

Brian White – Personal Story

My name is Brian Richard White and I'm in recovery for abusing heroin. This is my story.

It's hard to know where to start and what to include so I'll just start from the beginning and see where it goes...

Despite my mum attempting to induce miscarriages, I was born on the 5th of May, 1970. So I reckon that, even in my mothers' womb, I had a strength that was to serve me well during the life that lay ahead of me.

My earliest memories are of being sexually abused as a baby by my own dad. My earliest memories of my mum are of being beaten and feeling fear.

My mum would have regular break downs and as a result I would be placed with foster carers. When I was four years old my mum went too far, and beat me so hard with an iron bar that she nearly broke my back. From that point on I was placed in children's homes by social services.

My first children's home was a place called Krupton hall in Shrewsbury, Shropshire. An elderly gardener there took a shine to me. A bit too much of a shine; he became the second man to sexually abuse me.

One of the punishments in the home was pin down. We would be strapped down to the bed with straps that would be snapped into place with metal clamps. I experienced this punishment a lot due to night terrors or having to go to the toilet after bed time.

When I was about five I moved to another home called the Vineyard. I lived there until I was about 11. During my time there I suffered more abuse, both sexual and physical. I never complained about or reported any of my abuse as, although I didn't like being abused, it was what I viewed as a normal part of life.

Whilst living in the homes I would see my mum between one and three Saturday afternoons a month. My dad was out of my life as they had split up. Although I had been abused by my dad, I found their separation very hard to deal with because it destroyed my dream world in which my mum and dad would get me out of homes, the abuse would stop, and we would live a life of love and happiness.

Round about 1978, when I was eight years old, I started to sniff solvents. I found that they relaxed me and made me feel happier about life. I would find

somewhere quiet, out of the way, to sniff glue and dream my dreams of family bliss.

I started sniffing glue after a visit from my mum one Saturday afternoon. She told me, in temper, that my life had been an accident and she had tried to get rid of me. I was heartbroken at being told this.

After that, my mum would often tell me, in temper, that I was an accident, but it was that first time that really tore me to shreds.

After she left that day I went for a walk around the grounds of the children's home. I bumped into two other lads who were sniffing glue at the back of the fenced off outdoor swimming pool. So I joined in.

My dad didn't even know that I was in that particular children's home. However, one day he came to visit with a friend who was visiting her son. From that accidental meeting, the children's home let me have a few holidays with him, before social services stepped in and stopped him from seeing me.

Of course, when I stayed with my dad the sexual abuse continued, and I continued to sniff solvents when I was at the home. Because I was a loner who often misbehaved, got upset, was violent and regularly in trouble, no one at the home suspected that I was sniffing solvents.

When I was eleven I left the Vineyard and the special school that I was attending due to my aggressive and emotionally disturbed behaviour. For a couple of months I stayed with foster parents who I had previously stayed with for three weekends. Unfortunately, they had relationship problems themselves, and were not emotionally capable of looking after what was classed as a special needs child such as myself. One day I stole something from them and I was sent back to the home.

The children's home didn't want me back, so after a couple of months I was sent to Castle Hill boarding school. The school was run by a monster called Ralph Morris who opened up the place with false references and documentation. It was eventually closed down because of the sexual and physical abuse that went on there, although that wasn't until a few years after I had left.

I personally left that hell behind me when I went to live with the only good social worker I've ever known, who ended up becoming my foster mum. By then, I'd stopped sniffing solvents – I had had to as the kids who were considered dangerous at Castle Hill were watched very closely.

I spent about three years with my foster family, and experienced lots of good times and happiness. But, by the time I went to live with them, I was too screwed up and institutionalised for normal family life to work. So, when I was fifteen I ended up back at the Vineyard.

By the time I was sixteen I was enjoying a drink on a regular basis. When I was seventeen I found myself living in a B&B, with an alcoholic landlord who would ply me with rum and home made wine.

Now, to skip a lot of stuff, I met the woman who would eventually become my wife, when I was eighteen and she was seventeen. She was the woman I lost my virginity to, as well as my first and only love.

We ended up getting married two days before my 21st birthday, and eventually had four children together. In between meeting her and getting married, I enjoyed the rave scene. I was really into my dance and drugs like E's and speed. I also had my first taste of heroin when I went to prison for the first time when I was 18.

I loved heroin but I loved my wife, and eventually my kids, even more. So heroin was only something that I did when I was in prison. When outside, alcohol and dope became an every day thing that helped me to cope with past events, and helped me to get through life.

When I was 35 my wife and I split up. When she met another bloke she decided that she wanted me out of her and our children's lives for good. It was almost like I had never existed.

Despite everything that I had gone through in life, I just couldn't handle the thought of living without my children. I had finally come across a pain that was too much to bear. It seemed that the more I drank and the more dope I smoked, the more I cried. I got to the point that I just wanted to die.

Eventually I met a woman who I fell for. Unfortunately, so did my only mate. She chose me and I ended up losing my mate over her. It turned out that she had a heroin habit and I ended up chasing the dragon (smoking it off foil) with her every day.

Inevitably I ended up with a bad habit myself, and to top it off she ended up leaving me, over which I was quite heart broken as I really thought she loved me. One of the reasons why she left was because I now had a habit I wasn't giving her as much of my heroin and I had no money to give her as it all went on drugs.

So, in the space of a few months, I'd lost my wife and kids, lost my best mate over a woman, and then I'd lost the woman. All I had left in my life was a heroin habit. I ended up living on the streets, begging and selling the big issue to raise money to buy heroin.

Eventually I ended up getting on the Teen Challenge programme, where I planned to stop using heroin. I stuck the programme out for three weeks before snapping and walking out.

I still remember the first night after I walked out. I was positive that I could have a drink and some weed but that I'd never touch heroin again. But, within about four seconds of getting off the bus in Swansea I bumped into an addict who I knew. He asked me where I was staying and I told him I was back on the streets. He said that I could stay at his flat for as long as I wanted. I thought it was a bit odd at the time, as I didn't really know him very well. Later that night I realised that he was having trouble from the people in the flat above him and he wanted some help!

Anyway, as soon as he made the offer I said OK, and then I heard the words, 'have you got foil' come from my mouth before I could even stop it. I remember thinking to myself, 'oh no, that didn't take long.'

We got back to his flat and he began cooking up. I asked him to save some for me to have on the foil. Although he'd said that he would save me some, he ended up cooking it all up so that he could inject it. He told me that he simply forgot to take some out for me. He might have been telling the truth, but I doubt it. I was feeling so low that I just thought, 'I'm going to have some one way or another'. That night I had my first hit with a needle.

Injecting was a totally different buzz. It was like taking a totally different drug. Even though I had always been scared of needles, it was still a buzz, and a buzz that I wanted to experience again.

Before I knew it I was injecting myself 2-3 times a day to keep the blues away. As time went on my tolerance went up and up, and pretty soon I was injecting 6-8 times a day. I would experience really bad withdrawals if I couldn't get heroin when I needed it.

The withdrawals were hell. Aches and pains like a really bad flu, and I couldn't keep anything in, even a glass of water. The physical symptoms were the easiest part of clucking, in comparison to the mental and emotional side of it. I think that if hell could be described by a feeling, then clucking off heroin is probably the closest you will get.

Anyway, this was my life for some months until Teen Challenge took me back on the condition that, after a three week detox, I go to their retreat in Scotland. If I said no I wasn't allowed back on the programme. I went back on the programme for about 5-6 months. During this time I got into some arguments with other residents, as well as the staff, so they kicked me off for a month so I had the opportunity to decide if I wanted to abide by the rules of the programme.

I decided to stay in the local area, so went to Edinburgh. During the month away from the programme I met other heroin addicts, but I still managed to keep clean. I did have a few drinks and I smoked half a spliff once, but I didn't use any heroin. I also started smoking cigarettes again, as while on

the programme you aren't allowed to smoke. One of my main problems with the program was that I found it very controlling. I felt that they used God's name to enforce discipline to control the residents behaviour and thinking.

Anyway, during the month I was away from Teen Challenge, I phoned them up 5-6 times when I got to chat to staff, and another 5-6 times when no-one answered. On the day that the month was up, I phoned them up to ask about arrangements for me going back. I was told by my keyworker, with whom I had made the deal of a month off to think, that because I had not phoned up every day I would not be allowed back on the programme. I explained that I had phoned on numerous occasions, and asked him to see if they could let the fact that I hadn't phoned every single day go and still take me back. He said he would mention it in a staff meeting and get back to me.

That same day I met two girls who had just had a lesbian wedding. We started drinking and chatting, and I ended up back at their place celebrating with them. It turned out they were heroin addicts, and I ended up accepting a really full and really dark needle, even though I knew it wasn't a good idea. Sure enough it turned out to be a terrible idea.

Because my tolerance was, by then, non-existent, and because the quality of the heroin was a lot stronger than I was used to in Wales, I didn't get to party. Instead I went over. Luckily I came back round.

The next day, when I made it back to the night shelter where I was staying, I had a message for me to phone Teen Challenge. More than ever I was desperate to go back. So I expectantly rang them up and was told that, sorry, they weren't willing to take me back.

I was feeling so disappointed and let down that I went straight away to score, telling myself that it would be the last time that I used. But, of course, it wasn't the last time, and within a couple of weeks I was begging, stealing and selling the Big Issue to feed my habit again.

As time went on another overdose made me decide to try and get help again. I tried to get into another rehab and things were looking promising, except for I made the mistake of telling them that I had been on Teen Challenge. The staff member that I saw gave me every reason to believe that I would be accepted on the programme, but on the day I went back for the final answer I was told that they had been in touch with Teen Challenge and, due to information passed on to them, they were not willing to accept me.

I was absolutely gutted. Not only would Teen Challenge not take me back, but it looked to me as if they had the power to make sure no one else would take me either. I was still desperate to get clean, and if possible see my children, so I moved back to Wales.

I'm not too sure how long I was in Cardiff before getting onto the Bridge Project, which was set up by the Salvation Army, but I think it was about seven or eight months. Anyway, I'm glad to say that so far I've been on this programme for eight months and I'm totally clean off heroin, drink and pot.

To be honest it can be really hard some days. I get days that just drag on for forever, like it's never going to end. And I suffer regular nightmares and flashbacks of my past. In addition, I have to live with the possibility that I may never see my children again, but that's another story all together.

The thing is though, I'm learning how to cope and deal with life, my past, present and future without alcohol, pot or heroin. I always thought that I knew myself about as well as anyone can know themselves, but I feel as though I've really learnt things about myself since being on the Bridge Project, and it feels like I'm learning all the time.

Although I'm a bit of a pessimist, even I can see the benefit of a life without drugs. Now I can even see myself helping others to get off drugs and alcohol. I also know that even if I have to wait until my children are adults before I see them again, that when we finally meet I WILL be clean and have a job. I want to teach them by the way I live, with the most important lesson being – no matter how bad you might mess up life, or no matter how low a person might sink, it's never too late to pull yourself out of the crap, dust you're self off, and make something of life, even if it's a pretty average something.

So far I've seen myself as successful, and believe the thanks for that should be split three ways:

1. God, who I have great faith in
2. My own strength and will power
3. The dedicated staff who work on this programme, as I strongly believe that any such programme is only as good as the staff that work on it. They are kind, caring, giving people who really seem to want to see users on this programme break their addictions. It seems to me that there is nothing within their power that they wouldn't do to help the people they work with. While there are all types of reasons why I think this programme has worked for me, the staff really are a big part of it, and I feel thankful and grateful towards them.