

8 May 2006

Hi Trevor

I was moved to write to you after listening to BBC Five Live this morning. I want to tell you my story and offer myself as a mentor or a speaker to motivate; if ever you need me in the future, keep my details and keep doing what you are doing, it is fantastic.

I basically came out of prison and with hardly any support eventually became a university lecturer and am now a counsellor. Fundamentally, I understand that the majority of people should not be in prison, I have lived and suffered it. Working class cultural norms, peer pressure, learning difficulties and dysfunctional family relations put vulnerable people in prison, this is an outrage.

I was born in Teesside and was raised in a notoriously depressing estate. My grandmother was a prostitute and allowed a paedophile to baby sit my father and his three brothers and two sisters. I won't explain the horrendous circumstances of the arrangement; however, he had the freedom to abuse if he waived the baby sitting fee. Several months later, my five year old father witnessed the horrendous murder of his 6 month year old brother, my uncle.

This came to my attention when I was 15 years of age. My father psychologically tortured me for this length of time and was often violent towards me and my mother every other day. As a counsellor, I now know he was 'acting out' and suffering from post-traumatic shock.

My mother, out of desperation, then abandoned us both when I was 15 to start a lesbian relationship. My father then became more unstable so I went into the depressing culture of gangs to escape his violence; I was also an angry young man. The only self-esteem and respect I knew was now developing within my peer group. Classically, I was having my damaged ego stroked by being 'one of the lads'. I was involved with criminals and a football hooligan gang and was sent to prison (Durham) when I was 22 for a burglary, then later for gang fighting. So from the age of about 19 to 23 I was involved in a lot of crime. During my low ebb, I had a local gangster making a genuine threat to kill me. Currently, he is serving life for murders. My two best friends from those days are now sadly dead, from heroin addiction.

Through all of this, I remained fairly sensitive and understood right and wrong. It may sound paradoxical, but my obvious success of the last two decades indicates this. The day I came out of prison I put my thumb out on the A19 and ended up walking into a Cambridge hotel and asked for a job. I then moved to Germany and had 5 wonderful years rebuilding my life with a loving woman and her family and a great works agency. Alex then encouraged me to educate myself as I picked up the language quickly, we parted friends then and I moved to Bradford to begin university.

I have had a tough and incredible journey. I now have a tough client group at a local hospice. I counsel local men who have similar backgrounds to myself, and I hold them through their pains. I am developing my own tools of counselling, when clients, with difficult upbringings, tell me they 'cant' then I look them in the eyes warmly, self-disclose my story, and tell them they can. I bring hope to those in hopeless situations. I am now looking forward to step out into the community.

Sincerely

Paul M