

Hidden Voices: Alice's Story



Below is the 19th in a series of blog posts created by adults who have lived experience of parental imprisonment. By sharing these hidden voices, we hope to show how the impacts of parental imprisonment can stay with people well into adulthood.

This is something I've thought about for many years. Telling my story, inspiring others, finally being heard.

So this is where my story begins:

I lived with my mum, brother and sister. Things in my eyes were 'normal'. Upon reflection, I see a single parent with childhood trauma that led to a life of addiction and poor relationships.

My mum always tried hard; working, family time, making Christmas and Birthdays special. She did this despite the domestic violence and without any family support. Things slowly got worse. No money for gifts, mum missing for hours at a time, falling asleep mid-sentence, passing out on the floor – all became the norm.

I would often spend time with my brother at his dad's house at the weekend. When I was about 13 paramedics were called to the house. At this point my sister was already spending her time between a juvenile detention centre and foster care. I heard a paramedic say "what time did she take the heroin" a sentence that has haunted me to this day. I felt sick. I was already anxious about my mum's drinking.

Shortly after this my mum got into a relationship with a man who was flash with his money. He had a nice car, brought nice things - something that was not normal for me.

Unsurprisingly, this man was dealing drugs. I realised it when he and my mum were both arrested for 'dealing.' Words like 'dealing' and 'raid' were things I would hear but not fully comprehend.

My mum's boyfriend was not released on bail. I never saw him again. My mum was released and told me not to worry. Soon enough court date came and I remember my mum hugging me in tears at home. I told her not to worry, things would be fine and I would see her later. I couldn't imagine anything else, that wouldn't be possible surely? Mums don't go to prison! I certainly couldn't show her how I was feeling.

3 years. Wow. How do you process that at the age of 15? I felt numb.

Now this is the part where social workers/police/school/other organisations step in? Right? Wrong. No one came.

Since she was over 16, my sister moved back into the family home. I moved in with a friend. This didn't last long. I wasn't used to a stable family home life with boundaries and rules.

Mum was in the local newspaper; mug shot, address, number of children. I was so embarrassed. Luckily, I had some amazing friends, who to this day I am eternally grateful for. They, and their families looked out for me amongst the turmoil. No one really knew the whole picture.

GCSEs came and went. Looking back, I was such a vulnerable teenager, making bad choices without the guidance of an adult.

I started college. By this time, I was facing homelessness so approached them for support. They arranged for me to go to my local children's service office, where I went alone to tell my story to a social worker. It was arranged for me to stay within a household that they called 'supportive lodgings'. Here I gained an understanding of an ordinary household, which I found hard and became quite withdrawn. This was a positive part of my journey though, and I built some positive relationships through this.

I spoke with my mum once or twice on the phone. It was difficult not being able to call when I wanted/needed. I visited my mum once, but I don't remember much of this. I went with my sister and her boyfriend, nothing explained to us about the process. I remember seeing my mum in what I'd describe as comfy clothes - jogging bottoms. She looked different. After this I stopped contact for about a year. When she was released, after serving about half her sentence, I was in no rush to see her. I was still angry.

For me what I craved above everything was a feeling of stability.

This is where the good bit starts!

18 years old: By now, I'm well on my way with college study, have the same supportive friends and am finding my feet in the world. I met someone who I grew strong feelings for. He didn't judge me for where I came from and who I was. He had good values, treated me with respect, and was from a 'normal family'. Little did I know at this point he would be such an integral part of my journey.

Fast forward to now!

I continued my studies, graduated from university with a BA honours.... The fellow 18-year-old I met is now my husband. We married at 25, then had two beautiful children. I am passionate about supporting others and have worked supporting families for the last 10 years.

People often ask me what made me different from the rest of my family, how I've managed to find the path I'm on. I hear the word 'resilient'. Truth is, I have no clue! I have some strong, positive relationships and a drive to help others and be better.

The best feeling of all is knowing that my children are experiencing a childhood that I craved. One with stability, one free from addiction, crime and fear. And for that I am proud.