

**I've got this chance now
and I don't want to blow it**



Cover Art:

Figure 21. A cross-hatched drawing of a man holding a child by the hips - lifting them up, over his head and above the ring of a basketball hoop. In the image that child looks as if they have “dunked” the ball through the hoop before tightly clasping the ring

I've got this chance now and I don't want to blow it

I got kicked out of home when I was five

I grew up in [a small town]. And, I got into trouble ages ago. [When I was young] I moved away from my home town for [quite a few] years. When my Nana died, we moved back home. We moved away because mum and dad split - when I was 5. I got kicked out of home when I was 5 with my mum! Me and mum got kicked out of home cause my dad [chose] my brother and another lady over me and mum. My real father, I don't get along with him now cause, you know, he kicked me out of home and it took me a while to get over it.

[When my dad chose my brother and not me] it took, away from me and my brother - we've only just starting bonding now, to get close. So, when that happened, we left [our town], and mum met a new fella [who] became my stepfather and I call him Dad. [When my mum met him] he said I've got a place in [another town], would you like to come? And we got on the bus and I got sick [all the way]. I was a little boy spewing all the way. And I didn't like buses [but it] doesn't worry me now, I can get on a bus and I don't spew!

It was a lovely life [with my stepdad]. Oh, just going to the park and, you know, kicking a ball with your mates. That was one of the things I loved. [School in the new town] was good, yeah. No one picked on me. Got on with everyone.

Till we had to come back when nana got sick and my grandfather got sick.

Mum was a rock for me

Mum, me and mum got on like normal. Like normal. Mum was a rock for me, you know? I never asked for money, she never asked for money. If she wanted something she would always ask for help you know? [I think what happened] made us closer. [We didn't talk about my father leaving us much] I didn't ask that question. I didn't put her through that. I thought well it was not worth it, you know?

Yeah. And I've asked my father, [he goes] “oh yeah whatever”. I've asked him why he did that, he doesn't want to tell me, you know? [When I came back to my home town] it took a while you know? It took me a while to think should I [reconnect with my family] ...? Now it's good for me, cause now I've learnt not to build it up you know. Like go see my brother.

And it's good for me to go see him cause he's got kids and, I always hang out with him. And one night, well sometimes we go out together and it's good to bond. My sister-in-law, who's married to my brother, she says oh you guys need to have a bit more time together. You know, it's quite good. My [sister-in-law] is important to us. And her family are important.

Oh, it was kind of hard cause you're in a special class

People would pick on you [at school]. You know, it's not good. People pick on you and go "oh you're a retard, why are you in a special class", and the teachers really didn't stick up for people like that. And I think that's bad. And I thought "oh well no - I'm gonna stick to my guns and [not] go to school. I didn't go to school, and the next day [the Principal] rung up mum. And she said "oh why aren't you going to school?" I told her, and she said "they can't treat you like that". I said "well they are", and she said "well hang on I'll get on the phone" and she made a phone call, got into the principal. And he said "well no we understand what you're going through. We will make sure the teachers understand". And it went smooth after that but [the other kids would go] "oh you're the teacher's favourite!" And you just block it out. The goodest thing I learnt at school was woodwork. I loved woodwork and sports.

And I don't see her now

[Relationships were easy for me when I was younger] I had about three of them all at once [when I first starting having girlfriends]!

I like girls. I thought [a relationship] was like for two people to go and enjoy stuff you know? Not sit inside and watch TV all the time. Go out, if it was a nice day go for a walk or something you know? Go to the park and hang out. Or go out for meals you know?

My first [serious] girlfriend, cause she was working, she was getting more money than me. And she thought every week we could be going out for tea, we would be not cooking meals. And I just put my foot down one night and said "no, I think it's time, I think we need to have a sit down". And she said "I know what's coming", and I said "no we need to sit down. And talk about it". I said, "I'm not being mean [but] you're too full on, and, I think we need to break up".

[She said] "No, no, no, no I'm not having it" and she grabbed me and she wouldn't let me go. And um, next thing I, next thing she's puling a knife at me. I just said "oh nah it's over", and then the next thing she must have been in the kitchen. I didn't see her, I thought she was just going to get something. And she comes out with this knife, you know. I was thinking what! "What am I gonna do now? Push her out of the road or jump through the window?" [And then] my phone just rung, thank god it rung. And I said to my brother, "you need to come and get me quick". And he said "where are you?" Him and his mates come, and they bought the police with them. Luckily. Cause I would have had

to jump out the window. I would've went out the window and damaged my something you know? It was the first time [she had been violent].

[When it happened] I didn't want to push her. And the cops said "you should of". And I said "well yeah and the next thing I get charged. If I had of got the knife off her, I would of probably got stabbed or cut or something you know. Lucky the door was open cause... the police would've kicked the door down. Police said "we're gonna give you one more chance", to the lady, the girl. She said "I don't care, you can come and I'll stab you." [The police] got through the back door cause the back door was open and the front door was open. One [stood] at the front door and she turned around at the front door and she didn't see the cop at the back, and he handcuffed her. And the cops said "are you alright", and I said "yeah", he said "you're lucky. You're brave, a lot of people don't do that". I said "well what else was I supposed to do? Come through the window or ring somebody to help?" He said "well I would of jumped through the window". And I said "yeah, and I would have had to go to hospital!"

She tried to tell the police it was my idea. And they said "well when I got there he wasn't holding the knife was he?" Yeah, was I holding the knife? [We had to go to court] 'cause she pled not guilty. [She] got charged with something. And, oh what are they, they give you money. She had to pay me money...[reparation]. The judge was alright. And I had a good lawyer and the lawyer said you're gonna win. He said, just sit there and let me talk. He did all the talking. And the judge said oh do you have anything to say? I just said, I said to her I didn't want her charged, I tried to get the charges dropped to make it easy for her. And the police said no [you] can't do that. [I though dropping the charges would mean] she would get help properly. You know? And I don't see her now... nope. Don't see her at all...oh she tries to message me on Facebook, and I block her. I just don't want to go down that road.

She was kind

[When I met my next girlfriend] we just talked, and I think when I got to 20 I think I just went around there and asked her out. And then we moved in together. We lived with my brother for a while. Till she got pregnant. And we moved in together until I went to jail - before I went to jail, had the baby, you know got convicted, and I had 3 years in jail. And after that it took our life away.

[The pregnancy] wasn't planned because I don't think we had um, condoms and that, that she didn't want to use it. and she said "oh nah I'm on the pill" and I said "sweet as", and then she gets home from work, I get home from work and she's smiling. I said "what are you smiling about?" She said "it's your lucky day". And I'm thinking "oh yeah what have I done now?" She said "oh look over there". And she had this wee box. And I said oh what's this? I said oh what's that? I thought it just was, she must of bought something

from the shop. I said “what’s in the box?” And I opened it and I said “this is a pregnancy test, what are you doing with this?” She said “do you not see the thing?” I said “nah, nah you’re winding me up!” She said “I’m pregnant, I took the test.” I said “nah I don’t believe the test”. She said “we’ll go to the doctor tomorrow”. And I’m thinking “oh yeah we’ll go to the doctor tomorrow!”

[So we go to the doctor] and, and the doctor comes in, he’s smiling. I’m thinking “oh god she is right”. I thought she was just joking, for a joke. He said “you’re gonna be a father!” I said “no they’re fake, aren’t they?” And he said “do you want to listen to the heartbeat?”

[When I found out my girlfriend was pregnant I wasn’t angry, I wasn’t angry. I was, I dunno, I don’t know what I thought yeah. I didn’t think I wanted kids that early, not straight away. Oh, it was nervous for both of us. I think, I think she was right about, cause, most males walk away. That’s what she was worried about. Because she was pregnant, [and she thought] “now I’m gonna deal with it on my own”. And I said “no, we’re not gonna deal, we’re not gonna do it on our own, we’re gonna do it as a couple. We did everything, and we got mostly everything.”

Mum was happy. Yep my brother and sister in law were happy. My brother and girlfriend then, it wasn’t sister in law then. Me, I thought “oh well it’s time for us to find a house together, because the baby’s coming and it’s better to make sure he’s in his own house and settled down and all that.” Yeah. I just wanted to be a good dad to make sure he had everything you know?

He, when he was born I think he was a bit early or something he had to go [into an incubator for a short time] and when I went back at night time, they brought him into the room and he was in his room with himself, and I took [my girlfriend] in there before I went home. Cause I could go back any time. Yeah. I went home, had a shower and would go back. And mum stayed with us, all the way through with it. She was down at the hospital all the time.

I got into trouble

[When our baby was quite young I got charged and convicted for the trouble I had got into when I was a teenager]. It was terrible. It broke us apart. You know? Just the whole thing. [My girlfriend’s family] hated me, you know and I, it’s not good for me you know? It teared me apart too. I was scared. When I went to jail I was real scared. I was gonna get a hiding, you know, I just, I just did what I needed to do...People come up to you all the time. “Mate, bro what’s up, what you in here for? And you know, people standing at your door ...I did two years.

[I broke up with my girlfriend when] I was still in there. I said it’s too hard for you to come in, you get upset every time, you know? It was hard for her.

And now we're not together, it still doesn't matter, she rings me on the odd occasion "oh how are you doing" and all this, "are you alright" and all this stuff. You know?

[We'll never get back together] because [her] family would hate me. You know? My boy wants us to get back together and we've said no to him. He always asks me. You know? Dad why aren't you and mum get, it's too hard you know? It's too hard, cause I've got a job I don't want to give up, and she, we were talking about if we got back together she'd [have to move to where I live]. And she works too - she's got a good job.

When I see my son

[I have to have someone with me when I see my son]. It's a new lady now. yeah. She rings up [my son's caregiver], she makes the phone call. I don't make up the phone calls, they make the phone calls and they tell me when and what time.

We usually go shoot hoops, or go to the Warehouse, or whatever he wants to do. And have lunch you know? Shout him lunch and then he goes back. We have him from 11 to 1. Yeah. It goes quick you know? Yeah I just think oh well, I've got this chance now I don't want to blow it. You know. After so many years. And he, he hates, when I go to [to see him], because he hates me leaving. He starts crying and you know. [Our bond is because I've] done all the stuff I needed to do. You know? To get where I am now. Cause when you come out of jail and people go on the, go back and do stupid things you know. [I tried hard to do what] I needed to do. To do, what was planned, you know, not get into trouble. Not to have a fight with anyone, yell at the staff or scream. The most important thing is my family and friends, and my son.

Eventually I'll meet somebody when I'm ready. I'm not ready yet. You know. I don't want to meet a nice girl and she says "oh no I'm married or something". [I would like someone] who is um, sporty and um you know not, you know happy and all that stuff. [Someone who is happy] doing um, stuff together and eventually meeting my son. You know?

[If I hadn't gone to prison I probably] would've got married [to my son's mother] while mum was alive. Now she's not gonna be there when I get married. You know. And I don't know if I want to get married yet. [I talked about that with my brother] ages ago, [and] he said "do you want to get married?" I said "I don't want to yet". And he said at the end of the day he understands, he said "you don't have to get married". I think the end of the day, it's another piece of paper to me.

Key Messages

It's terrifying! I thought his girlfriend was going to stab him!

- We thought the story was terrifying and most especially the domestic abuse. We were all a bit surprised at first. It's not so common to hear stories of men being abused by their female partner, but then we thought, well, how would we know [how common it was]. People don't talk about partner violence against men. We also thought;
- The Storyteller was brave to include this part of his life in his story. As a man, it must have been hard to talk about.
- We worried the cops would think it was him.

He was pulled from here to there

- We noticed that this was another story where the Storyteller had grown up in a home broken up by the separation of his mum and dad. He was pulled from here to there.
- We think being pulled from here to there would have been especially hard because of the Storyteller's confusion about what was happening. He was taken advantage of.
- People with a learning disability carry feelings of being rejected when they are not told (what is happening) and never asked (what we think). Especially for important decisions like where and who you live with. We must be included in decision making.
- The Storyteller always seemed to talk about not having a say when he wrote about the relationships that were most important to him (His parents, his brother, his son) He never got asked what he wanted – all the way through his story.

(In)justice

- Every time the author had had an opportunity to talk, he seemed to have a kinder solution. We think the writer is "a peace-maker. He tried to work things out for the best.
- He didn't want his girlfriend charged. He wanted her to get help. He said his girlfriend hadn't been violent before. We think trying to get the charges dropped was the Storyteller's way of protecting his girlfriend. He wanted something that was good for her - not to have her punished.
- It was wrong, therefore, that his lawyer spoke for him at the trial. He was told to shut up and sit there. Winning the case probably wasn't what the Storyteller wanted.
- We worry that his girlfriend might not get the help she needed. Everyone missed opportunity to do something good by not listening to him.
- We wonder if people with a learning disability are treated the same as other people when they do something wrong. The Storyteller seemed to get treated more harshly when he made a mistake than other people.

- Prison would have been a “scary place” for a person with a learning disability.
- We think that prison might have broken the Storyteller. It stopped him from becoming the husband and father he wanted to be. Prison just made it harder for him to repair his life – not easier.

The many drifting away(s)

- We think that the Storyteller’s experiences of school marked him out as different - to himself. It was the beginning of his many drifting always.
- Being in a “special class,” begins it all. Being picked on and looked at differently is just what happens if you are in a special class.
- School can be a very unpleasant place for people with a learning disability. Bullying and abuse happens all the time. It begins the separation from friends that people with a learning disability experience as they grow up.
- Our experience is that bullying and being looked at as different – not like a normal person - make it harder for us to learn too. Getting behind at school is another kind of drifting away.
- We wonder, why teachers don’t do anything to stop it. Bullying has a life-long effect on people with a learning disability. “It [takes] your confidence away. Not having a positive identity, means you feel worth less and stop expecting to have loving relationships.

Becoming a dad

- We think the Storyteller was trying to be a loving dad. He wasn’t afraid of being a father - even though he thought [his partner] was joking, and that he wasn’t ready. We loved that the Storyteller kept coming back to the hospital at night to be with his baby who was by himself.
- Like other parents with a learning disability, the Storyteller wanted to get (his parenting) right. Even when this meant making hard decisions - like telling his son he and his mother wouldn’t be getting back together.
- It doesn’t seem fair or right that he couldn’t call his son. Or that the time he saw his son was organised by someone else. Or that he only got two hours and the time seemed to go so fast.

- We also didn't like that his son always cried when he had to leave. We think that that the way the Storyteller and his son were forced to meet wasn't good for their relationship and wondered if anyone had asked the Storyteller how he thought things could be worked out for the best. He always had good, kind ideas.

What do you think?