

Hidden Voices:

Little Boy's Hero!

By P White.



Early 1980's, my dad is amazing, he is tall, funny, clever, tough, he is my absolute hero!

I look up to him, I admire him, proud of him. All of a sudden, Wham! He is gone! arrested, charged, and convicted, sent to prison 100 miles away... My hero turns out to be a sex offender a liar, a serious criminal living a double life! My whole life was shattered in a moment.

I am extremely confused, abandoned, hurt, and left to be the so-called 'man of the house'. I am 6. My mother is struggling to come to terms with what just happened, living on a bleak grey concrete council estate with absolutely no money, living day to day, we cannot afford coal on a Friday from the coal man. We were borrowing food from neighbours, some of which would not speak to me because of the crimes my father committed. Adults would drive around looking for me to beat me up, which they did on multiple occasions. I learned quickly how to go to ground to take the minimal impact to my head area from their punches or weapons.

School was like utter torture to me; older children would approach me and just punch me in the face. They would say:

"Your dad is a nonce, a paedo, we are going to hound you out of this fucking town, or we will kill you!"

Being the family member of a sex offender is a very dangerous, volatile, and scary place to be. I fully understand the anger around this type of crime; however this was not my burden to carry.

I resorted to going to the school library to get books, not to read but to stuff down my clothing to take the impact of a punch. Life was a miserable existence rather than a childhood.

I would stare out the classroom window of school wondering what the view was like for my father from his prison cell. I would have to hide on the school premises until everyone had gone home to avoid the intense fighting and bullying. I was nicknamed 'paedo tramp', I would wet the bed and hide it and go to school in that unwashed state, holes in my sock for P.E, I took a lot of aggressive bullying for that. It was like a feeding frenzy for the school bullies who were like sharks circling their prey.

Until one day where I had taken enough and decided to tell my school bullies my dad was in prison for murder, that group never touched me again.

School was more about getting through the day and having dinner rather than learning or fun.

I had free school dinners and my mum received the school grant for clothing. All the kids knew about this, which was the ultimate badge of failure, shame, and ridicule.

Not only did my mother have a husband she is about to divorce in prison, mum had no friends and absolutely no support, all of her friends had abandoned her.

School was an extremely lonely place for me, I had hardly any friends. The school friends I did have would say:

"My mum doesn't want you to call for me anymore because your dad is a criminal, and mum thinks you will steal everything from my bedroom."

From that day on I became a loner. My school reports reflected that: bottom of the class in everything, this seemed to sum up my life. I would climb over the school wall at lunch time to hide in the graveyard next door to avoid the bullying and be on my own. I would read the headstones to cheer me up! Tragic I know! I would often cry alone in desperation and despair. I often thought about suicide and self-harm.

I distrusted social workers, they threatened me with children's homes every time I spoke to them. They would interview me like I was a criminal, this made me feel even more unsecure, scared, unwanted, and isolated. The local police would constantly search me if I went near any shops and call me 'rapist boy'.

Eventually letters arrived from my father from prison. These letters were always welcomed with mixed feelings and were often accompanied by a drawing and some jokes about the 'screws' the term used for prisons guards.

Visiting prison was always very intimidating, starting with a 3-hour drive with my grandmother. As we approached the prison, I remember seeing the high security walls with barbed wire everywhere. Accompanied by a long wait in the cold, bleak looking waiting room. The guards called us forward to go through security. I was searched along with my grandmother; I was made to feel like a real criminal and of the lowest social status possible. After more waiting, we went in and sat at a table with guards watching everything we do and say I see my dad in front of me in a grey prison outfit. I just wanted to cry. Instead, I remember thinking to myself: I am supposed to be the 'man of the house'. I spent every bit of energy trying not to cry or any show emotion at all in front of my dad, I wanted to be tough just like him.

When we left the prison, I cried all the way home, I have harrowing memories of this to this day!

It took me weeks and weeks of crying myself to sleep to get back to some sort of normal, whatever normal was.

The family situation was also a nightmare, my mother's family would not have anything to do with me at all and my father's family pretended that nothing had happened at all. That went all the way to my adulthood.

Eventually after some years my father was released from prison into a hostel, I remember a man on the desk at the front.

My father had to live there for some time and was being managed by the probation service.

I visited him there every Wednesday evening for a few hours. It seemed like an exciting place with a pool table. Often, there would-be other resident's unknown to me at the time who were convicted murders and rapists. I found out one day when I asked one of the men their "what are you in for mate?"

He laughed and said, 'murder of my wife'. Another said, 'I like kids too much'. Here I am, a child, playing pool with these people! The fact is I should never have been allowed anywhere near the place!

This cycle of arrest, conviction and prison continued for me as I went through the very same feelings repeatedly when both my brothers went to young offenders' institutes and prison on multiple occasions for considerable periods of time for serious crimes.

I would urge you to spare a thought for family members of convicted criminals, they are mothers' wives, fathers, sons, daughters, grandparents, cousins, friends, decent people who had nothing to do with the crimes of the person they love. You can't switch that love and bond off when they are in prison. That's not how life works.

I have paid for the crimes of my family members for over 30 years. I have had my battles and thankfully, eventually managed to go on to live a very successful, wonderful, fulfilling life, having never committed a single crime.

It turns out the real hero was staring right back at me every time I looked in the mirror.