

Hidden Voices: Lucy's Story



I was 8 years old when my mum ran outside the front door as she saw 2 police cars parking on our drive. My brothers and I sat at the window wondering what was going on as mum continued looking back at us, telling us with her eyes to stay inside. She retreated back through the front door, the police officers remaining on the drive. She told us that our dad had gone missing and that the police officers had to come and check if he was here. I remember taking the police officer into my bedroom and showing her inside my wardrobe, under my covers, even inside my sock drawer so as to prove the point that Dad was not here with us. I felt they were looking in the wrong place, they should be looking somewhere else, they had to go and find him safe, they were wasting valuable time.

Dad turned up two days later. Mum told me he was going to explain himself to us. I told him he had to, but he put his head down and continued to play Lego with my brothers. I told him again that mum said he had something he wanted to tell us. He explained he was in trouble with work. I asked him if he could go to prison. He looked me in the eyes and promised that would never happen. A few months later, my mum sat me down after school and said that he'd gone to court that day and had gone straight to prison from there. He'd lied to me. He'd lied to my face. I was devastated. I was supposed to trust him and believe him, but he'd lied. He'd written us a letter explaining everything, but that we weren't to visit him and that we'd have to write instead. I hated the thought that someone else would read my words before my dad did, see the pictures I'd drawn him and the photos I'd sent him before he did. He'd try and make jokes about his cellmates and make light of his situation in his letters, but I could often read sadness between his words. I was still angry at him, but I would also lie awake worrying about how he was feeling in a little room without us.

I began googling. I found a blog post someone had written about him saying the most awful things, I couldn't recognise my dad in their words. I was suddenly terrified that people in school would know, that they may have read these same words. It became my deepest secret. I felt an intense shame that my dad was in prison and wouldn't speak about it to anyone, not even my mum and brothers. I didn't tell a soul until I was 18 and drunkenly spouted it out when I was in my first year at university. No one seemed to mind, the world didn't implode, people stayed my friends, my life continued. I began to tell more people and each time it got easier and each time the shame eased

off my shoulders. I carried that shame for well over 10 years and I wish someone had told me that it wasn't mine to carry.

The first time I saw my dad when he was released, I had told myself I was going to be furious with him, I was going to show him that he had hurt me. But as soon as I saw him climb out the car I ran into his arms and we sobbed together. I love my dad dearly and we have such a wonderful relationship now. I respect him. I also have a deep respect for my wonderful mother, for her strength, her love, her protection and her honesty.