamster crawled about her crutch.

"I bet you'll get him out of there, wont you?" she suggested in a provocative voice.

"No. He must be happy down there, it looks as if he's gond to sleep," I said. Angela was starting to feel rejected.

I rose from my seat and gave her a light kiss on the cheek, "I'm going to bed," I said. "I'll see you in the morning, and don't forget the hamster, he'll suffocate."

"You're a good bloke. See you in the morning," Angela called as I left the room.

I continued working long hours in the restaurant and for a while Angela sat up and waited for me to return. I was beginning to believe she was serious about me but I was very jubious about entering into a relationship with her. I just thought that Henry would be back sooner or later.

I returned from work and was preparing to take bath. Angela was in her bedroom. I tried not to disturb her and thought she was probably in there with Henry.

When I had finished in the bathroom Angela called out to me, "Billy, can you come in here a minute? My hairdryer won't work."

I knocked the door and walked in. She was standing in her black bra and pants. "Oops Sorry!" I said.

"Come in, it's all right," she said. I walked into the room, sat on the bed and rewired the plug on her hairdryer.

"Try that," I suggested.

She took hold of my hand and slowly placed it inside her pants, "Try this," she said.

'Why not?' I thought and was all ready to go for it when suddenly there was a lot of banging at the front door.

"Shit!"

"I think you had better go and answer it. I can't go like this," she said.

"It's got to be for you. You better get dressed while I go and see who it is," I said.

I went to the door, opened it and Henry came charging in, "Where is she? The thieving little bitch, she's cashed my fucking giro. I'm going to kill the bitch this time."

"All right Henry, sit down," I requested calmly. "She'll be through in a minute. Just calm down and keep your voice down. She's trying to get the kids to sleep."

"What do you want?" Angela said, as she entered the room.

"You bloody cashed my giro, you bitch. I want my money," Henry shouted.

I went into the kitchen to make myself a cup of tea and remained in their kitchen so they could argue in peace. After an hour arguing the couple got back together and I went back to my room and left them to sort things out. I was starting to have feelings towards Angela and the way she tormented me, I didn't think it was very wise to remain any longer. It was time to move on.

Chapter 5: First Love

I reluctantly returned to my parents house once more. I explained to my father what had been happening and he agreed that I could stay. My mother didn't seem too pleased.

"Do you mind if I stay for a while?" I asked my mother. "I will be moving on again as soon as I can. I'm working and can pay you £20.00 a week, if that's ok with you?"

"No! That's not all right with me, I want £25.00," my mother replied.

"I won't be eating here, I work in a restaurant, so it'll just be the occasional cup of tea or coffee," I explained.

"I said £25.00," she said nastily, "If you don't like it, tough!"

My mother soon showed her disgust at the hours I was coming into the house. I often worked very late, sometimes until 1.00 in the morning, but even when I did finish work early, never went straight home. I regularly went to Bogarts Bier Kellar in New Street, Birmingham and from there often went on to Snobs night club until 2.00am. I had special membership at Snobs which meant I didn't have to pay to get in. The manager of Snobs night club was Spanish and a close friend of the manager from the restaurant. All the staff from the restaurant were given special membership cards and most of them would go to the night club almost everynight. I really hated it at home and tried to spend as little time there as possible and I suddenly realized this was what my father had done for years, although he was generally home by midnight.

I tried not to let my mother know how much I was earning, but she knew I did have some money because of the number of hours I was working. She asked me, "Do you think you could lend me some money so that I can decorate this place? It hasn't been done in years."

"I will pay you back but it would have to be so much per week. I saw your savings book the other day so I know you can afford it," she said.

"How much do you want?" I asked, not really wanting to give her any money.

"£250.00, if that's all right? I know you can afford it. I could pay you back a little each week," she stated.

I considered this for a while and agreed to lend her the money, thinking it might buy me a slightly more peaceful life, at least for a short term.

A few days later she asked, "Is there any chance you could lend me another £200.00? Most of that other money has gone and I haven't managed to get

half the materials I need to do this place the way I want it. I'll pay it back, promise."

I lent my mother another £170.00, which was all the money I had. "That's £420.00 you've lent now," I said, politely reminding her.

"Don't worry, you'll get it all back over the next few months. The place should look nice when it's done, certainly needs it," she concluded.

Soon after this I lost my job in the restaurant following some trouble at Snobs night club. I had been involved in a minor disturbance at the club, nothing serious but the manager of the club complained to the manager of the restaurant. I was not given any reason why I had suddenly been asked to leave but I knew it was to do with the trouble at the club. I had already been offered a job in a pub in town while still working at the restaurant. I went to see the manager of the pub to see if the job was still available. I walked out of one job straight into another in the space of a few hours.

I didn't want to tell my mother that I had lost the job in the restaurant. I just started my new job in the pub and carried on working as if nothing had ever happened.

My mother realized I was going out different times and returning different times. "Are you still working in that restaurant?" she asked suspiciously.

"I lost my job over a week ago," I replied, "It doesn't matter though because..."

"I want you out, you lazy good for nothing. Get your stuff packed," she ordered. "You're not sponging off me and your father. And before you open your mouth, your father has already agreed you can't stay here if you're not working, we simply can't afford it."

'What's the point?' I thought, I went upstairs and packed my bags.

"I'll try to find somewhere by the weekend," I offered, to my mother.

"I'm not having you sponge of us until the weekend. I want you out in the morning. Don't you understand? We don't want you here and you can't afford to live here," she said maliciously.

The manager of the pub wanted to know why one of his staff had turned up for work with a suitcase. "Going on holiday already? You've only just started here!" he remarked. I explained to the manager what had happened.

"Tell you what," he said, "You can sleep in here tonight, you'll be all right, just get you head down for a few hours on one of the benches."

"Thanks, I really appreciate it. I don't know what I'm going to do this time," I replied.

"I don't know where I'm going to find lodgings this close to Christmas and I've got no money anyway. I lent her over £400.00 only a few weeks ago. I bet I don't see that again."

"Try not to worry too much about it now. You'll be ok here for a while, now go and get some work done before I change my mind," the manager told me.

At the end of the week I was surprised by a tax rebate of about £200.00 on top of my wages, I bought the newspaper and looked for some lodgings.

'I'll never go back again, no-matter what happens, I'll never go back to live there again. She'll never have the pleasure in throwing me out or driving me out again, ' I promised myself.

'Christmas! Another bloody Christmas, I give her all my bloody money and she throws me out penniless with nowhere to go. Never again, ' I thought.

I found myself a flat in a house in the Edgbaston area of the city. I paid the deposit and the rent on my new flat and bought a few towels, saucepans and plates and the money was gone. For the first few days I slept on the floor in front of the gas fire with the curtains pulled over me, trying to keep warm. There was a good ground coverage of snow outside. The old house had been converted into five flats. The water dripped through the roof onto the mattress of the double sized bed. The flats were damp, cold and the mildew separated the wallpaper from the walls. The icy stalactites hung from the inside of the window frames and dripped constantly. Each flat had two rooms, but they were not all the same. In my flat the bedroom was also the living room and the kitchen was also the bathroom. Despite the condition, the flats were very much appreciated by the tenants, most of whom would have otherwise been homeless.

I bought a large Alsatian dog for some company and by Christmas had got to know a few of the other residents in the house. Christmas for me was generally a very depressing and lonely time and this was no exception.

My fridge was full of booze so I just sat in my room with the dog, drinking. A can of lager fell over and the dog started lapping it up so I poured him a can in his dish. We both got drunk. The ghostly hunger and slopping lager sounds that emerged from my stomach prompted me to cook myself a Christmas dinner. I opened a tin of new potatoes and a tin of processed peas, emptied both tins in the same pan and added a couple of eggs from the fridge. I just cooked the lot together. The eggs burst and the spuds turned to green sloppy mush, but something was better than nothing. I felt quite sorry for the dog, seeing him drunk, trying to walk about. At the end of the day nothing seemed to matter, I just felt so very lonely and very much alone.

The year of 1980 seemed to be a different sort of year than I had grown used to. Working in the pub, I very rarely walked out sober at the end of the night. I got to know a few of the customers who drank regularly at the pub, but this was not one of the better pubs in the town. The pub had quite a bad name. In reality it wasn't that bad although I considered many of the customers to be awkward and ill mannered.

When I wasn't working I sometimes went drinking socially with my neighbours, Pete and Sue. "You just need to find yourself a good woman," they said.

"You'll feel much better in yourself when you have someone to share your life with." They were right. Life on the streets and in institutions had deeply embedded its effects on me and I still found mixing with people very difficult.

Soon after moving into this house I saw a familiar face from my past. "Hello Carol," I said. "What are you doing around here? I haven't seen you in ages."

"Oh hello Billy, I only live up the road. That house just there. I've been living up here for a few months now. How you keeping?"

"So where are you living these days?" Carol asked. This was the girl who I had been caught in bed with while in Highcroft Hospital.

"I live just here, flat 3, I've only just moved in and don't know this area too well. Why don't you come round later? I've got some cans in the fridge," I said.

"Yeah ok. I'll see you later then, I've got to go now," she replied.

The next morning I took Carol a cup of tea in bed. "I'm going to have to go," she stated.

"Why don't you stay for a while? There's no need to rush off," I said.

"You don't understand, what we had was good, but I should have told you, I'm married now. My husband often works away and he's due back today," she explained.

I didn't think there was any point in asking her to come round again. I was not the sort to get involved with other mens wives.

A few doors along the street lived a bunch of kids that I had seen pinching bottles of milk and anything else they could get their hands on. There were nine kids in the family, all scruffy little tearaways. I got to know most of this family and knew in some ways that I was once like them. They would bring milk and food to my flat which they had undoubtedly pinched from somewhere. Sometimes they bought these goods for my own use, but more

often than not, they just wanted someone to cook them something to eat. These kids had problems at home. Their mother was an alcoholic and their father was in prison. The older children in this family were quite capable of cooking their younger brothers and sisters something to eat but were usually out and up to no good. I really didn't mind these kids coming round to the flat. It was company for me and I felt as if I really understood these kids and tried to help them in any way that I could.

"I don't mind you all coming round here," I told them, "but I'm telling you all straight, if I catch any one of you stealing from me, I will break your fingers. Never steal off anyone who tries to help you, that's my unwritten law."

Working in the pub, I sometimes found the attitudes of some of the customers very aggravating. The pub had a large group of skinheads who were regular customers and they were very well behaved. Some of the skinheads were friends of mine and they were a good bunch of lads. They usually spent most of the time releasing their aggressive images on the space invader machine, shooting little green aliens with electronic missiles. They never caused any trouble in the pub, but were often involved in gang fights after closing time in the streets. They usually didn't start the trouble but they usually did finish it. There was also a large group of black guys, with long Dreadlock hairstyles, who would sit drinking and smoking drugs. One black guy often caused a disturbance in the pub.

He would walk up to the bar and lean over the counter, "Hey you, gimme pinta lager."

The manager always requested he speak to the staff properly and would not serve him until he did. The staff would just remain wherever they were at the time, not moving to serve him.

One Saturday lunch time the black guy approached the bar with his girlfriend and his usual manner, calling out to me, "You, Rarse clart, gimmie lager now!" I was already serving someone else and would have ignored him anyway.

I couldn't help but smile at the black guys game with us but on this occasion he was not in a particularly friendly mood. He turned to his nicely dressed, attractive white girlfriend, "You, buy me lager, me waitin!"

"I haven't got any more money," she said calmly.

His facial expression changed suddenly. He coldly, grabbed her hair and smashed her face into the bar, then lifted her head and I heard the horrible sound as he headbutted her in the face.

My reflex action came into play faster than my brain. I hit the guy over the head with the pint beer mug I was holding, but it was obviously a big mistake.

The black guy was real mad and started trying to climb over the bar to get at me.

I stepped back from the counter and was real scared, "Leave it," I said, "Just leave it."

"Ya blood clart, me gonna carve you up."

His girlfriend was still sat on the floor with the blood pouring from her broken nose. The pub was full of football supporters and most of the skins were in the pub with only a few of the regular black guys. A beer mug came flying across the room from another black guy who was about to join in. One of the skins pulled the guy off the bar and pulled out a Stanley knife and held it to the black guys throat. He didn't say a word. The manager had seen everything and had gone over to talk to the other black guy. I knew what to do and took my chance to run up the fire escape and out the emergency exit of the pub. The black guy was arrested for what he had done to his girlfriend. He told the police about being bashed on the head and about being held down at knife point.

"Where's the guy who hit him on the head?" The police asked casually.

"What guy?" came the reply.

The whole pub suddenly developed permanent memory loss. I had such a respect among the skins, they all backed me up but that was the end of another job.

I went out one night with Pete to the Crown pub in the city. Pete seemed to know everyone in the place, whereas I didn't know anyone. The D.J. was playing some music from the charts and a few Motown sounds from the past. I looked around the room taking mental note of the people around me and my eyes become fixed on one girl wearing a black satin dress. She had noticed me staring but I couldn't find the courage to approach her. I didn't know what to say and was afraid of making a fool of myself, I just kept looking and couldn't keep my eyes off her.

This girl knew Pete and most of the other people in the pub. She came over to Pete and myself, standing at the bar and started talking to Pete. She put ice cubes down the front of Pete's and my shirts and walked away, returning to her seat. Pete just ignored it and removed the ice. I went over to her and returned the ice down her dress. That certainly did break the ice between us and I fell in love with her right there and then. I invited Stella back to my flat. She had lovely eyes and a lovely smile and I liked the way she moved when she walked. I thought she looked very elegant and sexy, but thought she would get up the next morning and leave my life forever.

When we woke up the next morning, it appeared the dog also wanted her to stay. The dog did not usually like people coming into the flat and would constantly growl at them every time they went to move. The dog had responded differently to Stella, almost as if he had known her for years. He allowed her to move about freely in the flat, without growling at her and even obeyed her commands. I had never before known the dog to obey anyone but me. Rebel, the dog, wanted her to stay and made sure she did.

Stella and I made love a few times before going to sleep and while we slept the dog chewed up Stella's shoes, he obviously wanted her to stay. Stella didn't get upset about it and I certainly didn't. We spent the next few days together before buying some new shoes. We were in no hurry to go anywhere and spent most of the time in bed, making love. Stella had not only entered my flat, but had also entered my heart. Despite the fact that we had only just met we both knew we were definitely in love.

Eventually we decided to get dressed. I went out and bought Stella some new shoes and we went to Stella's nans flat in Smethwick. We explained to her grandparents that we had decided to live together. We collected Stella's clothes and returned to our flat. I really loved this girl and we were very happy together.

Stella and I visited her grandparents regularly, sometimes three or four times a week. Stella was emotionally very close to her nan and we often went out with them to play bingo at the local social club. We never had much money but usually managed to go out a few times a week.

We regularly went to the Horsetrader pub in the city, where Stella knew the disc jockey. She had once been involved with a DJ named Carl and he often worked as a 'Roadie' type DJ at this pub. Stella knew quite a few of the disc jockeys and often spent half the night talking to the DJ when we went out. I really didn't like her standing around talking to the DJ while I sat on my own like a prize idiot. I tried not to cause too much fuss as I knew we did love each other and at the end of the night she would be coming home with me.

After living together for a few months I asked Stella if she would do me the honour of becoming my wife. She proudly and happily said that she would. We loved each other so very much. I bought her a nice engagement ring and placed it on her finger, with all the love I had.

I started a training course at Handsworth skill centre in Birmingham. I decided that I wanted to train for a job with a future, to provide for my wife to be and hopefully a family. So I went on a steel fabricator and welding training course for six months. Stella would usually have the evening meal ready when I got home, but even if it wasn't I didn't mind helping and sometimes liked to surprise Stella with my own cooking. At the weekends we would prepare the meals together. I liked to take Stella breakfast in bed and treated her like royalty. We were a good team and were very happy doing things together.

When Stella announced that she was pregnant I was overjoyed and so was she. We wrapped our arms around each other, in a warm embrace and looked lovingly into each others eyes. "Ever since leaving school, I have wanted to settle down with someone to love and have a few children," I told her. "I truly love you with all my heart. This is my dream come true."

"I love you too with all my heart. I've never been so happy," she said. "I want to spend the rest of my life with you and can't wait for us to get married."

Stella carried the baby for four months and had a miscarriage. We were devastated. I looked up towards the Heavens, "Why us? Why do you have to do this to us? We really wanted this child."

We had already started buying baby clothes and had a few names short listed. We were really looking forward to becoming parents. The dream had been shattered.

After the miscarriage, Stella decided to wait for a while before we tried for another baby and she went on the contraceptive pill. We continued a full and loving sex life and were just as close, maybe even closer than ever

. I was doing fairly well with my training at the skill centre and quite enjoyed learning the trade. During this training course, I got myself into a panic situation one day by setting fire to my overalls, while wearing them! I was flame cutting a large piece of steel plate, when the red-hot swarf went into my turn-ups on my overalls, setting them alight. I tried patting out the flame to no avail and was looking around desperately for a bucket of water, but there never seemed to be a bucket of water around when I needed one! I pulled out a Stanley knife from my pocket and cut the leg off my overall. Seeing a slowly moving flame growing up my leg was a most frightening experience and things did get a little warm for a few seconds but I wasn't burned. The training itself was very interesting but many of the trainees thought they were trying to rush two years training into a very short six month course.

In November 1980 while working on the training course, I received a telephone call from my mother. I had no idea of how she had come to find me and after hearing what she had to say did not ask.

"Hello Son," she said, in a distressful voice.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"I suggest you sit down," she said, "I have some bad news."

"Your sister, Michele is dead. She passed away at 11:00 o'clock last night. Will you come home and pay your respects to your sister? We need you to come home."

I asked a member of staff from the centre if someone could give me a lift in a car and explained what had happened. One of the instructors from the centre gave me a lift to Edgbaston to fetch a few things from the flat, where I quickly explained to Stella what my mother had told me.

"I'm sorry but I have to go. I'll be back after the funeral and after I have found out how she died. I love you Stella. I have to go," I said.

The instructor took me to my mother's house. The front door opened and my mother stood there waiting for some comfort from me, the tears rolling down her face. I put my arms around her and she wept bitterly on my shoulder.

"Come inside. I think you had better sit down," I said. "Come on, I'll make you a cup of tea."

I helped my mother back inside the house, sat her down and made her a cup of tea. She didn't take sugar but I put two spoons in her cup.

"Drink it," I suggested. "You're in shock. Just drink it, sugar is supposed to be good for people in shock."

"How did she die?" I asked.

"She died of Pneumonia. After all she's survived through, she died of Pneumonia," my mother told me through her tears.

The whole family were very upset. My father was in a terrible state and Beverley kept bursting into tears. Michele died while in the care of a Social Services residential home for the disabled, where my mother had placed her several months earlier. My mother was finding it increasingly difficult to cope with my sister, who had been both physically and mentally handicapped since the fall when she was a baby. In many ways, Michele had deteriorated in her abilities and behaviour in the few years prior to her death and had started rebelling against my mother's acts of cruelty.

Michele had walked with a limp all her life and found most things fairly difficult in comparison to most able-bodied people, but she always made every endeavour to do whatever was asked of her. She was quite willing and able to do most things for herself, it just took her a little longer to get the things done. My mother often showed very little patience with her and often lost her temper with my sister simply because she wasn't quick enough.

I didn't know that my sister had been admitted into a home and when I heard this, I felt that Michele hadn't really died of Pneumonia. I believed she had simply lost her will to live. Michele was twenty one years old when she died and there were twenty-one wreaths at her funeral. My sister's coffin was brought to the house for us to pay our respects. I was disgusted at the way the coffin bearers had to upend the coffin to bring it into the house. I felt that

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my sister deserved more respect than to be tipped up in a box, but said nothing. The coffin was placed in my mothers living room, with the top removed. I remember how cold my sister was, the paleness of her face, the look of peace in her face. She was surely going to a better place.

My sister was cremated at Yardley Crematorium on Thursday, 20th November 1980. As her coffin was lowered to be cremated my mother yelled out after my dead sister, but it was obvious to everyone it was nothing but an act. Just a masquerade for the people from the home, who had come to pay their respects and none of the family ever forgot or forgave my mother for that.

"Mother killed Michele," Laurence told me, a few days after the funeral.

"Give it a rest Loz," I told him.

"No! It's true. Mother killed Michele," he insisted.

"What are you talking about?" I said. "I thought Michele died in a home, but I do find it a bit hard to believe that she died of Pneumonia."

"So what are you going on about?" I asked.

"I'm telling you the truth," he said, "Mother killed her. Last week, Michele came home for a weekend leave. Mother asked her to peel some potatoes and then started moaning that Michele was peeling them too slow. Mother hit her in the chest (Solar-Plexus) with such force that Michele stopped breathing and her heart stopped beating."

"Dad heard the almighty thud of Michele hitting the floor from in the living room and came rushing into the kitchen. He realized that her heart had stopped beating and had to pump her chest with his hands and give her mouth to mouth to bring her back to life. But I'm telling you, she was dead. That's why she's dead now, she never recovered from it. Mother fucking killed her," he cried.

I did not remain at home for very long after the funeral as I felt quite sick at what my brother had told me. I returned to Stella at the flat and she tried to ease the feelings of sorrow and guilt from my heart.

I was filled with bitterness and hatred towards my mother and believed every word of what my brother had said. I thought if only I had been at home, I may have been able to prevent my sisters death. I still feel guilty. The authorities and I failed my sister and she paid the Ultimate Price.

I returned to my training within a few days and tried to keep my mind occupied, trying to put everything to the back of my mind.

Stella and I spent that Christmas at Stella's grandparents flat. We had a nice Christmas, totally different from any Christmas I had ever known. I had someone I loved very much and someone who loved me. I no longer felt lonely or depressed, for once I felt a sense of belonging. I had never been close to anyone before, not in any emotional sense. I had learned how to switch off my emotions, sometimes not being able to switch them back on. For years my heart had been full of bitterness and misery, a painful life filled with empty emotions. Stella had been allowed inside my defensive wall, which prevented anyone from getting close to me. She had brought to the surface feelings I never believed I had.

Stella and I had now been together for one happy year, it was March 1981. We went out to celebrate and talked about trying for another baby. We had always had a very active and loving sex life. Stella stopped taking her contraceptive pill and soon after announced to me that she had become pregnant. I quietly and privately prayed to God that everything would work out this time, we were very happy but just a little worried.

About three months into the pregnancy, we were still visiting the discos and Stella met what she considered to be a new friend. Her name was Tracey and I took an instant disliking to her.

"I don't know why or what it is about her, but I can sense trouble in her and know she's bad news. I just don't like the girl," I said. "She's going to bring us trouble, I can smell it coming."

"Don't be silly. She's all right. She just likes dancing, that's all. You don't like any of my friends. You're just being silly," Stella replied.

Stella went out with Tracey a few times and I could feel something was going wrong. Tracey was slowly but surely disrupting our lives, but Stella couldn't see it.

"Billy, You know I love you very much don't you?" Stella lovingly declared.

"Yes," I said, "and I love you too, very much."

She looked at me through her sad sorrowful eyes. I smiled at her appealing face, wearing its 'sad puppy' expression. I could see in her eyes that she did love me, but I could tell by the sound of her voice that she had something on her mind.

"Come on spit it out, I know I'm not going to like it by the sound of your voice," I commented, removing the smile from my face.

"Tracey has asked me to stop at her house tonight. I told her I would have to ask you first. So would you mind if I stopped at Tracey's tonight?" Stella asked. "It's just for tonight. She's having a few problems at home. All right?"

I wasn't really surprised at what she was asking. I was just upset at her wanting to spend the night with this, 'lager supping pig' in preference to me. I couldn't understand what Stella admired in this creature.

I turned away, unable to look Stella in the face, "To be honest," I said, "Yes I do mind and no it's not all right. She's big enough and ugly enough to sort out her own problems, without you sleeping at her house."

Stella had the ability to wind me round her finger and persuaded me to agree with something I didn't agree with, to her staying at Tracey's house. Stella was overjoyed which was usually something pleasant to see. She said she would be back first thing in the morning. I knew I had to give this girl something that I had never given anyone else in my life before, trust!

The street riots started that night, in nearby Handsworth and I was worried for Stella's safety. I had seen the television pictures of the rioting and some of the aftermath the next morning on my way to work. I decided to turn back. I telephoned Tracey's mother to make sure Stella was ok.

"They didn't come back here last night," Tracey's mother said, "I was told they were both stopping at your house. I'm sorry Billy, but I don't know where they are."

Stella returned later in the day. I was glad to see she was safe, but wanted to know where she had been. "Did you have a good time last night?" I asked.

"Yeah, not too bad. You don't mind do you?" she replied.

"So what time did you get back to Tracey's moms house?" I asked.

"I can't remember now. We just went when the pub shut. We got a taxi," she replied.

"Do you want a cup of tea?" I asked, not letting on to the fact I knew she was telling me lies. "So what did you have to do, sleep on her mothers settee?"

"Yes please," she said. "Yes, her moms really nice and she's got a nice place too."

"I know! I spoke to her this morning. She told me you two told her you were stopping here. So where the fuck have you been and why all the lies?" I said, straight faced.

Stella would not change her story and insisted that they had been at Tracey's mothers house. I didn't believe a word of it.

"Her mother was asleep when we went in. She probably didn't hear us go in," Stella said.

Tracey later called at the flat and they both stood telling me lies. They went out again and Stella did not return until the next day.

"I just thought I would give you time to cool down," Stella told me. "I know you don't like Tracey but she's done nothing wrong. You're causing a lot of fuss over nothing. Don't you believe me when I tell you I love you, or is it that you don't trust me?"

"I love you very much and I have given you trust. As for Tracey, I wouldn't trust her to put my rubbish out. I just know there is something wrong," I replied.

They went out again the following week. I knew where they would go and later turned up unexpected. I saw Stella sitting with Gary in the cozy corner of the pub. Stella and I had both known Gary for some time as he often helped Carl with the discos. I bought myself a pint and went over towards them. Gary removed his arm from around Stella and went downstairs to the toilet to try to avoid facing me.

"Have you been sleeping with him?" I asked Stella.

"No, I haven't. He's just a friend," she snapped.

I went downstairs. Gary was washing his face in the sink, the heat from the disco making him sweat or maybe worry having a strange effect on him. Maybe he was washing Stella's lipstick off his face?

I could feel the adrenaline pumping round my body, my heart racing and my legs shaking. I had the overwhelming need and burning desire to hurt this greasy little slime ball.

"Have you been sleeping with Stella?" I asked him.

He raised his head only slightly and turned his face towards me, "Go and ask her!"

I viciously grabbed the back of his greasy black hair and lifted his head, "Wrong answer!" Bang! I bashed his face into the sink and his legs gave way, buckling from under him.

I dragged him across the floor and stuck his head down the toilet, "I'll ask you again, have you been sleeping with Stella?" I flushed the toilet with Gary's head down the pan.

I dragged him into the next toilet, "I can't hear you!" I said angrily and flushed his head down the next pan.

Gary finally answered, "Yeah, but it was just the once."

I lifted his head very slowly and brought it down sharply and felt the vibration through the floor of the solid crash of his head against the porcelain toilet bowl. "Once is once too often, you bastard."

I left him lying on the floor soaking wet and covered in blood and went back upstairs to Stella. "I'll ask you once more. Have you been sleeping with him?"

"No," she answered.

"You Liar!" I slapped her across the face and walked out of the pub.

Heartbroken and betrayed, she had abused the one thing nobody had ever had the chance to abuse, my trust. I was devastated. I walked the streets trying to hide the sorrow in my heart, which was visible in my face. I had never hit a woman before. I worshipped this girl. I loved this girl with all my heart and she was ripping me apart.

Stella went to live with Gary and it started a war. I wanted Stella back and was prepared to do anything to get her back. Several people who Stella knew were encouraging her to stay away from me and this made me even more angry. I had calmed down tremendously over the previous few years and I had matured into a respectable living human being, I had become civilized. Now I was hurt, like a wounded wild animal and I went on the rampage.

The knives that had been put away years before came out once more and were sharpened. I practised throwing a 4" Bowie knife and a 6" Bowie knife with both my left and right hands and I walked around with them both.

I turned up at the Horsetrader pub and Gary was sat with his arm around Stella with a group of his mates. They sat laughing and passing comments among themselves.

'Gary thinks he's tough with a few mates around, does he? I'll bloody teach him to laugh at me.'

I walked over to Gary and Stella, straight through the middle of all Gary's mates. Gary suddenly lost his smug grin. I picked up his pint glass and held it under his nose, "Laugh at me now and I'll rip your disgusting face off! Come on laugh, I dare you to laugh," I said, glaring into his eyes.

"That's my child in her belly, not yours! There's no way you are going to rear my child. I will rear my own kids. Do you understand?" I said.

I kept the glass under Gary's nose while I turned my head slightly to speak to Stella, "I still love you very much and I still want you back. I trusted you and you abused it. I have told you before I always wanted kids and I mean what I say, I will rear my own kids."

I turned my attentions back to the slimey greaseball who sat next to her, "If you think your mates frighten me your wrong, because you wouldn't live long enough to see them do anything to me."

I considered this my own private war, the likes of which they would have never seen, me against Gary, all his mates, all the DJs and all their mates. Months of trouble followed. One DJ had his transit van rigged to explode right outside his house. The van did get a little burned but didn't explode and the same guy had his customised Capri wrecked. I was arrested on suspicion. I didn't admit to it and nobody could prove a thing.

Stella started visiting me at the flat as we still had very strong feelings for each other, but for some reason this was no longer enough to hold us together. I begged her constantly to come back to me but she just returned to Gary. After causing months of trouble I decided to try some different tactic. I realized I might have been frightening her too much for her to consider returning to me, so I let things cool down altogether and stopped turning up at places that Stella went to.

"I blame Tracey for most of this," I told Stella. "You wouldn't have gone off if she hadn't lead you astray. Well, I'm telling you, if she ever has the nerve to ring my doorbell I'm going to drop the telly out of the window, onto her head."

During one of Stella's visits, when she was about seven months pregnant, she started to haemorrhage. I called for the ambulance and went with her to the hospital. I saw our son born dead. Stella was in a very bad way, she had lost a lot of blood.

"There was nothing we could do for the baby," the doctor told me. "It was already dead when she got to the hospital. We are now doing all we can for your girlfriend, but I must tell you, she might not survive."

Stella asked me to phone Gary and tell him what had happened. She knew how I felt about Gary but thought he had the right to know what had happened to her. I was in no fit state and no mood for arguing with him, or anyone else, I did as Stella asked.

"What are you telling me for?" Gary said, "It's not my baby, it's nothing to do with me."

"She might not last the night," I explained. "She has lost a lot of blood and she's asked me to ask you to come to the hospital. I'm not going to start any trouble and I'll go if Stella asks me to." I spoke to him calmly and explained everything to him.

"Like I said it's not my baby, so why the fuck should I care?" Gary replied.

I went back to Stella's bedside and announced, "I've told him but he's not sure if he can make it over to the hospital tonight. I told him there would be no trouble, but he just said he might not be able to make it," not wanting to upset her any more than she already was.

She later phoned him herself from the hospital portable phone and he repeated everything directly to her. I stayed by Stella's bedside until morning, sitting on the armchair, holding her hand with my head resting on the bed. Stella appeared to be a little better by morning and the drip was removed from her arm.

"You will be all right now," the doctors told her. "Things will settle down on their own in due course. You will be able to go home in a few days."

"I'm going home now," I told her, "I will let your Nan and granddad know what's happened. I still love you and I still need you, I still want you and I still care for you very much, but I won't be coming back to the hospital again. It's up to you what you do now. You know where I am if you want me." I gave her a kiss on the cheek and left her with the tears running down her face.

Stella's grandparents knew something was wrong, when they saw me standing at their door, at 7.00am. I told them the bad news and returned home. Unknown to Stella, I phoned the hospital twice each day to see how she was, until one morning I was told that she had been discharged. I kept looking out of my flat window, wandering what she would do now. Wandering if she would call at the flat, wandering if she would come back, wandering if she loved me as I still loved her. I didn't have long to wait. Stella came to see me later that day and we finally got back together. I was happy that she had come back but just wished it had been under different circumstances, or more to the point, wished it had never gone wrong in the first place. I really did love her very much but I no longer trusted her and that put a lot of pressure on the relationship.

About a month later my brother appeared at our door, "Is there any chance I can stay here for a while?" Laurence said, "Mother's thrown me out."

"I had just finished doing the polishing for her and she started saying that I had missed half the furniture, which I hadn't. I put the polish in the kitchen and she came out into the hall and threw it at me with such force it smashed the glass in the front door," he explained.

"So you just walked out then," I commented.

"No," he said, "After she threw the can at me she started blaming me for the door being smashed. I told her it wasn't my fault so she just came over and started hitting me and I hit her back. That's why I'm here."

"Where about did you hit her and how did you hit her?" I asked.

"I didn't really mean it, she just kept hitting me and I punched her in the arm," he replied.

"I don't think you're very clever," I told him, "but I can't say I blame you. I know what she can be like. If you promise that's all you've done you can stay, but if I find out you have beat her up you're out of here."

I later talked to Stella and told her what my mother was like and a little about the way she used to treat me as a child. I knew that my brother and sisters never took the sort of beatings that I took but even those they had were severe.

"I remember when I was about six or seven years old, Beverley was crying in her pram in the living room and my mother grabbed her and shook her like a rag doll. Her head was going backwards and forwards, I thought my mother was going to break her neck. Then my mother stopped shaking her and looked at me staring at her and said, 'catch'. She threw my sister across the room. Luckily, I did catch her before she hit the brick wall. The force of catching her knocked me to the ground but if I hadn't, she too would be dead now. So I don't really blame Loz for retaliating. I just hope he hasn't gone too far and end up in prison."

Stella did not object to me putting my brother up in the flat for a while but none of us stayed there for much longer.

The long hard winter of that year caused all the water pipes in the house to freeze up. When the pipes thawed, they burst, flooding the whole building. A housing inspector called at the house. He entered one of the flats and found a fridge that had fallen through the rotten floor boards. There was water in the electricity circuits. The only fire exit was through a flat, which was securely locked. He condemned the building as unsafe for people to live in. We soon moved into a council flat in the Ladywood area of Birmingham.

I had acquired, by various means, a fair amount of furniture by this time. We were keen to move, but could not afford a removal van. I persuaded my brother to help me move house manually, on foot. We carried most of the furniture to the new flat walking around Edgbaston reservoir. My brother and I worked throughout the day and through the night, carrying things from one flat to another, while Stella continued packing things into boxes and anything else that seemed suitable.

We were stopped by the police on the last trip, pulling a shopping trolley and carrying a few boxes. "Bit early in the morning for doing your shopping, isn't it lads? What's in the trolley and where are you off to?" the officer said.

"Don't tell me, you're moving house," the officer remarked, placing his hand on the trolley.

We stood still, appreciating the overdue rest, the sweat turning cold on our backs. Laurence commented to me, "I hope we don't have to unpack all this in the street."

I showed the coppers my old rent book and the new rent book. "We are trying to move house. That's where I'm living now and that's where I'm moving to. I can't afford what they're asking to hire a van so we're moving what we can ourselves. We started this morning."

The officer looked at the rent books, "You mean yesterday morning, don't you? It's Sunday now! So, what's in the trolley?" he asked.

"To be honest, I have no idea," I said. "My girlfriend is in the old flat packing things into boxes and two trolleys and we are just running backwards and forwards with them. I just unpack them at the other end. I think it's mainly clothes and a few ornaments this trip."

The officer had a quick look in the trolley. "Go on, but make this your last trip," he said. "If we see you again, we will run you in. Just think yourselves lucky, if you were carrying a stereo we would have run you in already."

A grin appeared on my face, "We took the stereo first. I think we have done enough for one day anyway and thanks a lot."

The following day Stella's granddad helped by providing some transport to move the fridge and cooker and the job was finished. We moved into the flat that day and got everything arranged in the new flat. We moved in very quickly and were settled in time for the Christmas. We had been shopping and I thought the turkeys were very much overpriced. When I noticed a 14lb turkey with two prices attached I removed one of them and paid a fiver for the huge bird. I managed to burn the turkey on Christmas day. I guess this was justice for my needless dishonesty. It was like a leather football. I salvaged what I could and nobody went hungry, it was a big enough bird and there was plenty of other food available. We all had a fairly nice quiet Christmas and Stella and I saw in the new year with Stella's grandparents at a social club in Smethwick.

In the early part of 1982 Stella started seeing another guy again and I was not prepared to go through the trouble all over again. Since she had returned, I had found it impossible to give her back the trust she once had and abused. Stella denied any knowledge of this other guy. I had been told by one of Stella's friends and decided to believe them rather than her. We had a big argument and I threw my dinner up the wall and Stella left. This time I didn't chase after her. I just had to let it end. It took me a very long time to get over Stella, that's if I ever did.

I started working in a restaurant in the city, employed as a kitchen porter. I didn't like working at this restaurant as many of the staff were homosexual. I

made it crystal clear to everyone that I was straight. None of them ever tried anything and seemed quite happy at the fact that I had told them, with no uncertain terms, that I was strictly heterosexual.

Most of these guys were ok to speak to, some of them didn't appear to be gay at all. Others didn't try to hide the fact and went around very 'camp'. I did feel very uncomfortable at times and I thought about my reputation working in a place like this.

'I hope people outside don't think I'm a gay, ' I thought. 'Most of the customers are probably gay anyway. I'm glad I don't have to work upstairs where people can see me.'

I spoke to them with respect, never looking any of them in the eye, but it was very rare I ever looked anyone in the eye at any time. I did object very strongly if any of them appeared to enter my invisible 'personal space', the space where only close friends or relatives could enter. One day one of the guys came up behind me, quite innocently, to put something in the sink, in which I was working. The guy just brushed passed me.

"Next time you want to get to the bloody sink don't just brush up against me," I said. "If you do it again, I'll sit you on the cooker."

The chef, who was also gay, came over to the sink. "What's going on here?" he asked. I told him what had happened and what I had said.

The other guy remarked, "We don't need this sort of attitude in here. We have just as much rights as him to be here."

"I think you were in the wrong," the chef told him, "and you have no rights to be in my kitchen. You work upstairs. It doesn't excuse what he has said but you shouldn't have just brushed passed him. He has told us where we stand and you should have the same respect for him. I think you were pushing your luck. Now go back upstairs."

"You can hurry up!" the chef told me, "You should have finished those pans by now. I want the cold room cleared out before you finish today."

While working in the restaurant I bought myself a disco deck. I planned, designed, wired and built my own light show and set up the finished light towers in the flat.

'This is the best light show I have ever seen for a mobile disco, ' I thought. 'I'll show 'em. Let's see how they respond to a bit of class competition.'

I had seen the attention some DJs got while working the discos. 'If you can't beat 'em, join 'em, ' I thought.

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My plan was really just to make Stella jealous. I bought myself an old Vauxhall victor estate car for £50.00, which I thought was a real bargain. I taught myself to drive in a car park. It took me a while to realize that I had in fact bought a scrap car, with a scrap engine. It served the purpose for which it was bought and that was all that mattered. I started doing discos at pubs and clubs. I had worked hard at the idea but soon found there was more to doing discos than just playing loads of records. Most DJs have an outgoing personality and the 'gift of the gab', which was something I didn't have. I managed to get a few bookings and most of the people thought my light show was brilliant. The bookings I got didn't even cover the cost of the records I was buying each week. I did one disco at a club where Stella was with her new boyfriend, Trevor. By the end of the night she had not become jealous or hurt, I had.

Chapter 6: Falling Apart

I regularly played the music almost full volume in the flat, which did upset some of the neighbours, while others shouted up for requests to be played. People could hear the music streets away.

I took very little notice of the few neighbours who complained until one day one of them tried bashing my door down. The guy went mad, "Your bloody noise has cracked all the plaster on my walls. There's lumps of it falling down off my ceiling. Just look at this," he said, holding out a handful of bits of plaster. "And I've got a constant headache."

"Wait there," I said. I went into the kitchen and returned to the door a few seconds later.

"Here, take two of these for your headache and here's something for your ceiling." I held out a box of headache tablets and a box of plaster.

The man knocked them out of my hand. "I don't think you're very funny. You're just showing off in front of your stupid brother," the man said angrily. Laurence went to walk away.

"You needn't run off either, you're the worst," the mans said. "You play them all day long, from the minute your brother's out of sight. At least this bleeding lunatic only blasts them out for a few minutes at a time."

"I don't mind your music loud," he said, "I actually listen to it myself. I'm just telling you, half the volume or I'm gonna break your sodding door down and throw the lot out the sodding window, and you and your stupid brother, if need be. Ok." I thought the guy was being quite reasonable, under the circumstances.

"Ok. I'm sorry. You have made your point and I have been selfish. I will keep it turned down, ok. Now do you want any of these tablets, because I've got a headache now?" I said.

Laurence was getting me very angry at times as while I was at work he was letting dozens of people into the flat. They would mess about with all the disco equipment, mess all the records up and didn't show any respect for the thousands of pounds of equipment. Things were regularly going missing from the flat and the furnishings were being burned by cigarettes. I returned home from work one night to find the flat full of people. There was one kid sat on the arm of the settee, hitting the sides of it with a motor cycle chain. Another guy was stood in the middle of the floor holding his face which was pouring of blood. He had been slashed across the face with a small Stanley knife. I grabbed the chain off the kid.

"Get the fuck off my settee," I ordered.

"What's happened here?" I asked.

"He cut himself shaving," the chain kid said and started laughing.

"You better shut your mouth," I said. "I want to know what's happened here and someone better answer me properly and I mean now! Looks like you've had a real party in here."

Some kid was sitting behind my disco deck and put on another record. "You better turn that off and get the fuck away from my stuff, before I wrap this chain over your head," I said.

Laurence was sat with some girl on his lap. "Off," I ordered, talking to the girl, who sat laughing.

"You let this lot in here," I said to my brother, "You can tell me what's going on."

I turned to the people trying to leave the flat, "Sit down. Nobody is going anywhere until I find out what happened to this guy."

"I cut him," another guy called out.

"Yeah... Why?"

"You lot can go now," I said to the crowd gathering by the door.

I looked at the cut across the guys face. He was cut from his forehead right down and across his nose.

"Can you go in the bathroom and bleed in the sink?" I said. "You're making a right bloody mess in here."

I looked across the room at the guilty party, not the sort of guy I wanted to tackle. "So why did you cut him?" I asked.

"He's been bad mouthing my Missus," the guy explained. "I just told him to stop and didn't want any trouble but he went to pull a big sheath knife, so I cut him with this." He held a miniature Stanley knife in his hand, but I didn't want it!

I went to see the slashed face, bleeding in my bathroom, "Keep your bloody head over the sink. Look at my sodding flat... Knife!" I held my hand out for the knife. I wasn't worried about tackling this guy, with or without the cut face, but definitely without the knife.

"Looks like you all come here prepared for war, bloody motorbike chain, two knives any more knocking about?" I said.

"What did you pull a knife on him for?" I asked, "I bet you won't be so quick next time, will you?" 'Or maybe, you should have been a bit quicker, ' I thought.

"I think you better get yourself down the hospital and get your nose stitched back on properly," I said.

After everyone had left, I had a few words to say to my brother about the sort of people he was allowing into the flat. "The main problem is, you don't even know half these people. It's like you know one or two people but they are bringing all their mates, who you don't know." Laurence agreed to only allow his own friends into the flat and to keep a bit more control.

"And nobody plays on my deck, just you or me, nobody else. Half my sodding records have gone and the other half are all scratched up," I told him.

Laurence mixed with people very easily whereas I had always had great difficulty in mixing with people. Laurence continued to have people in the flat but generally speaking they were a little more civilized and the place didn't get wrecked quite so often. Laurence often had the place full of people when I got home from work but I still felt very much alone. He knew quite a few of the girls in the area and invited many different girls to the flat. Mostly they were just friends of his, rarely anyone special to him. One night I walked in to find my brother and about half dozen girls in the flat, one of whom I had never seen before and I managed to start talking to her. It had been about a year since I had split up with Stella.

About two days after our brief meeting, Marina knocked my door, "I left my bag here the other day. Can you see if it's still here, please?"

"I found it after you had gone and put it away. I don't know where you live or I would have dropped it in to you."

"How long have you known my brother?" I asked.

"I don't really," she said. "I know one of the girls who comes up here sometimes. I had only come over because her mother wanted her and sent me over to tell her. I had only been here a few minutes when you walked in." I quite liked the look and sound of this girl.

"Where about do you live?" I asked inquisitively.

"Just over the road," she replied.

"I'm going down the pub for an hour, I'm not sitting here all night. Would you like to come with me?" I asked. "We can have a chat down there, if you like."

We went to the local pub for a few hours and back to my flat. We started kissing in the bedroom but Marina started to become nervous as I started to run my hand up her skirt.

"I'm still a virgin," she said nervously.

"You're joking, seriously, really?" I smiled, somewhat surprised.

"Honest, I've never done it before," she said, straight faced, as she wrapped her arms around me.

"You don't have to do anything if you don't want to. I won't touch you if you don't want me to," I told her, "but I must tell you, I want to. I've never done it with a virgin before."

Marina could see that I meant what I'd said and was prepared to leave her intact and untouched.

"I do want to," she said. "Just don't hurt me, just be gentle, ok."

She was certainly no virgin by morning and my back had suffered. She clawed all my back but we both enjoyed every minute of it.

Marina's mother was none too pleased about what had happened. "You're not on the pill or anything and I bet he didn't use anything. Did he?" her mother said anxiously.

"Well, I'm very sorry young lady, but you're not going over there again until you've been on the pill long enough for it to have taken effect. He can come to see you over here if he wants. I just hope you don't find you're pregnant from this time," she said.

Once Marina was safely protected by the pill she was allowed to come over to my flat but was not allowed to stay over night. This didn't stop our sex life at all but spoiled some of the enjoyment, having to watch the clock. Sometimes I'd wind the clock back, so that she could stay an extra half hour. I hated to rush a job that should take time. It never seemed right to just steal a few hours just to have sex before taking her back home, half the time with her knickers in her pocket.

We saw each other daily and I did grow very fond of Marina and it was a good relationship. Marina and I liked to go to the occasional restaurant and the occasional pub and went out whenever we could afford to. Sometimes we just drove round in the car, to find different and daring places to make love. We made love in the grounds surrounding the reservoir and in the grounds of the

local hospital and sometimes we just did it in the car. Occasionally we would make love on her mother's dining table or on the kitchen floor, while her mother was watching television, in the lounge, upstairs. I did eventually tell Marina that I loved her and I meant it, but I still loved Stella. The feelings I had for Marina were never quite the same.

I had been working in the restaurant for about a year when things started going wrong. I suddenly had my hours cut by nearly half. I was very upset about this and found it almost impossible to pay my debts on the suddenly reduced income. The newly appointed manager was demanding the same amount of work to be done in half the length of time. It was impossible. I had always worked hard and had never been seen to be standing around, doing nothing. If the jobs were not finished by the end of the day, I was required to work over time without pay. The manager was finding more and more work for me to do each day, until I was working a ten-hour day for about six hours pay.

The day came when I had just about taken enough. I was scrubbing some pans in the kitchen sink and the manager came over and threw a handful of knives in the sink. "Hurry up," he ordered, "I want the cold room done."

"Can you put the knives on the side next time, please?" I said, as a reminder and to point out the mistake made.

I had previously asked the kitchen workers not to put the knives in the sink as I couldn't see them in the water and had sliced my hands a few times. These knives were very sharp.

A few minutes later the manager came over and put a large pan on the top, ready to be washed. I picked it up and dropped it on the floor with an almighty crash. It was bloody red-hot!

"Bastard," I yelled, not directed at anyone. Hot pans were always put on the floor so that accidents like this didn't happen. The manager was fully aware of this and had always put hot pans on the floor.

"What did you call me?" the manager asked angrily.

I turned back to the sink. "Nothing," I said, "I just burned myself on that pan."

The manager spun me around, "Look at me when you're talking to me. I said, what did you call me?" he said and then threw another handful of knives in the sink.

I turned to the sink filled a pan with greasy, dirty, washing up water and waited. The manager spun me again and I threw the water all over him and went to the staff room.

The big boss came into the staffroom following the complaint. "You're sacked! Get your things and get out. You have five minutes."

I had been out of work for some time before starting work in a chip shop on an occasional basis, where Marina also worked on a part time basis. I did the occasional disco with Marina at a few pubs and clubs around Birmingham before giving up the disco game for good. I sold the estate car to a scrap yard for £15.00. I had saved some money and bought myself a Ford Escort. I sold most of the disco equipment and made a huge loss. I used this money to pay for repairs on the car to get it to m.o.t. standard.

Some trouble broke out one evening in the chip shop, while I was working. The manager of the shop lost his temper with a guy who had been kicking the gaming machine. The manager had told this guy repeatedly to stop kicking the machine but he took no notice. The manager physically removed the guy from the shop, who promptly returned and threw a house brick through the window of the shop. He then ran inside and put another house brick through a hot food cabinet.

The manager gave chase after the guy and called out to me, "Phone the police!"

The police came but couldn't catch the guy. Some days later my flat was burgled and my video and television were stolen. Unfortunately for me, I couldn't even report the incident to the police. I had bought these items in good faith off a guy I thought I knew, for a £100. It turned out the guy had pinched them from a nearby house. I had some money put away and managed to replace the items fairly quickly. I had quite a lot of fairly nice things in the flat and I had the feeling that the burglars had probably seen me returning to the flat. I didn't think they had finished the job they had started and thought they would be back. I secured the flat the best I could and insured the contents.

Within days the chip shop was also burgled. My car had been tampered with on a few occasions and I was beginning to wonder when the trouble was going to end. The car had a perfectly good alarm installed and wheel locks on all the wheels but I woke up one morning to find all the doors wide open and the boot and bonnet. The wheels had been removed and placed neatly inside the car. I was a little upset but I also saw a funny side to the pranks. These guys were professional idiots. They had gone to all that trouble and left over £200.00 worth of wheels behind! I had no doubts about who was responsible for the burglary and the car. It was just as if they were trying to make a point, which they succeeded in doing.

The manager of the shop had unbreakable glass installed at the chip shop, as he too thought these guys would return. About a month later, the manager and I both thought the trouble to be over. We were wrong. My flat was burgled again. Most of the furniture was stolen and almost everything that had been

left behind, had been destroyed. Clothing had also been stolen and several items had been slashed with a knife. This time the two guys had the perfect alibi. They were both already in prison for more serious crimes, involving firearms. I knew they were responsible and had sent their mates to do the job for them. My flat looked as if a hurricane had gone through it. When the police arrived, I was sat behind the front door, which was literally hanging off, with a hammer in my hand. I explained why I had the hammer and showed the police the cut up clothing. It was sickening! I had no way of closing the door and was afraid of the burglars returning. The police could see why I was so worried but stressed that it was very unlikely they would come back as there was nothing to come back for.

Although there was very little left in the flat, I was afraid to leave it. The dog I had at the house in Edgbaston had long since gone. I was worried to turn my back on the flat so I bought a fully grown Alsatian dog from a half caste woman who worked at the chip shop.

The woman warned me the dog could be very aggressive but that was exactly what I was looking for, an aggressive man-eater of a dog. This was one mean, guard dog! The problem was he wasn't too keen on letting anyone into the flat and that included me. After three days the dog turned on me. I was getting ready to go out and was putting my shoes on. The dog started jumping all over the place excitedly, obviously wanting to go out. The dog jumped up at me, whining like a lost puppy, but he was no puppy. He was a big dog.

"Off!" I commanded.

The dog continued jumping around. I didn't think it wise to smack the dog after only having him for a few days.

"Off! You stupid animal," I ordered.

After bowing my shoes laces, I stood up. The dog was still jumping all over the place and jumped up at me again. This time I turned away from the dog and raised my arm out of the way. The dog jumped up and sank his teeth in the top of my arm and pulled me to the ground. The first bite had punctured the muscle in the top of my arm and the fluid ran down, leaving my arm limp and useless. I was wrestling the dog on the ground with one arm and the weight of my body trying to hold him down. I knew if the dog was able to get up he would have the advantage and attack again.

Marina was in the flat at the time and I was afraid of the dog attacking her as well as me. Eventually I managed to throw the dog into the hallway and close him out of the room. I tried to give the dog time to calm down. I still couldn't lift my arm. It was hanging and flopping about like a loose empty sleeve. In the finish, I had no choice but to shout from the window for a neighbour to phone the police. The dog was not going to let anyone in or out, he had turned really

nasty. A police dog handler arrived and managed to take the dog away without any real problem and I was taken to hospital.

"The wound to your thumb is very nasty," the doctor told me. "The wound to your arm will be ok, provided you keep it clean, but this thumb is very nasty, he's really chewed it up quite bad. We may need to amputate!" I could hardly believe my ears.

"You want to chop my thumb off, because of a bloody dog bite. You must be joking."

"Dog bites can cause some very nasty infections and he's certainly made a meal of your thumb," the doctor told me. "Your thumb may become infected."

A nurse applied a clean dressing to the wounds, "You have to come back in a week so the doctor can take another look at it. You must keep it clean."

I never went back to the hospital and the wounds healed up perfectly well without any drastic action. I bought myself another dog, only this time I bought an Alsatian puppy so that I could train the dog myself. Despite being only fourteen weeks old this dog was a rather nasty animal and had already bitten some guy while the previous owners had the dog. He had already drawn blood. When he was taken out for his walks, he would jump up to try to attack people in the street and he was very destructive in the flat.

Laurence had moved out of the flat, some months before the burglary, into his own flat in the Hockley area of Birmingham. He was well settled and was taking his time in decorating the place, just the way he wanted it. When he had finished, he seemed to take the next six months admiring his work of art, clearly proud of his achievements.

In comparing my brothers flat to my own partly demolished one, I decided it was time to move on. All the trouble I'd had, made me feel sick of this flat. I moved out in 1984 and went to live in a private house in Oldbury, belonging to the owner of the chip shop. The owner of the chip shop owned three houses in Ashes Road. He and his family lived in one and the other two were rented out privately.

Soon after moving into this house, I bought an Alsatian bitch from a rescue centre to keep my dog company. I thought it might help to distract the dog from ripping the place to pieces. The dog had ripped a massive hole in my bed and literally pulled out virtually all the stuffing and ate it. This dog had pulled a glass bowl containing some left over mashed potatoe onto the floor, smashing the bowl. He'd stood there and ate the potatoe and the glass bowl! On another occasion one of Marina's friends had been at the flat and had volunteered to do some washing up of dishes. She took off her gold diamond and sapphire engagement ring, leaving it on the kitchen worktop and the bloody dog ate it! He was, without doubt, a very expensive dog to keep and

this one meal alone cost me over a hundred pound! I could see no reason for the dogs destruction and scavenging. The dog was very well fed with proper food and he was well cared for, but he was eating me out of house and home, literally!

The dog didn't like the Alsatian bitch that I'd bought and constantly attacked it, probably wanted to eat that too! The bitch decided she was not going to stand for his bullying. She jumped a six-foot fence and ran away.

While working in the chip shop, I decided to buy a better car as the old Ford Escort had become unreliable and presented problems in getting to work in the mornings. I bought a 1975 Morris Marina from a reputable car dealer. Each day I drove to work from my home in Oldbury. After work, I would go to Marina's house and drive back to the house in Oldbury for a few hours before taking Marina back home, as she was still not allowed to stay overnight. We had been together for about two years when things started to go wrong and we started to drift apart. I was getting tired of driving back and forth several times a day and having to race my sex life, and my driving. Marina was not allowed to stay at my house overnight and the constant running about became exhausting. I stayed away from Marina's house and appeared at her door again a week later.

"What do you want?" Marina asked.

"Let him in Marina and don't be so rude," came her mothers voice from the kitchen.

Marina swung open the door and left me to go into her mothers ever smiling face, while she retreated to another room. I sat and had a drink with her mother who wanted to hear some explanation as to why I hadn't been to see her daughter. As my words left my mouth, even I realized just how pitiful they sounded. I was truly sorry, but didn't want to say so. I went into the living room and sat down next to Marina, who immediately got up and went to sit in a chair.

"What do you want?" Marina asked, talking down her nose at me.

"We can sort this out," I said, "I was just overtired and needed some rest."

"Well, go home and get some sleep," she snapped. "We're finished!" I pleaded with her on bended knee, but she was a heartless bitch. I left the house wishing I'd never stayed away at all.

Things started going downhill rapidly after that and the life I had was crumbling around me. I lost my job in the chip shop. The manager discovered that I'd been using the phone in the shop to arrange bookings for the discos, without his consent.

A few days later I went out in the car, in the snow and ice and skidded into the back of a stationary car. The damage to the other car was only a broken glass in a tail light. My own car was a wreck. The front wing had completely crumpled right up against the door. I paid the owner of the escort £50.00 in cash for the damage I had done to his car. I didn't want any problems from insurance claims. I had never had a driving lesson in my life and had taken and failed my driving test on the one and only occasion that I tried to become legal on the road. I had driven about six cars, on a provisional license and was insured in someone else's name, so I tried to avoid any accident claims, or any questions from the police.

Everything seemed to be going wrong at the same time. I had lost my girlfriend and my job. My dog had mysteriously disappeared, I had been given notice to quit the house and now I had wrecked my car. I went to the pub and got drunk. I returned home, got into the car and finished it off.

Christmas was approaching and the depression had already set in. My whole world was falling apart, everything crumbling around me. I knew most people were making plans and getting ready for the Christmas festivities. I considered Christmas to be the worst time of year, I felt so isolated and so alone and I hated it.

Shortly before Christmas, I went out to the car in the middle of the night and calmly shoved a piece of hose pipe up the exhaust tailpipe and the other end to the inside of the car. I climbed into the car and started the engine. My feelings for Marina had grown quite strong and I had grown to love her. I felt so very lost. I felt as if my mother had completely wrecked my entire life. I could not cope with the life I had, a life I never really wanted. What happened to my childhood, why didn't I have one?

I sat in my car drinking a can of lager. I could feel the poisonous gases of the exhaust fumes building up inside the car, choking the life out of me. My stomach started churning, heaving and I started to feel very sick. I was coughing and choking violently. I felt very dizzy and my head was so very heavy. I could feel my life being drained away, slowly suffocating myself to death. My grandfather and uncle had both committed suicide in this way so I knew my chance of success was. . .

I woke up in Sandwell General Hospital about twelve days later. The doctors made constant checks on me, checking for any heart, lung or brain damage.

"Hello. Do you know where you are?" the doctor asked.

I couldn't see properly and wasn't with it at all. I was in the intensive care unit, looking at the ceiling but my mind was not functioning. The doctors returned later in the day. I really thought I was actually dead.

"Do you know where you are?" I could see a ghostly figure standing over me.

"Do you know where you are?" he asked again. I looked at the ghostly figure, standing in white.

"I must be in Heaven."

The doctor looked into the my eyes, shining a torch into them. "What is your name?" he asked.

I had no idea. I couldn't remember. My memory had completely gone. I had no recollection of anything. After a while the memory of what I had done started to return and the thoughts came flooding back into my head.

"I'm still bloody alive. Why can't people just sodding leave me alone to die in peace?" I was so disappointed and sorry to be alive!

My father came to see me at the hospital. The hospital staff had found his telephone number amongst papers I had in my wallet after being admitted. My father was very upset and angry with what I had done.

My landlord and his wife, Kashmir, also came to see me. "It was me who found you," Kashmir said. She appeared very upset.

"You were dead," she explained. "When the ambulance arrived you were not breathing and I was trying to save you. The ambulance men said your heart had stopped beating. They had to put some 'electric pads' (fast patches) on you and had to shock you back to life."

"I came with you to the hospital and your heart kept stopping in the ambulance. You were dead when you arrived at the hospital. Everyone was running around. It was very frightening," she said.

On Christmas eve, I was released from the hospital and collected by Beverley's father-in-law. Beverley had married her long standing boyfriend, John, after becoming pregnant. They married in 1983 and my sister gave birth to their daughter, whom they named Stacey.

My father had left my mother very shortly after Michele's death. He was settled with another lady, June. Laurence was settled in his flat. He seemed to be smothered by friends while living at my flat but most of them rarely bothered with him after he moved from Ladywood. My brother visited my sister almost every day. My mother had successfully driven everyone away and was living on her own, although Laurence and Beverley did visit her occasionally. I believed my mother was happy enough. She had a house full of furniture, which my father was still paying for and nobody around to make bits on the carpet. I certainly didn't have any sympathy for my mother.

I spent Christmas at Beverley's home in Chelmsley Wood, with Bev, John, Stacey and Laurence. I could see that I had ruined their Christmas and was

really very sorry about that. They never took their eyes off me as they knew sooner or later I would try again.

The Christmas passed without any real fuss or celebrations. Knowing that I was responsible for ruining their Christmas made me feel worse. Laurence insisted that I move into his flat in the new year and I spent the whole of 1985 at my brothers flat. Laurence was very angry with me and was trying to keep me alive. As Laurence only had a one bedroom flat, I slept on the settee in the living room while my own furnishings remained in Oldbury. Laurence would not let me out of his sight for any length of time. Every time he went out, I went with him. I could see my brother was concerned about me but my feelings were very deep and powerful. My wish to die was constant.

While living at my brothers flat, I climbed out of the twelfth floor window while my brother slept in the next room. I sat on the two-inch wide window ledge but could not find the courage to jump.

'What if I jump and I don't die? I'd be a cabbage for the rest of my life, ' I thought.

All my thoughts were negative and I couldn't find the courage to jump. I sat on the ledge thinking if I were to fall asleep, I would just fall off. I was so very desperately miserable and empty. My life had no meaning or purpose. Some days later, I took two bottles of sleeping tablets which I obtained from doctors prescription. The doctor was aware of my suicidal tendencies and the tablets he prescribed had no effect at all.

I had applied to the council for a flat of my own, but in reality I didn't want to be on my own. While at my brothers flat I just sat around most of the time, doing nothing. I rarely spoke to my brother or any visitors who visited the flat. Laurence didn't want me to die and was afraid to let me out of his sight, but he was also getting fed up of me being constantly around him.

"You don't need to keep watching me and can't change the way I feel," I told him. "You can't stop me from dying. We both know it's going to happen, it's just a matter of when, where and how."

Eventually I did try to get myself out of the severe depressive state I was in and tried to stop my brother from constantly worrying. By the time Christmas had arrived once more, Laurence had eased off a little and I started to show a slight improvement. Laurence went to Bev's for Christmas and I stayed at my brothers flat. I took Marina a Christmas present on Christmas eve and she returned it with her new boyfriend and her brother on Christmas day. I had not seen Marina since we had split up and I was missing her quite a lot. I felt very hurt by the return of the gift. I was so very depressed and lonely. I sat in the flat on my own drinking, staring at the television, absorbing nothing.

Chapter 7: Tears of Joy

In about March of 1986 I got my council flat in the Nechells area of the city. My brother helped me to move my furniture into the flat and visited me almost daily for the first few weeks. My flat was on the fourteenth floor and I looked over the balcony at the ground below but knew I lacked the courage to jump to the ground. I tried to settle down and find some other interests.

I started purchasing weekly bus travel passes and wasted away many days travelling around on the buses, going nowhere in particular. I visited my brother fairly often and paid my sister the occasional visit. I had no idea where my father was living and didn't pay social calls to my mother. I'd been doing this for about a year when I noticed a familiar face waiting at a bus stop in the city.

'I know you from somewhere. Where do I know you from?' I wondered, but said nothing.

The next day, while waiting at the same bus stop, the same familiar face appeared. "I recognise you from somewhere, but can't remember where from," I remarked.

"I used to live in Edgbaston, just up the road from you," she replied.

We both got on the next bus to arrive at the stop. I had no other plans and made out that I was also waiting for that particular bus.

"Where are you off to?" I asked inquisitively.

"I'm going to see my sister. She lives down Smethwick. Where about do you live now?" she asked. I told her my address.

"You can come round to the flat later, if you want," I suggested.

"I'll think about it. This is my stop," she said.

"I've forgotton your name," I said.

"Tracey," she said, as she rose from her seat. She was only a kid the last time I had seen her, but was certainly grown up now, still just as scruffy though.

That night, I was sat in my flat watching television when there was a knock at the door. I looked at my watch as it was getting very late and I wasn't really expecting anyone. I was more than surprised to see Tracey standing at my door. She was dripping wet. It had been raining for several hours.

"Come in," I said. I showed her straight into the bathroom. "If you wait there a minute, I'll sort you a towel out, you're bloody soaked."

She stayed the night and gave me a bit of a shock the next morning. She told me that she was only sixteen, whereas she had previously told me she was eighteen. She also surprised me by telling me that she was from a childrens home. I suddenly felt ashamed at sleeping with a girl so young, some nine years younger than myself and the fact that she was from a childrens home made me feel very nervous.

That was three girls from that family I had now slept with, as I had slept with two of her sisters a few years previously. Tracey went back to the home and later reappeared at my door. I didn't quite know what to do. I let her stay for a few days and then contacted her social worker.

The social worker came to the flat and spoke to Tracey and myself. The social worker agreed that Tracey could stay at the flat. She also pointed out that Tracey was still officially on a care order and that if she ever disappeared I had to inform her immediately. The social worker spoke to me for quite a while and explained that Tracey could be quite a handful at times.

I soon discovered for myself that Tracey could not read or write and she most certainly could not cook. I bought her some new clothes and threw her dirty old rags in the bin. I tried to teach her how to read and write but she showed no patience and very little interest. Tracey and I got on quite well together and I understood her rebellious behaviour against the authorities. Tracey was obviously happy to be free of the childrens homes and, in time, even her own family started to comment on how she was improving in her manner, attitude and appearance.

Tracey's mother lived quite local to my flat with her common law husband. Tracey and I visited them regularly and members of Tracey's family visited us at the flat, none of whom had really changed very much over the years.

After a few months Tracey became pregnant and I tried to encourage her to calm down and take things easy. Tracey could be extremely reckless and wild at times and was very immature for her age.

Tracey frequently visited the home of a friend of hers who lived in the next block of flats. She would spend hours there, helping to look after the children and clean the flat. This flat was filthy dirty with grease half-inch thick all around the kitchen. The bin was always overflowing onto the floor and open discarded nappies lay all around the floors. The place was a stinking, disgusting mess. I called at the flat on a number of occasions to retrieve Tracey from the rubbish tip and often found her lifting heavy items of furniture to clean the stinking mess which was rotting away below them.

After one of her visits to the flat, Tracey had a miscarriage. I was a little upset and very angry at the thought that this may have been caused by the heavy lifting. I started to wonder if I would ever have children of my own, as this was the third child to have been lost.

After the miscarriage Tracey had a few internal problems and was admitted to hospital three times before the problems were finally sorted out. Tracey soon become pregnant again and I tried my best to take good care of her for the baby's sake. I was determined to take care of this baby right from the very start and to see it born properly. I went with Tracey to all the antenatal appointments and asked questions if and when necessary. Tracey's understanding was somewhat limited.

We started buying baby clothes and other necessary items in readiness for the new arrival once Tracey had passed seven months of pregnancy. I made sure we bought suitable foods to nourish the unborn baby and really tried to take care of Tracey. I would not let her do any heavy lifting or any heavy work and in many ways I knew I was probably overdoing things. I was protecting my unborn child and often talked to the baby through Tracey's huge belly. Tracey thought I was mad, but I didn't really care what anyone thought.

One day, when Tracey was about eight months pregnant, the baby did not move for nearly twenty-four hours. I tried talking to it and making loud noises around the flat in an attempt to wake the baby, but every attempt failed. The hospital had said there must be some movement each day. I was very concerned and feared the worst. Tracey seemed quite unaware of any possible problem. My telephone call to the hospital did not ease my fear.

I spoke to one of the doctors who confirmed a need to be concerned and he suggested that Tracey be brought in without delay. I wasted no time in getting Tracey to the hospital, who was still unaware of any reason for concern. When we arrived at the hospital, the doctor asked when baby had last made any movement. He was quite alarmed and ordered an immediate scan.

The ice cold jelly applied to Tracey's belly woke the baby up and baby started kicking nicely. The sound of the baby's heartbeat and the sight of the kicking brought a huge smile to my face. A ton weight had been lifted from my shoulders and I could feel the great relief.

Baby was due on about the 2nd May 1988 and when the date passed without any sign of an arrival we started to get impatient. I would talk to the baby and ask when it was planning on showing its face. Tracey was obviously slightly more impatient than myself. She drank a whole bottle of castor oil, thinking the baby would come out a bit quicker. She started to get some abdominal pain and was taken into hospital where she lay in her hospital bed, groaning in pain, and produced sextuplet diarrhoea. The doctor and myself almost pissed ourselves laughing.

By the 18th May, the hospital agreed that baby was overdue. Tracey was admitted on the morning of Thursday 19th and we both knew the big day had arrived. Tracey was put on a drip to start her contractions and her waters were broke. I was surprised by the colour of the fluid that poured out onto the protective sheet of the hospital bed.

'Green? ... She's having an alien, ' I thought, my humour remaining silent.

Tracey was connected to the scan machine to monitor the babies heartbeat and her contractions. I was keeping a close watch on the printout from the scan machine, waiting for some indication that baby was on its way. Tracey was given gas and air for her pain relief but as the day went on she started feeling the contractions quite strongly and so went on the epidural. Once this had taken effect she didn't feel a thing and kept saying she thought her legs had been amputated. I could see the contractions on the scan machine. Tracey was totally unaware that she was having contractions, due to the epidural. Student Nurse Ingram paid regular visits to check on the progress. I remained by Tracey's side and wasn't going to miss this for anything.

By about 9.00pm I started to notice some major changes to the printout. The babies heartbeat was fluctuating and baby was becoming very distressed. I calmly went to fetch the nurse, trying not to alarm Tracey at this stage. The nurse agreed that something was wrong and called for Dr Callinan, who had looked after Tracey throughout her pregnancy. The Doctor told us that the baby was having problems and had to be delivered immediately. Luckily Tracey was ready to give birth in the normal way.

There was a long hard struggle, the doctor was doing his very best and so was Tracey. She could not feel when to push, due to the epidural, and had to push on command. The doctor put forceps on the babies head and pulled with all his might. I held on to Tracey, trying to give as much support and encouragement as possible. Doctor Callinan was joined by another doctor in the struggle as time was rolling on and the baby was still having problems. I was getting very worried and wasn't the only one. Doctor Callinan gave Tracey a snip and pulled baby out to safety. The doctor went to put the baby on Tracey's belly but she screamed at the sight of a baby covered in blood. While the doctor stitched Tracey I remained by her side, watching what was happening to my son. A young Chinese nurse cleaned the contents from his nose and mouth and he began to whimper, he didn't cry. Our son weighed in at 10lb 2oz, born on Thursday 19th May 1988. I could feel tears of joy in my eyes. I was so very happy. I felt so very proud of Tracey and so very grateful to the doctors and nurses.

Despite being asked several times, I had never told anyone that I really hoped for a son first. This was without doubt, the happiest day of my life. I now had; "A Reason for Living."

At about 9.45pm the doctor asked the nurse to feed the baby. I politely thanked them all for everything they had done and asked if I could feed my son. Tracey and I took a few photos of the baby with each other and one with the doctor who delivered him. I fed my son when he was twenty minutes old and talked to him face to face.

"I've waited a long time for this moment," I said cheerfully, thoroughly overjoyed.

Tracey was very tired, obviously happy it was all over. She was taken to the ward and I stayed for just a few minutes, as I knew she would want to rest. Our son, Shayne, was taken to the nursery for the night.

I got a taxi home, singing in my head and smiling nearly all the way. There were many times during my life when I wondered if there really was a God. I have never really been convinced either one way or the other, but that night I prayed and I felt now was the time to say, "Thank you!"

By the time Shayne was born Tracey and I had moved from the high rise flat and were settled in a first floor maisonette, in the next street. We were already prepared for the new baby. The next day I got up very early, took the Alsatian for his morning walk and thought about returning without him. I'd found this dog as a stray, wandering dangerously in the middle of the busy roads. The animal was half starved with his ribs protruding from his shabby coat. I had brought the dog back to good health and had trained him as a guard dog.

I was fully aware that dogs and babies, or children in general, don't really mix. I was also aware that if I got rid of the dog the flat would almost certainly be burgled. Tracey's brothers and most of her acquaintances would rob and steal from anyone, including their own family. I decided to keep the dog and made arrangements to keep the dog away from my son, although I was fully aware that this would not always be possible or very wise to try. The dog needed to be further trained.

I went to see Tracey and Shayne as early as possible. When I arrived, Tracey was fast asleep. Shayne was beside her in a plastic 'fish tank style' hospital cot. He was screaming his obviously well-formed lungs out, full blast. I looked at Tracey and smiled.

'How on earth do you manage to sleep through all this noise?' I thought.

I looked at my son, picked him up and he instantly stopped screaming. One of the ladies told me that he had been screaming for over an hour and that Tracey hadn't woken up.

I looked proudly at my son, "You stink!" I said. The other ladies all heard me and were listening and watching.

"Morning son. Morning ladies," I said cheerfully.

I noticed the state of the cot and turned my son round. He was covered in shit from his shoulder blades right down to his ankles.

"Where do I start?" I said.

I asked a nurse if she could organise a bath so that I could bathe my son but the nurses were very busy, dealing with an emergency elsewhere on the ward. I slowly peeled the dark sticky vest from my sons back.

"How the hell does so much shit come out of such a small baby?" I said.

"How you manage to get it all the way up your back is beyond me. Just look at the colour of it... Bloody hell. You Stink!" I declared. I kept the smile on my face and changed, washed and fed my son.

"You're my son and I'm going to be a good dad. I will always be there for you!" I promised.

The other ladies on the ward watched in total amazement as I tended to my son. Shayne finished his feed, I winded him and he was falling to sleep. I held him for just a few minutes more and then returned him to his cot. Tracey was just waking up and I gave her a kiss and the bunch of flowers I had bought for her. I was proud of her for my son, but was fully aware that I would have to keep a close eye on Tracey and Shayne. I knew that she was obviously tired after giving birth, but also knew that she had no maternal instinct.

Shayne remained in hospital with his mother for four days. My father came to see his first born grandson on the third day of his life and was visibly overjoyed at seeing his grandson for the first time. I arranged for Tracey's social worker to collect the three of us from the hospital when the day came for my son to see the outside world for the first time.

I moved the dog to a safe area before Shayne was taken into his home. The social worker had a good look round, trying to find fault. She failed to do so and left wearing a face of disappointment.

Later that day, Tracey and I took Shayne to see the neighbours who lived in the block and then to Tracey's mothers flat. Everyone was surprised at his birth weight, 10lb,2oz.

We registered his birth the next day at Birmingham Registry Office. An old lady gave me a copy of the Evening Mail, "For the baby," she offered.

I thought the offer rather kind and thanked the strange lady. "I'll save it for him. He can't read yet, he's only five days old," I said kindly.

During the first months of Shayne's life it was me who got up twice a night, every night, to change my sons nappies and feed him. Tracey would occasionally wake up but would not attend to his needs. I had always known Tracey would have great difficulty in coping with the day to day needs of a young baby. I had always been prepared to look after any child of mine and I was still taking care of Tracey.

Each day I would generally wake up before Shayne and just wait for my son to start his day. I would get up, bath and dress my son and give him his breakfast time feed. Once Shayne had gone back to sleep, I would wash and sterilize his bottles, take the dog for his morning run and then return and clean the flat.

Tracey regularly went visiting her friends soon after getting out of bed. Tracey very rarely wanted to take Shayne with her, but when she did, I would usually go with them. Most of Tracey's friends were not the sort of people that I considered any child to be safe with and Tracey had proved to me, without any doubt, that she was totally incapable of looking after Shayne properly. Many of her friends had violent and aggressive natures, some were alcoholics and others had serious drink or drug related problems. I did not consider my son to be safe in such company. In fact Shayne was not really safe left in Tracey's hands at all.

In early August, Tracey went visiting some new friends, going out fairly early in the evening saying she would be back shortly. I remained at the flat, taking care of Shayne. At 11.30pm, I wrapped Shayne in a warm blanket and went to the house Tracey was visiting. I was told by one of the residents of the house that Tracey would be back shortly. I took Shayne back to the warmth of his home, put him in his cot for the night and went to bed myself. At 12.30am my door bell rang and I knew I had trouble at the door. Tracey had a key and so would have no need to ring the bell. The dog was in the hallway and barking ferociously at the door. I went to the door and opened it slightly, holding the dog tightly by the triple chain collar round his neck. The dog always greeted everyone in the same aggressive manner as it was what he'd been trained to do.

The two police officers took a step back, "Can you put the dog away Billy? We need to speak to you," the W.P.C requested, frowning, trying to talk above the noise from the dog. I put the dog in the kitchen and closed the door.

"I'll come straight to the point Billy," the W.P.C stated, "Tracey has left you. She's moving in with a guy round the corner and has sent us to collect the baby. Can we come in?"

"Have you got a warrant? I can answer that myself, no you haven't. The short answer to your question, coming straight to the point, is no!" I stated, in no uncertain terms.

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The police man spoke up, "We can enter by force if need be. So why don't you just let us in?"

I tried to ignore him and spoke to the W.P.C. "My son is fast asleep. This is his home and I have reared him since he was born. Tracey is totally incapable of looking after him and can't even change a nappy."

"He's staying here! I'm not being nasty or making threats, like your mate, I'm being honest. He's my son and nobody is taking him anywhere!" I said. The two officers spoke to each other quietly for a few seconds.

"Can we just come in and see that he is ok?" The W.P.C requested. "It is getting very late and like you said, he is asleep and Tracey is drunk anyway."

I still didn't trust anyone. I paused for thought and said, "You can, providing you make me a promise first. You don't try to pick him up."

"OK, I promise," she replied.

"And your mate," I added. The male officer made some grunting sound.

"I'll take that as a yes," I commented and opened the front door to let them in.

"This is going to be fun," I remarked, with a devious mind and an overwhelming need to protect my son.

The front entrance door lead into a tiny square hallway, which lead onto another similar hallway, where there were two more doors to choose from. Directly ahead was the reinforced wire meshed glass of the kitchen door which the savage dog was attempting to jump through while barking ferociously, enough to make the bravest feel uneasy.

"Wait there," I requested, as I entered the door to my right and went into the living room.

The policeman had already grabbed the handle of the kitchen door in fear that the man-eater would escape and have him for breakfast.

A few seconds later, I called out to the officers from the living room, "OK. Come on through," just loud enough for them to hear.

"Oh Fuck." The WPC almost shit herself.

"Have you never seen a Rottweiler before?" I asked, as the WPC tried to decide if she was coming in or going out.

I was full of surprises and had hold of a full-grown Rottweiler by a heavy chain round its neck. This dog had never barked since the day I'd found it with its

head stuck through a glass window and rescued it. The huge dog stood very still, his teeth bared and the vibration from the growling echoed on the gas fire.

"Go through that door and wait there," I suggested.

I then put the Rottweiler on the balcony, which overlooked the bedrooms and put the Alsatian back in the hall to guard the front door, effectively sealing off both possible exits.

I returned to the officers, "Come through," I requested, leading them into the bedroom. "Remember your promise."

The W.P.C went over to the cot and peered in, "Ah, he's lovely."

"Why did you insist that we didn't pick him up?" the male officer asked.

"If you want the truth, it's simply because I know if you were holding him I wouldn't be able to knock you on the floor," I said. "I'm not making a threat, it's just that I will protect my son in any way I need to."

The officer smiled as he walked round to the side of the cot, "Fair comment, but there are two of us and only one of you. We could take him if we wanted."

"You two cut it out," the W.P.C snapped. "I gave my word and so did you," referring to her colleague.

"Billy, I think you're doing a great job. If I thought someone was going to take my kids, I would react the same. Only I haven't got the sort of child minders you obviously have, mine have two legs, not four." At least she hadn't forgotten about the two dogs they needed to get passed!

The male officer shook my hand, "I just had to make sure you were for real. Not many blokes could do what you're doing. We have no intentions of taking him out of here."

The officers followed me back into the living room and I moved the dog, so they could leave.

"I suggest you find yourself a good solicitor, if you're going to apply for custody," the P.C suggested.

"Thanks, I will. Thanks a lot," I concluded.

At 1.30am Tracey called at the flat with her new boyfriend and two other occupants from the flat. I didn't bother to open the door. I had been expecting trouble and had wired up the doorlock to the electricity supply. Tracey and her friends shouted threats and abuse through the locked door, threatening to

break it down with a sledge hammer. They threatened to kill the dogs and me and take Shayne. One of the neighbours telephoned the police and Tracey was arrested for disturbing the peace.

The following day I went out early to find a good solicitor who specialised in custody matters. After speaking to possibly a dozen solicitors, I found one of the best solicitors available and after filing my first affidavit was awarded interim custody of my son. I knew it was very rare for fathers to be awarded custody, especially considering I had never been married. My solicitor pointed out that this was only temporary custody and was not even official until Tracey had received the court papers.

After the ex-parte hearing, I went to Tracey's mothers flat but said nothing about the court hearing. I patiently awaited Tracey's arrival and then announced that I was going to the shop, taking Shayne with me. I went to the shop to get suitable change to use the telephone and made the expected call to my solicitor. The court papers were served on Tracey within the hour. The first step was complete and the custody of my son was now official.

I continued looking after and taking care of my son alone and soon realized that although Tracey had been of very little help, to be totally alone with him was a different story altogether.

Trying to take the dogs for their daily exercise was a real struggle while pushing Shayne in his pram. The Alsatian had become very defensive towards me and would try to attack anyone who came near. I had trained him as a guard dog and had made things more difficult for myself, but I also wanted the dog to be protective towards my son and so he was.

On one occasion, the dog had been released from his lead to do his duty on the waste ground when an acquaintance of mine approached me as I held onto the pram. The dog watched from a distance as the guy approached.

"Don't touch the pram," I blurted out, but it was too late. Yam! The dog had already got him.

I was very proud and very defensive towards my son and was too proud to ask anyone to help. I had to prove to everyone that I could and would manage to rear my son alone, without help from anyone.

I had a number of visits from the police, social workers and health visitors who would call at any time of the day or night, even one visit at 3.00am. On each and every occasion I let them into the flat to see that my son was being well cared for and properly looked after and I showed them every ounce of respect.

"I must tell you, alarm bells are ringing everywhere," Tracey's social worker told me. "A lot of people are very concerned about you taking care of the

baby. I, personally, do not believe you are capable of looking after a baby all on your own. It will only be a matter of time before we get him into Care!"

She wasn't ready for my verbal onslaught. "You might be Tracey's bloody social worker but you aint mine. You have got nothing to do with me and nothing to do with my son and you never will have. You will never take my son into care, never in a million years."

"I will prove to you all that I can rear my son on my own. Nobody, and I mean nobody is taking him away from me. I have let everyone who has an interest into my home so that they can see I can and do look after him, without help or interference. I have never complained about being woken up at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning by police officers, health visitors or unwelcome bloody social workers. I don't like or trust social workers and especially you. You have just made a threat against my son! Get the fuck out my house!"

In reality, I did understand the reason for everyone being concerned and in a way appreciated the fact that they were just doing a job and had Shayne's interests in mind. I did get very tired and fed up by the number of early morning and late night visits, but remained calm and polite. I allowed these people into my flat on each occasion and they always left completely satisfied with my care for my son.

I took Tracey back twice to try to pull the family back together. She wanted me to drop my application for custody but there was no way I was going to do that. I knew that if I were to drop my application, she would be able to just walk out and take Shayne with her.

She started disappearing for days on end without any word or anyone knowing where she was. She would return with love bites all over her neck and expect me to say nothing. Tracey went out one day and returned two days and three nights later after going to visit a local friend, for an hour. Her friend was a working prostitute. I had taken just about enough of Tracey's irresponsible behaviour and had packed her bags ready for her to collect on her eventual return. I could not rely on her or trust her and she become a hindrance rather than any help. I asked her to buck her ideas up and try to act more responsible but she picked up her bags and walked out.

By December 1988 Tracey and I had attended two Welfare meetings, together with Shayne, as ordered by the County Court. The purpose of the meetings was for the welfare officer to judge who would better serve Shayne's interests and to make a welfare report for the court. The report was to show who would be more suitable, capable and responsible parent for Shayne's day to day needs.

The report was made available for both parents to read but Tracey couldn't read. I mentioned this to the welfare officer, who suggested I read it to her.

After first reading through the report myself, I read it out to Tracey in the presence of the welfare officer.

I didn't think the report was particularly strong considering all the important points that I had raised. It was fair, accurate and to the point and described Tracey as, 'A child-like individual.'

By this time the concern had started to die down and I had fewer visits from people checking on Shayne and myself. The health visitors and social services had realized that I was perfectly capable of taking care of a young baby on my own, without any help from any of them. I had made it clear to the health visitor that I would ask for help or advise if I needed to. I had also made it clear to the social services that they were not welcome and had no hold over me or my son and they never would have. They did eventually get the message and completely left us alone but were clearly still waiting for me to make a mistake. I knew how devious they could be. I had nothing to fear from them.

Tracey continued drifting from one place to another and had lived with at least four or five different blokes before Shayne was a year old. This all helped prove that she was not ready to settle down anywhere to any sort of family life and face the responsibilities of motherhood. I was content with what I was doing, proud of what I was doing but regularly had trouble at the door connected either directly or indirectly with Tracey.

One afternoon the disturbance at the door got so much out of control from Tracey and her boyfriend, Derek, that I took the dog to the door. My intention was merely to deter Derek from trying to force his way into the flat. Tracey got worse and tried to force her way in. The dog responded to this aggression by barking fiercely at her, jumping up, trying to bite her. I kept hold of the dog by his three band chain collar. Tracey thought that because she thought she knew the dog he would not go for her. I DID know the dog and had trained him not to think first but to simply respond to circumstances. The dogs gnashing and snarling teeth did encourage Tracey to think again. I was anxious to get back into the flat as Shayne was alone, while I was trying to rid myself of the unwelcome callers at the door.

"Stay, Watch 'em," I ordered the dog and left him to keep guard. I went to check on Shayne.

Shayne was fine, fast asleep in his carrycot in the living room. I made myself a cup of coffee before returning to the door. I was hoping they would have got fed up of waiting and gone away, but they were still stood there like a pair of idiots. I was really tired and pissed off at all the trouble she was continually bringing to my door.

"I'm asking you both nicely to piss off," I said, "I want to go back inside to look after my son properly."

I held the dog by his collar. This was my way of silently telling the dog to prepare to attack. Tracey thought she would try to barge passed us but I had heard her talking to the dog while I was checking on Shayne. The dog had already warned her but she was too stupid to realize this. I let go of the dog and he gave her a powerful bite to her leg, forcing her backwards in a state of shock.

"See 'em off," I commanded and went to check on Shayne.

The dog chased the frightened pair down the flight of stairs and out of the block. The dog returned to the flat a few seconds later. Tracey and I both telephoned the police about the incident and two officers called at the flat.

"Come in. Just wait in there," I requested, showing them into the living room.

"I'll be through in a minute. I'm just doing my son's dinner," I explained, with Shayne in my arms.

The dog was jumping at the window in the kitchen door, barking ferociously at the visitors. I entered the kitchen, "Baby, leave!" I commanded and continued working with Shayne still in my arms.

"I'll be with you in a minute," I stated, as I entered the living room where one copper was sitting and the other standing blocking out the limited sunlight.

I lay Shayne on his belly on the floor who immediately crawled away, raising his head to look at the giant policeman staring at him. I got the terry towelling nappy from the massive supply in the sideboard and proceeded to change my sons nappy.

I didn't look up at the police officers when I said, "You'll have to excuse me, it's my sons feed time. I always change him first as he usually falls asleep in the middle of his feed. Just hold your noses. This is a ripe one."

The police watched as I strategically placed my leg across the body of my ever lively son to prevent him from turning onto his belly and crawling away while I changed his nappy. After removing the stinking nappy from the room, I sat down to feed my son.

"Sorry about that," I said. "I presume this is about the dog at the door... Or should I rephrase that?"

"We have seen the bite on Tracey's leg," one officer said. "There is a massive bruise and some superficial puncture marks and she has had to go to hospital. She is insisting that the dog be removed and destroyed."

I explained my side of the story, missing out the bit where I had given the command to 'see 'em off.'

"Have you ever heard the saying every dog has its day?" the copper asked.

"I have, but I don't pretend to know what it means," I said.

"It means, every dog can have one bite and if it's lucky get away with it... Well, this is your dogs lucky day," the copper said.

"Thanks. I'll have to take him the vets anyway. He might have caught something nasty off her," I said.

Shayne had finished his bottle and I sat him up, facing towards me and started rubbing and patting his back to bring the wind up. It was a nice warm day and I was quite content sitting with trousers on and no shirt. Suddenly the volcano erupted and the projectile vomit hit me straight in the chest, covering me from neck to waist in the warm milk that my son decided he didn't want.

"Thanks a lot son," I said, as I stood up pushing my stomach out in an attempt to stop the liquid from leaking down the waist of my trousers.

"It's the joys of parenthood," I stated, smiling. My son could do no wrong.

"My Missus has just had a baby, but I couldn't do what you do," one of the officers stated.

"That's the difference between being a father and a dad. I'm a dad and I'm a good dad. A dad will do anything for his kids," I stated proudly.

The council had informed all the tenants in the maisonette that the building was to be demolished. All the tenants were to be rehoused and given the choice of any property in the city, with unlimited offers. I put in a request for a three bedroom, postwar, house in any nice area and waited patiently for the offers to be made.

Eventually, after the council ceased messing around, I was offered a three bedroom postwar house in the Sheldon area of Birmingham. This was a very nice house and a nice area but the house was in desperate need of redecorating throughout. I accepted the property and started making plans of how I was going to manage moving house while looking after my son, who was now eleven months old. I considered things very carefully. My main problem was the dog. I needed some help with this job and knocked on the neighbours door.

"Could you do me a big favour and look after Shayne for a few hours?" I said. "I have to take the dog to Sheldon. I'm moving to my new house on Monday and I'm having a few problems."

The man stood smiling, "I'd love to, but how are you going to get Sabre to Sheldon?" he asked. I handed Shayne over to him.

"I'm taking him on the bus, that should be fun. I'll have to muzzle him and he's not going to like that one little bit," I explained.

"Oh, if by any chance Tracey should come hammering the doors down, don't let her anywhere near Shayne. She has threatened to take him. She had no rights to take him anywhere and has no legal rights to know where we are moving to," I said.

The man looked at me as if I had just insulted him. He knew what Tracey was like. "Tracey will never take him from here. You have nothing to worry about. He will be fine," the man said.

"I feel deeply honoured that you choose to ask me," he said. "I know you don't usually ask for help. I have seen you struggle many times. You just carry on and don't worry."

I started my journey with the dog wearing the muzzle. In reality I trusted the dog to do as he was told, but did not want to take any unnecessary chances. I got the dog to town without any problems at all.

"Shit!" Tracey was in town, waiting at the bloody bus stop. She approached me and the dog.

"Just stay there," I said, wishing she was somewhere else. As usual Tracey thought she knew better.

"What's he got that on for?" she asked stupidly. "Where's Shayne?"

"Just stay there. He will still go for you if you get too close. Shayne's ok, he's being looked after," I replied.

Tracey started shouting and the dog started pulling, trying to get at her. I asked Tracey to leave things as I was in a hurry but she took her shoe off and tried to attack the dog. Tracey could be really stupid at times. I pulled the muzzle off.

"OK Tracey, hit the dog now," I said. The dog was worse with armed attackers. He started barking at her and trying to bite her and Tracey backed off.

I continued my journey without the use of the muzzle as I started to see a weakness in the dog. He become confused in the crowds. I kept him very close and held his mouth shut as we got onto the next bus. We completed the journey without further incident to arrive at the new house, where the dog was left alone overnight.

Shayne was deprived of some attention on the day the furniture was moved in and did nothing but scream all day long. I was working as fast as I possibly

could and knew there was nothing actually wrong with him. I continued laying carpets and arranging the furniture, wishing there was someone who could lend a hand to help at the time I needed it most. Once the furniture was arranged and the cooker connected, Shayne and I settled down with the dog in our new home. Shayne was almost a year old by this time and was very active, sleeping a lot less during the day. He was also having tantrums whenever he could not get his own way or if he wanted some attention from his dad and I, for whatever reason, was unable to give it.

When I started the decorating, Shayne started screaming. It took me about a week to decorate the first room which was to be Shayne's bedroom. I left him in his cot in the next room with the cot full of toys while I tried to get the work done. On the third day of the decorating, I heard an almighty thud, followed by a terrific cry of shock. I dropped everything and raced into the next room to find my son lying on the floor. He had climbed over the side of his cot. The pain of failure was hard to swallow, as I picked up my son from the floor. I felt so very guilty and ashamed. I placed the cold, wet, cloth on the back of his head to bring the lump down.

The thoughts of what happened to my sister, Michele, blasted through my head as I checked my son for any other signs of injury. The dog had come upstairs, jumped the gate and was stood next to me. I had tears in my eyes. Shayne was really ok but I wasn't. Guilt of failure was a heavy burden. The dogs concern was also obvious as he nudged at my hand, searching for approval of his trip upstairs. The painting was completed with Shayne in the same room as myself. There was no alternative but to put Shayne back into the cot, despite his fight for freedom. Paint was dangerous, so were paint fumes. I had to hurry.

The decorating was left for a few days before I started wallpapering the room, by which time I had bought a large playpen for my son to play in while I worked. The papering was completed very quickly and my sons room looked nice. I had to continue in order to get the job done so I started on the next bedroom, my own. Again the screaming started. Shayne was removed from the playpen and had total freedom in his room with the door removed and replaced with a childs safety gate. I didn't want Shayne near the toxic paint, the fumes had already got to me. The screaming did not cease from the time he woke up to the time he went back to sleep. It nearly drove me insane. After completing the bedroom, in record time, I continued trying to decorate the whole house and managed to get as far as including the living room when the screaming suddenly stopped.

'Something's wrong, ' I thought and went to check on Shayne.

"You little sod," I said. I picked up my son and removed the bits of carpet from his mouth.

Shayne had decided to help out and had started removing the new wallpaper from the walls and pulled up the carpet and was quite content on eating the foam backing. I was fighting a losing battle and decided to call it a day. The decorating would have to wait a few years.

About one week before Shayne's first birthday the custody case was back in court. The courts ordered that a second welfare report should be made saying the one produced in this case was old and needed updating. This was mainly due to the fact that Tracey had filed an affidavit and had applied for custody. I was furious. Her affidavit was almost total lies. She had walked out on her son when he was just ten weeks old and had never shown any interest him. I believed she was simply upset because she didn't know where Shayne and I were living. The judge fully understood why I wanted to keep my address confidential and agreed that I could do so, but ordered that Tracey must be allowed Reasonable access. The arrangement was that I must give my telephone number to Tracey and she must call to arrange access, upon my agreeable terms. The minimum access was ordered, once every two weeks, to be supervised by myself. The judge stated that this was not the final hearing and that things may still change. The welfare report must be updated before the final decision could be made.

I started going to 'Gingerbread' (an association for lone parents and their children) in the centre of town. My first visit to Gingerbread went quite well as a few of the members came over and started talking to me. The next few visits were totally the opposite leaving me feeling lost and out of place. The people I had spoke with the previous week were not there and I still had great difficulty in mixing with people. One lady told me that everyone at Gingerbread was in the same boat and if I didn't make the effort to talk to people they would think that I simply wanted to be left alone. That was the last thing I wanted. I started talking to some of the other members and soon realized there was a big difference between being 'a lone parent' and being 'alone parent'. 'A lone parent' was not necessarily completely alone and being alone was something I knew about only too well. Shayne also had an outlet. I took my son to a mother and toddler group in Sheldon, twice a week, and received a few unwelcoming comments at first.

One lady came over to me, "This is a Mother and toddler group," hinting that it was not for the dads.

"Thank you! I'm in the right place then," I replied.

"No. You don't understand. This is a Mother and Toddler group, it's not really for the fathers," she stated.

"I'm in the right place. I'm a single parent. I'm his mother and father, it should be parent and toddler, not mother and toddler. We're staying," I replied.

After a few weeks the mothers could see that I was not deterred by any remarks passed loudly enough for me to hear. The mothers started to accept my son and myself as part of the group and even went on to ask me to individually photograph all the children in the group.

Shayne was getting worse with his tantrums and it was getting me very worried at times. If I told my son 'no' he would get down on all fours and headbutt the floor. I was very concerned and asked the health visitor for some advice.

"Ignore him," she told me. "He's doing it for attention and if you keep giving him the attention he will always do it. Just ignore him. He'll stop on his own."

"How many children do you have?" I asked her.

"I don't have any. Why?" she questioned.

"I didn't think so somehow. I'm not going to stand and watch while my son gives himself brain damage. Obviously you didn't hear me. He headbutts a concrete floor. I'll stop him my own way. Thanks for your advice," I concluded.

There were times when I really needed a break. As a child myself, I never had anyone to turn to for help and as an adult I had grown to turn away from the help on offer. My mother once had the nerve to offer to look after Shayne while I went shopping. I couldn't believe my ears. She honestly thought I would consider leaving my son with her. I nearly burst my sides laughing.

She had seen her grandson once or twice but was now going blind with Glaucoma affecting her eyes. She was also suffering from Arthritis. I did take Shayne to see his Grandmother on rare occasions. I would never, under any circumstance, leave Shayne or any other child with the woman who had so mercilessly and ruthlessly tortured me day after day, for years on end. I would never be prepared to take such a high risk with any child!!

On one of these occasional visits to my mothers, she asked me to do some gardening for her. Despite my deeply embedded feelings I had never, ever, refused help to any member of my family. I started digging the garden and Shayne went toddling back inside the flat. Suddenly he came back outside crying, screaming hysterically, fighting to get his breath.

"What's happened Shayne?" I asked anxiously. I started checking him for the source of the pain.

"I smacked him," my mother said. She almost sounded proud of herself.

My entire body physically shuddered at the thought of what she had done to my son. I lifted my head and the garden fork ready to ram it through my mothers body. I could feel the adrenaline pumping and the raging anger, a

killing anger, building inside me. My blood turned stone cold with hatred for this evil bastard who was about to be buried in her garden.

"What the hell for? He's only a year old," I said.

"He went to touch the cooker, so I just tapped his hand," she said.

The garden fork was still aimed directly in line with her chest. I immediately checked Shayne's hands for signs of burning. He had a large red patch on the back of his hand from what was obviously a powerful whack.

"I wouldn't hurt my own grandson," she said.

"You just bloody did and once is once too many times! You want to think yourself lucky he's not burned. There's no way I would believe it was an accident and you know what I would do... You'll have to dig your own garden. Nobody hits my son and I mean nobody."

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Chapter 8: First and Foremost

My father had simply disappeared off the scene and I had no idea where he was living. He did pay his grandson and myself the occasional visit but he still kept himself out of reach, which was something he had always done. Laurence had no real interest in children. He would not object to watching Shayne for a few minutes while I went to the local shop, in the event of a visit. Generally speaking, Laurence found children to be mostly an irritation, which many would agree, they can be at times.

Beverley, by this time, had three young daughters of her own. As she was really the only member of my family with any real interest in children with the ability to care for them, I did occasionally leave Shayne with her if I needed a break.

After living in Sheldon for a few months, I decided the dog would have to go. I suddenly realized that my son was being restricted to certain areas of the house. The dog was restricted to the hall and kitchen, which in turn gave access to any point within the house. My son needed more freedom to move about in his home and his interests and needs took priority.

Once the dog had gone, I decided to try to get myself a lodger. I simply needed some extra cash as I was finding things quite difficult, financially, on single parent benefit. I planned to get a lodger for some extra money and maybe a little company, as I did feel very lonely at times. After trying for several weeks to find a lodger I decided in this case honesty was not the best policy. I had advertised in the local newspaper and had registered with a few accommodation agencies and wanted a female lodger, a male lodger was simply out of the question. A few young ladies came to view the room on offer but as soon as I explained that I was a single parent, living alone in the house with my son, they all left as fast as possible with no thought of moving in.

I had one young lady call to see the room and with the help of her mother jumped to the conclusion that I was married. I decided to play along with the belief. On the day she was due to move in, I had one of the ladies from gingerbread come to my house to act as my wife for the day. Debbie played the part of the loving wife very well and the lodger moved in without any suspicion that I wasn't married. I wondered what sort of wife Debbie would really make. I thanked her for her superb acting and thought nothing more about it. She left just half an hour after Julie moved in.

I lay in bed that night and somehow knew that she would not be able to sleep, knowing I was in the next room on my own. I knew how she must have felt, in new surroundings, knowing there was a strange man lying in bed just a few feet away. I didn't get any sleep either knowing there was a stranger in the house and a stunningly beautiful, shapely, female at that. I had estimated that she was no more than about seventeen years old. I wondered what thoughts

were running through her mind, I knew what was running through my own, she was beautiful. I knew I couldn't and wouldn't try to take advantage and thought she was too young for me anyway.

Over the next few days, Julie would ask me where my wife was. To start, I told her that my wife worked funny hours and would not be back until the next day and said that she often worked nights. After about a week, I decided to tell Julie the truth on her return from work. I often made her a drink as soon as she came in from work and often offered her a meal, which she would usually take to her room. In reality I wasn't making any money out of this young lodger but I liked to see her walking round the house. She seemed to brighten the place up and put a woman's atmosphere into the place with her pleasing fragrance drifting through the whole house.

"Can I have a word, when you're ready, Julie? Nothing to worry about," I stated softly, "I just need to talk to you about something." Julie suddenly looked worried. She dropped her bag in her room and returned downstairs to the kitchen.

"Sit down a minute," I said. "There's pie, peas and mash for tea, if you want some." I was hesitating, struggling to find the nerve to tell her the truth.

"I have something to say to you, but first I want to ask you a question. How do you feel about living here, are you content, do you like living here?" I asked hopefully.

Julie sat, crossed legged, at the kitchen table. "Yes, I think it's really nice. I like it here, I'm not planning on moving for a while anyway. Why?" she replied.

I sat down at the table. "To be honest I don't quite know where to begin," I said. "Prepare yourself for a shock. Remember the day you moved in and that woman was here? She wasn't my wife and never has been. I'm not married and never have been. That woman you saw was just a friend. She has never been in this house before and has not been since, there is nobody living in this house except you, me and my son."

Julie looked as if she had seen a ghost, she was in total shock. She sat with her mouth half open, not quite knowing what to say.

"I had been trying to get a lodger for some time and every time they came I would tell them I was a single parent and they would just leave. When you and your mom jumped to the conclusion that I was married because of Shayne I just decided to play along with your belief. I'm hoping you are content here. I'm also hoping you decide to stay. You said you like it here. Well, to be honest, I like having you around," I explained.

"I meant what I said, I'm not planning on moving, I like it here. I would have moved in even if you had told me you were single parent," she said but I doubted that very much.

"I don't think your mom would have allowed you to. So, do you want some food?" I asked, feeling the relief from the load off my mind.

"Yes please. Will you bring it up to my room?" Julie replied, as she left the table and took her drink to her room.

I continued going to the coffee mornings at Gingerbread, initially hoping to find that someone special with whom I could settle down. I soon realized all these people were not in the same boat, as I had been told. They were all in separate little boats, in their own separate little worlds. At least that's how I felt, in a separate boat, all on my own.

My whole attitude and outlook had changed dramatically during the late 80s, more-so since Shayne's birth. My own upbringing had left me with a few external scars and a lot of internal scars which never seemed to heal. Nobody could see these scars which remain deep within my mind and heart. Not only did I find difficulty in mixing with people, I had learned the hard way not to trust anyone. As a small child I had to steal to stay alive. Then I started stealing things I merely wanted, things I saw other children had that I never had, but I could never steal a normal childhood which was what I wanted most of all.

I met a lady at Gingerbread named Tina. She had a young son, Ryan, the same age as Shayne. We talked about how we had become single parents, which was always the starting point of every conversation at Gingerbread. We got together and decided to try to live as a family. Tina had recently suffered a stroke and was finding things very difficult with her son. She had been married for a few years, her husband disabled with an artificial leg. She divorced after he discovered that she had been having an affair with another man, Ryan the result of the affair.

I sensed that she blamed Ryan for the ending of her marriage. She insisted from the very start of this new relationship that Ryan call me dad and that I take full control of her son. I told her not to try to force her son to call me dad and explained that I would not object to the title, but it had to come voluntarily from her son. Tina had very severe problems in coping with Ryan and insisted that I provide the discipline. I was no softy. Shayne was reared with a strict hand, but with love and care and without cruelty of any description. Tina was highly volatile and would completely lose her temper at the slightest and most trivial things, which I thought were better left alone. She tried demanding that I punish her son for these trivial things and got most upset when I refused.

She also continually found fault with the lodger and Julie clearly tried to keep out of Tina's way. Julie and I had become close friends and had much

respect for each other, but this was all dwindling away. Tina had taken over. She responded well towards Shayne, continually giving him hugs and praising him while pushing out her own son. This had a very damaging effect on everyone. Shayne didn't like being continually picked up and squeezed, Ryan didn't like being the unwanted child and I didn't like any of it. I did my best to treat both lads the same, fairly, kindly and with care for them both. Julie was also highly irritated by the interfering woman, who appeared from nowhere and took over the entire house. I liked my lodger very much and wanted her also to be happy in my house but she was becoming increasingly unhappy. My feelings for her had become very strong and I knew she also had similar feelings. Both knowing, both respecting the reality of nothing could happen between us, nothing was ever said, but we knew.

Julie was upset at the fact that Tina was removing things from her room and moaning about the state she left it in. Julie had told her it had nothing to do with her and she was right. I had given Julie permission to enter my bedroom to get the hairdryer, without the continual need to ask. Julie was clearly comfortable with the fairly easy going rules that I had. Now I had invited chaos and disruption to live in my house, with my son and the girl I had grown to love.

Tina clearly needed someone to help her and she was convinced that she loved me. I did have feelings for her, but desire and love are not the same thing. Generally speaking I just felt sorry for her, but mostly I felt sorry for Ryan. All I could see was someone in need of help who had turned to me. The pressure for Julie became too much. One evening she had returned from work to face Tina's ever moaning tongue. Tina always spoke to Julie as if she were dirt.

"You've been in our bloody bedroom again. I had to go and get the hairdryer from your room this morning. You better bloody keep out of our room!" Tina demanded nastily.

"You better bloody keep out of my room, you mental bitch. I don't need to ask your permission for anything," Julie yelled and went storming up the stairs, slamming the doors behind her.

"There was no bloody need for that," I told Tina as I left my seat to go upstairs to talk to Julie. I knocked on her door. Julie opened it very quickly and violently.

"Can I come in?" I asked.

"You better ask that psycho bitch down there! You need her permission," she shouted, at the top of her voice. Tina came running up the stairs and wanted to push her way passed me. I knew she wanted to fight with Julie.

"Go downstairs. You wouldn't have a chance," I suggested judgementally. I went into Julie's room and closed the door.

"I think you need to calm down," I stated. "I know she's trying to wind you up, I'm not daft. Just calm yourself down ok. I'll have a word with her, see if I can get some peace back in the house." Julie was still very upset.

"You think she's it. You're wrong. She's mad, coming in here like she owns the place, she thinks she's the boss. You're nothing with her here. She's turned this house upside down. Shayne's always crying, Ryan's always screaming and she's always shouting her big mouth off and you're standing for it. You pratt."

Julie had certainly got a way of making her point and most of what she was saying was accurate and correct. Suddenly there was a knock at the door. Tina had to stick her nose in. Julie opened the door and sighed.

"Wait downstairs, Tina, please," I said. I was getting fed up of asking.

"I'm leaving," Julie snapped.

"Well, pissing go then," I chanted as I walked out of the room. I was sorry I had said those words, deeply sorry. I later spoke to Julie again and asked her to stay.

"I can't," she said. "Things have got out of hand now. You told me to piss off and I'm going. I can't live in the same house as her. I mean what I say, she's mad. You'll see, you'll be sorry."

"I already am!" I said meaningfully. Within a few days Julie started taking her belongings out of my house, moving onto a new beginning.

"You know you can come back, don't you? I think you know how I feel, don't you?" I told her.

"I know, but I never turn back. Maybe, one day, you'll see what I've never said. I have to go," Julie said, trying to hide the tears.

I left her room alone for a few days in the hope that she might return. When I did clear the room, rearranging the furniture, so the lads could have the bigger bedroom, I discovered the Christmas card that I had sent to Julie.

She had written all over it, "I really hate Andrew, I love you." Andrew was Julie's ex-boyfriend.

I was left feeling very angry with Tina for a while, eventually living with the reality of what was and trying to forget what could never be. Tina was proving to be a serious problem with her reactions to her own son. I would never

tolerate anyone being cruel to any child and Tina was being mentally damaging to the child. She would continually tell him that he was not wanted and that he had ruined her life, she would continually push him away, refusing him the parental love he so desperately wanted from her. I could see the heartache in his face and did what I could to ease the pain, but I was fighting a losing battle. Ryan started responding to the way he was being treated by attention seeking acts like piddling on the floor, only feet away from the toilet, wiping shit on the walls and ripping wallpaper and other similar acts. These things did get me cross and Ryan would sometimes get smacked. Tina would bombard Ryan with threats of being put into a home. She told him repeatedly that she did not love him or want him and that he was a little bastard. I continually tried to stop Tina from being so damaging and hateful towards the child. I often sat with my arm round both lads, trying to let Ryan see I cared for him. This in itself often led to even more problems. Tina felt left out and neglected and blamed Ryan.

Tina told everyone she met that Ryan was a very naughty child and that she couldn't cope with him. I could and did cope with both lads and didn't really think Ryan any worse than any other child of the same age. Eventually people started listening to Tina's cries for help, but all looking in the wrong direction. They all considered Ryan needed help, when it was really Tina who needed the help. Ryan was admitted to a special day care centre, which he attended from home five days a week.

Tina didn't get any better, in fact she steadily got worse. One day, Ryan was sat in the living room crying, heartbroken by his mother's continual rejection of him. Tina was cutting up potatoes for the evening meal, while shouting hurtful remarks through the wall at her son.

Suddenly, she charged into the living room, grabbed Ryan and waved the knife in front of him, screaming in his face, "Shut up, Shut up, Shut up," shaking him in temper.

I shot across the room like a bolt of lightning, "Leave him alone," I ordered.

I grabbed her wrist, putting severe pressure against the joint, "Drop the knife... Now, before I break your arm!" I demanded angrily. The horror of my own childhood had been suddenly woken up.

"Don't you ever let me see or hear you pull a knife on any kid. I'd ram it up your arse, and don't think I'm bluffing 'cause I'm telling you, I mean it! You're just like my mother you are and I won't stand by and ignore it. You asked me to take him on, well just leave him alone. He's only crying because you're always screaming at him and because he knows you don't bloody want him. He's done nothing wrong, just leave him alone," I said.

It got to a stage that I was becoming afraid to leave the house without taking both lads with me. Tina had never said a single word out of place to Shayne

but he was clearly affected by the continuous shouting and crying. Eventually the day care centre called for me to attend a meeting at the centre due to Tina had been repeatedly complaining about Ryan's behaviour. I went to the meeting and put the picture straight. I explained that Ryan was not really a problem child and that the real problem was Tina. It was suggested that Shayne also spend a little time at the centre so they could assess how the two lads reacted to each other. They pointed out that Tina was in need of a break. I reluctantly, eventually, agreed to Shayne's attendance but soon discovered that this day centre was run by social services and was for children 'at risk'. I removed Shayne immediately.

"My son is not at risk and never will be," I told them, demanding they return my son without any delay.

"Is Ryan at risk?" they asked. I looked at the care worker. It was hard to admit I was failing.

"Yes, he is," was my reply.

An emergency meeting was held at my house. Bruises had been found on Ryan which had in fact been caused at the day centre, by another child. I had discovered the bruises while the lads were in the bath and I asked Ryan about them. Ryan was too young to make up stories and I would get to the real cause regardless. The centre was quizzed over the bruises who placed the blame at my house, denying any responsibility. The meeting was held with social workers, day care assistants, a doctor and health visitor. I would not cover up what was going on. With so many official people asking very delicate questions, the suspicion of child cruelty lay thick in the air. I decided it would be better to cover my back. I was heavily outnumbered and it could have been my word against all of theirs, including Tina's. I set the tape recorder machine and turned it on to record the meeting. I stated the meeting was being recorded in a quick and quiet manner, not really wanting them all to know. Few heard the statement, many later surprised at how crafty and devious I had been. I listened to the meeting without saying a word. I was saving it all for the final chapter.

Tina started going on about how bad Ryan was and said that there was something wrong with him. She told of all the dirty tricks he got up to and of how he would force himself to be sick across the table. She told of how he would piddle on the floor just outside the toilet door. She just went on and on...

The doctor explained how Tina had suffered the stroke and how that may have affected her. The care workers talked about the bruising and the social worker said a few words. I had spoken to the social worker previously and had told her about my previous experience with social workers. She said that she respected my honesty, but I wouldn't be fooled by her but I did believe she was for real and had the real interests at heart, Ryan's. She had been

told about Tina's manner towards her son and was aware of what I was trying to do and the problems I was having. The meeting went on and on. Tracey, the social worker, kept looking over towards me as if trying to read my thoughts as various things were said. It remained to be seen which one of us was going to drop the bombshell on the whole meeting. The tape recorder banged as it clicked off. I said nothing and turned the tape over, while the authorities argued among themselves about my statement about the recording of the meeting. Most had not heard the statement that I had made. The room suddenly fell into silence with everyone looking around the room, wondering who was going to speak next.

I looked around the room at all the vacant faces. Tracey looked directly at me, "Are you going to do it or do I have to?" she asked. "I think it may be better coming straight from you, as you know the full story."

"Thanks a bunch," I said.

"You'll have to excuse his manner," Tracey announced to the crowd, "he doesn't like social workers and trusts no-one. That's why the tape recorder is on. Just listen to him, very closely, to what he says and leaves unsaid."

I removed my backside from the wooden fire surround that I had been leaning against and stretched as I returned to a more comfortable position.

"You've all sat here for over an hour and got absolutely bloody nowhere. You haven't even touched on the real problem yet. You're all looking in the wrong direction," I said.

"Can you explain about the bruises on Ryan's backside? That's the matter we are here to discuss," the care worker interrupted.

"Hang on a minute. You're not dropping the blame for that in my bloody house. Take it back where it belongs, in your bloody centre, and that's not the matter to be discussed anyway. If that's what you believe, you shouldn't be here," I stated. I turned my attention back to the rest of the officials.

"Now where was I, before I was so rudely interrupted." Tracey smiled at me putting the care worker in her place.

"Just start at the beginning, is Ryan at risk?" she said.

I came straight to the point. "Yes, he is. He has not been physically cruel treated, although there have been two very close calls. Far too close. I hope you're all listening very carefully and are all able to read between the lines."

"There are many ways of being cruel, not only physical, there is also mental cruelty and various other ways of being cruel. He is not being physically cruel treated. I hope you all understand what I'm trying not to say," I said.

Tina was sat in the corner of the room in a world of her own. She could clearly hear everything that was being said and yet seemed totally immune to what was going on.

"Ryan is not a problem child. He is a child with a problem and you're all too blind to see it. Tina considers Ryan to be a problem. To put it in a nut-shell, she is the problem, not him. He's not a nut case, like she says he is, she is!" I said.

"What did you mean when you said there had been two close calls?" Tracey asked.

"I knew it would be you who asked that."

"Twice I have found it necessary to jump to his rescue. The first time was a few months ago when Ryan was sat in here crying. There was nothing physically wrong with him. Just read between the lines here," I said, but thought I had better spell it all out for them.

"He was just sat here, as good as gold. Tina had been cutting up some potatoes in the kitchen and still had the knife in her hand when she came in to Ryan. She frightened the pissing life out of him and children don't rattle when they're shook, they cry," I said.

"I was forced to remove the knife from her and told her if she ever held a knife to him again I would break her sodding arm. The other occasion was just a few days ago when Ryan and Shayne had both got ready for a bath. Ryan started crying as soon as he was placed into the bath and I know a cry of being hurt when I hear one," I said.

"I ran upstairs, put my hand in the bath and pulled him out. The water wasn't hot enough to scold him but it was definitely too hot for a child of that age. I accepted it to be a genuine mistake but I have my doubts," I explained.

"Oh, I nearly forgot, she later dangled him over the top of the stairs by his ankle. Hanging him upside down, threatening to drop him if he didn't stop crying. I could do nothing but watch the fear in his face," I said.

"And what about Shayne?" The care worker asked.

"You can bloody leave him out of it. This has nothing to do with him," I stated.

"Is he also at risk?" she asked. I fully understood what she was up to. Tracey smiled, aware of what I was likely to say.

"The small fact that she is still alive and able to use all her limbs should answer that. No. He is not at risk! You can keep him out of this," I stated.

The other social worker, a male colleague of Tracey's spoke up for the first time, "I would suggest that if this woman is as bad as what you're indicating, with what you're saying, then both children are at risk for as long as she is living here."

I didn't need to hear any more. I understood exactly what the man was saying. "Pack your bags," I said to Tina, "You're leaving."

Tina started crying and blaming Ryan for all the trouble. The volatile cocktail was out of control again and going hysterical. I felt like going over and slapping her face to calm her down, but thought better of it. Tracey turned to her colleague and had a quick and quiet word.

"We don't really think it's a good idea that Tina leave here, just yet. You obviously try to give her a lot of support. We think it would be much better for Ryan if you let them stay here. You obviously care enough about them, Ryan in particular. We feel the need for some sort of supervision a must," Tracey said.

"We want Ryan to continue at the day centre so we can keep an eye on him. We understand why you don't want Shayne to continue there. We would really like both lads to attend as it would give Tina and you a break," Tracey suggested.

"Two things," I said, "Firstly, Shayne is not going to any 'at risk' day care centre and second, he does not go on any register. He is not at risk!" Tracey looked at her colleague who nodded in agreement.

"I think we can live with that," Tracey suggested.

The doctor announced he would arrange for a psychiatric analysis and numerous other suggestions were put forward. Generally the room was left feeling very stunned by what had been uncovered. The meeting was clearly at an end. They all sat waiting for a second cup of coffee.

I looked at all the vacant faces. "Is that it then?" I asked. Tracey could see Tina was still very upset.

"I think there is one question yet to be answered. Where are Tina and Ryan staying?" Tracey asked.

"Will you keep Shayne's name off your register?" The answer to their question was dependent on the answer to mine!

"We will," she replied.

"Fair enough. She can stay... You lot can piss off."

The relationship with Tina didn't last. In reality I felt I was putting Shayne at some risk by having Tina in the house. Shayne had to come First and Foremost. Tina did not improve to any great extent and I did not believe that the social services would leave my son out of all the mess. I knew that even in the unlikely event that they had told me the truth, it would be only a matter of time before they also added my son to the 'at risk register'. Tina had to go, which proved easier said than done. She was like a bull terrier, she just wouldn't let go. Eventually she found some other fool and moved out of the area altogether. Social services were hot on her tail, Ryan was safe!

Shayne was sad to lose the woman he called mom, likewise Ryan was sad to lose the man he called dad. Tina was happy with the new man in her life and I was glad that I had been able to save Ryan from a life of suffering. I was glad the whole lot was over. I could settle back down to a normal life with my son, or could I?

The date for the final custody hearing had been set for mid December 1989. I woke up earlier than usual on the big day and woke Shayne up at 7.00am, later than usual for Shayne. Beverley had agreed to look after Shayne for the morning. I bathed and dressed my son. I couldn't bear to think this may be the last time I would be able to do this. I gave my son his breakfast and had a coffee myself. I wore my grey suit, ready for the fight of my life. I walked the few miles from Sheldon to my sisters house in Chelmsley Wood. Shayne was warm and dry in his pushchair while I walked in the pouring rain with only one purpose in mind.

The journey to Chelmsley Wood took me passed many of the places I used to hide as a child after running away from home. My whole childhood seemed to go through my mind. Walking passed one house where people were preparing to attend a funeral brought back the memories of my own suicide attempts and of my sister, Michele, who had lost her fight for survival at just twenty one years old. I was not the only member of my family to suffer at the hands of my mother!

Michele had been mentally and physically handicapped all her life but she did not escape the physical and mental torture. At times she was deprived of food for so long that she would eat the raw potato peelings from the bin. On a few occasions even ate the dogs food, she was so hungry. Laurence and Beverley also suffered. I recalled the time when Laurence had dropped his dish of rice pudding on the floor and scrapped it back into the dish. It was covered in dog hair. My mother made him sit and eat it while he choked and heaved and removed hair continuously from his mouth. Laurence and I once stood side by side in sheer terror, waiting to be burned. My mother often put the money in the cutlery drawer in the kitchen to pay the milkman. One Friday night she sent my brother to the shop to fetch her ten cigarettes and used the money from the drawer. When the milkman called for his money, she could not pay him and accused her sons of stealing the money. She sat at the table

smoking her cigarettes while we screamed in pain as our dad burned our hands over the flames of the gas cooker.

The journey into the past continued, passed Whitesmore School where I arrived daily covered in blood, passed the river where I was found floating by a couple of kids after taking an overdose of tablets and passed the sewerage pipe where I used to hide at night with rats for company, passed the woods that were so familiar to finally arrive at my sisters house.

The court hearing took only a few minutes. The judge sat with a huge pile of papers before him. The room was silent. I could feel my heart thumping in my chest. This was the most important day of my life.

I had never had any real ambitions before, unless a constant wish to die was an ambition. The birth of my son gave me, "A Reason for Living" and an ambition; "For me to be a caring, successful and loving parent, to rear my son to the very best of my abilities and to see he never has to experience the sort of life I have experienced."

The man sat in front of me had the power to destroy everything. The judge looked up, his face was wrinkled, stern and cold-looking with emotionless eyes.

"Where is the mother of this child?" he asked. Tracey's solicitor was present, while Tracey was absent from the Court room.

The judge awarded me full custody of my son, Shayne. My fear finally removed, I could breathe again. Tracey was awarded reasonable access, December 1989. The access lasted just two months before it collapsed!

It was two years later before Shayne asked about his mother. It was something I had expected, but not so soon. No matter how hard I tried, I found it impossible to explain to him, in a way that he could understand that his mother walked out when he was only ten weeks old.

'How does a child of three relate to time? What does ten weeks mean to a child of that age? What does three years mean to a child of three years?' I thought.

I tried to explain in the best way I could but it was not enough. My son wanted to see his mother and who was I to say no? My son had to learn a lesson, the hard way. I took him to his mothers flat, without warning to her or explanation to my son and knocked the door of the flat. Tracey looked at us standing on her doorstep, obviously shocked by our sudden appearance.

"Who's this?" she asked.

"It's Shayne," I said with some contempt in my voice. She picked him up and almost squeezed to life out of him.

"Hello Shayne, I'm Tracey, your mom." Shayne started crying hysterically and he came running over to me.

"Me wan' go 'ome, me wan' go 'ome," he cried. I sat him on my lap.

"It's all right son. This is your mother. Do you want to say hello to her?" I asked softly, but hoping he didn't.

"Me wan' go 'ome, me wan' go 'ome," he cried, gripping my trousers. Tracey made some tea.

"I see you've learned how to make tea then," I said sarcastically. "Whose is this baby on the floor, eating the dogs food and wearing the floor cloth?"

Tracey picked up the crawling baby off the floor and handed it to me. I had never felt so disgusted in my life. It was difficult to tell what colour the baby grow was originally. I'd never seen them in battleship grey and black before.

"It's my baby," Tracey said, "Will you hold her for a minute?"

"Have you got any rubber gloves?" I asked. "These clothes are disgusting. My dishcloth is cleaner than these clothes. Doesn't your washing machine work, or can't you read the instructions?"

She passed me the hot drink in a well used dirty cup and handed Shayne a bottle. I started laughing, as I tipped the cup of liquid in her plant pot. "He drinks from a clean cup. He doesn't take sugar and he doesn't drink dish water and neither do I."

"Well you make it then," she snapped. "I have to give the baby her tablet and get her fed."

"What's wrong with the baby?" I asked, as Tracey started trying to get the baby to swallow the capsule she had forced into its mouth.

"She can't shit, so the doctor gave her these tablets and now she's being sick all the time," Tracey answered.

I started reading the box from the medication. I went over to the baby and stopped Tracey from putting the capsule back into the babies mouth. "Has nobody explained to you about these capsules?" I asked, rather concerned.

"Tracey, you are going to kill that baby if you continue giving these like this. You need to go back to the doctors and explain what you have been doing. These capsules are suppositories and are supposed to go up the backside."

On leaving Tracey's flat, I felt desperately in need of a bath and thought how lucky I was and how lucky my son was. We started our journey back home.

"Shayne, do you want to come back here again another day?" I asked.

Shayne grabbed me, as if I had abandoned him and started crying, "Me wan' go 'ome, me wan' go 'ome," he said in his toddlers voice.

I felt so hurt at what I had done to my son, but didn't see any choice in the matter. He had made his own decision and he really didn't need any help from me and that was probably the most important part of the whole exercise. He never asked about his mother again and completely of his own free will started denying that he had one.

He started nursery when he was four years old, the same age that I started and I remembered the first lesson my father ever taught me, the day I started school.

"Stand up on that mantle piece." My father told me, "Just climb up and stand there, this is your first lesson."

I did as my father said. I trusted him to protect me and look out for me. I stood on the mantle piece looking down at the floor, with my backside pushing me forward away from the wall until my balance was on the edge of falling. It seemed such a long way down. My father stood in front of me, his arms outstretched ready to catch me.

"Close your eyes and jump," he said. "Don't be afraid, I'll catch you."

I closed my eyes and jumped forward to my fathers open arms but went splat on the floor. My father picked me up and wiped the drop of blood from my mouth from where I'd hit it on his foot.

"Here endeth your first lesson. Never trust anyone, never take anyones word for anything and never walk around with your eyes shut!" my father explained.

Funny thing about this lesson was my reluctance to ever share it with anyone. It was so quick and easy to learn and so very difficult to forget. When I did forget, I always got hurt in some way and then I would remember my fathers first lesson.

Now it was time for me to give my son his preschool lesson. I sat him on the kitchen work surface and stood in front of him, holding him securely so that he didn't fall off!

"Talk to people with respect and learn when to listen," I said. "Listening to people is very important."

"Try to keep out of trouble and if you can't keep out of trouble learn how to run. No matter what trouble you get into, never be afraid to tell me the truth. It is important that I believe you above anyone else." I picked up my son and placed him on the floor, end of lesson.

Once Shayne started school on a full time basis I found myself at a loose end, with nothing to do, wandering from room to room, not knowing what to do. I bought myself a long wheel-based Ford Transit van and started going to a dealers auction several miles away from Birmingham. I could go there once a week and fill up the van with second hand goods for as little as a hundred pounds. Then I could resell the goods through various outlets for a considerable profit, or at times a considerable loss! On one of these trips I had returned from this auction, the van fully loaded with all sorts of junk for cleaning, repair and recycling. I had reached Birmingham and was less than three miles from home when suddenly a woman walked out from between two parked cars.

I saw something fly into the air and slammed on the brakes. The whole load shot forward from the back of the van, crushing down onto my back, pressing me up against the windscreen. My head and neck twisted and crushed by a wardrobe that came to rest on the top of my head. I turned my eyes to the road ahead. It was my mother! It was my bloody mother with her stupid white stick, pretending to be blind. It was her bloody white stick that she had stuck out into the road, like a set of emergency traffic lights, expecting all the traffic to come to a sudden halt.

"You bloody mental bastard," I yelled, as I tried to shove the wardrobe back into the rear of the van from the top of my head.

I watched as she tapped her way across the road then folded her stick and walked merrily down the road. Her sight was deteriorating but there was absolutely no need for this pathetic and idiotic sympathy act. It would have been a genuine accident, the chance of a lifetime and I bloody missed it. I cursed and swore all the way home.

Several hours later, I telephoned my sister and told her what had happened. My sister started saying she would leave my mothers body to science so that someone could try and find out why she was insane and that her organs should be donated for experimental research.

"I have some bad news for you. You can't leave mothers body to science," I said to my sister.

"Why not? It would save some animal from the experiments," she said.

"Don't be bloody stupid," I told her. "We couldn't allow all the evil loose into the world. The consequences don't bear thinking about, an animal running

around with part of her brain or with the heart or lungs. I will not allow that evil to survive in any other life form."

"So, what are we going to do?" Beverley asked. "You know she carries a donor card, don't you? So her organs would be donated without our say-so."

"No. They can't. They obtain the permission of the next of kin. Think about it Bev, mom and dad are now divorced, neither of them have remarried. I am the next of kin to both of them and what happens to them is down to me," I said.

"I do forgive dad for the bad things he has done and his wishes will be honoured. As for mother, if I lived to be a hundred years old, I could never forgive her for all she has done and the pain we have suffered. I have never, in my entire life, known or heard of anyone in the world as evil as her. I could not take the risk of all that evil being donated to some other living being."

"I won't go to her funeral anyway," Bev announced.

"You will, for the same reason I will, just to be sure she is dead. I will seal the box myself. I would like to see it dropped into an active volcano, the chimney pot to hell, but in any event she is going to hell. . . And may God have mercy on her soul."

Amen.

Errors of Judgement. . . Social Services Bury their Mistakes.

Warning:

Some readers may find these stories distressing! These stories are based on actual events. Certain names may have been changed.

In February 1976, a baby girl, Two-months of age, was admitted to hospital with injuries, including a fractured skull, inflicted by her mother. The little girl remained in hospital until the end of March. During that time a 'Care Order' was made, placing the child in the 'care' of the local Social Services, Derbyshire County Council.

On discharge from the hospital, the baby girl was placed with foster parents. She remained with them for twelve months, but was allowed home with her natural parents at weekends. The length of these visits gradually increased until at the end of March 1977, when the fourteen-month-old child was returned to the family home on a 'full-time trial basis.'

On 16th April 1977 the young child was again assaulted by the mother and sustained serious injuries, from which the child died three days later.

In January 1978, my own sister, Michele was taken into the 'so-called care' of the local Social Services, Solihull County Council. Michele was the eldest of four children, all of whom had been submitted to extreme cruelty spanning over ten years. Michele was disabled from an early childhood 'suspicious' accident. She was Hydrocephalus.

While in the 'so-called care' of Solihull Social Services, Michele was placed in a residential home for the disabled. She was allowed home with her parents for weekends and was regularly battered by her mother.

In January 1980, after a home visit, Michele was examined by a Doctor at the request of a Social Services care worker. Michele was covered in bruises, of a non-accidental nature, and the Police were notified.

The Police questioned both parents about the injuries but could find no evidence of assault or cruelty.

Despite the obvious signs of abuse, Social Services continued to allow the visits to the family home. Records of the injuries were being recorded in the 'accident book' at the residential home.

In November 1980, just ten months after the 'so-called' enquiry, Michele was severely battered by her mother and suffered a full Cardiac Arrest. She was revived by her father and returned to the residential home, where my sister's condition deteriorated and she died ten days later.

These victims and many more have paid the Ultimate Price of Failure!

**In memory of my sister. - Always remembered -
Rest in Peace!**

In 1989 and during the writing of my book, I became aware of a child cruelty case that was actually dealt with by the Courts. A young mother had been sentenced to two years imprisonment after being found guilty of burning her Two-year old daughter with cigarettes. The young girl suffered multiple burns to her back and buttocks and was placed in the 'care' of Birmingham Social Services, along with her brother. The mother was released from prison after just eighteen months and almost immediately re-united with her two terrified children. Within days of the reunion, the children were found sleeping on the pavement outside a public house, in sub-zero temperatures.

In 1996 the entire country was shocked by the atrocities of 25 Cromwell Street. Several young people died, many of them in Social Services care, and their dismembered bodies buried in various parts of the house and surrounding areas. Stephen West told on national television how Social Services failed him and his family and failed to pick up the obvious signs of child abuse and cruelty. Once again, Social Services publicly denied their responsibility to protect the children in their care and 'At Risk.'

In 1997, the Director of Cambridge Social Services was questioned by me on a live radio station. He could not, and had to be prompted to, answer my questions. The questions started following the death of a Five-year-old child in Cambridgeshire. The child had been on the 'At Risk Register' and was said to have been 'at risk' since the day he was born. Despite the child being well known to Social Services and being on the 'At Risk Register,' the Director of Social Services denied knowing the child was in danger!

**Suffer the little children to come unto me. . .
But He didn't mean like this. God Bless 'em all.**

Epilogue:

Child abuse and cruelty remain one of the most common causes of childhood and premature death, with an estimated 36,000 girls and 34,000 boys in need of protection from abuse in Britain today. The majority of abused children are emotionally and psychologically scarred for life and yet, many cases are never reported or ever brought to the attention of the authorities and a child's life is slowly destroyed.

Children have complete legal protection against assault, ill-treatment or neglect, all of which are criminal offences. Child abuse includes the offence of ill-treating a child emotionally or of negligence in proper care. Anyone who causes unnecessary suffering to a child can be sentenced to two years imprisonment.

The difference between actual bodily harm (a.b.h.) and the more serious crime of grievous bodily harm (g.b.h.) is usually a matter of degree. The police usually charge the offender with both, thus leaving the courts to decide. The maximum sentence for the lesser a.b.h. is 5 years imprisonment but this offence is sometimes dealt with in the magistrates court when the maximum is 6 months imprisonment. The more serious offence of g.b.h. is usually dealt with in the crown court where the maximum sentence is life imprisonment.

If a person dies as a result of an attack, or in trying to prevent such attack, including suicide through fear of attack, the attacker or would be attacker could be charged with murder, manslaughter or unintentional manslaughter. Each of which carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

During the writing of this book, I became aware of a child cruelty case that was actually dealt with by the courts. A young mother had been sentenced to two years imprisonment after being found guilty of burning her two year old daughter with cigarettes. The young girl suffered multiple burns to her back and buttocks. The mother was released after 18 months and almost immediately reunited with her two terrified children. Within days of the reunion, the children were found sleeping on the pavement outside a public house, in sub-zero temperatures.

Custody and Access orders were replaced in the 'Children's Act 1989' with Residence orders and Contact orders. An unmarried father does not have the same legal rights as a married one towards his children. However, the unmarried father can now take legal steps to be granted parental responsibilities to his children which he does not need the mothers consent to obtain.

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The 'Children's Act 1989' introduced many changes in the legal aspects of child care which basically meant a lot of people were starting to think about the mistakes they were making with children's lives. . . And people started to listen!



End of;

**"A Reason for Living"
A Story that Shocked the World!**

Published in the UK by Defiance Publishing
www.defiance-publishing.com

Someone once asked me why I wrote "A Reason for Living." At the time the question took me by surprise and I was unable to answer the man.

"Why do you ask? " I said. Suddenly the tables were turned and he was unable to answer my question.

I thought long and hard about his question. I guess there are many reasons why I wrote this book. Firstly, I needed to tell my story and set the record straight about how various agencies and authorities failed to provide proper care for a child so desperately in need of protection. And, more importantly, to educate people into the true consequences of ignoring child abuse and cruelty. This story contains some very powerful and important lessons for anyone with children or anyone who cares for them.

No child should ever be expected to suffer in silence. My siblings and I suffered some of the most horrific acts of cruelty and torture, on an almost daily basis, for a length of time which far exceeded the length of the Vietnam War. . .

In 1995 I subscribed to the Internet, the biggest computer network in the World. Today, I help support other victims and survivors of child abuse and cruelty and attempt to assist in the education process of the child care authorities from various parts of the World.

It's a far cry from my early childhood days, when I lived in fear of speaking out and struggled to open tins of food with little more than a few stones and brute force. . .

This book may be of interest to other survivors of childhood abuse and cruelty and those who have spent 'time' in institutions of some kind. It is also believed that it may be of an 'educational value' to those in the Child Care, Legal, Medical and Psychology professions.

Hopefully, and God willing, it will be an education to all who have the courage and strength to take this journey. . .

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ISBN: 978-0-9530374-5-2

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