

Victims of the Post Office Scandal:

Adi's Story



It all started on my 10th birthday. My mother dropped me off at school and said goodbye to me for a long time. She promised me a lot of things for my birthday before she left, like that she would come watch my cricket match on the weekend and she would cook my favorite food, things like that. She felt bad going to prison knowing that she was leaving her only son with basically a single dad. She only told me that she went to prison 9 years later after her first high court victory.

At the time, my family told me that my mum was going to a special hospital because she was pregnant with my brother. The only time I could see her was during visitation periods, maybe once a month. We were separated for about four months in total and when I first started seeing my mum in the 'hospital', I did not speak to her at all.

My mum means so much to me. That last kiss on the forehead before dropping me off to school and then her being just gone was the worst feeling ever. I actually thought she had died at first. And then, I hated her. I know it's bad but I just thought 'how can you leave me like that?' I understand why my parents didn't tell me she was in prison, but my feelings towards her shifted dramatically.

My mum wanted to commit suicide in prison. She was there contemplating her life and her only son wasn't speaking to her. I felt awful when I learned this. She couldn't in the end because she was pregnant. If it wasn't for my younger brother, I'd still be without a mother and my last feelings towards her would have been hate. I never would have said 'I love you' to her again.

From that last time my mum dropped me off before going to prison, the feeling of the world around me completely changed, everyone was different towards me. I remember that feeling so clearly. I was distanced in school. Later, I found out that parents were telling their kids not to hang out with me, as I was the son of a convicted criminal. So, I didn't have any friends and no one wanted to partner with me anymore. I was immediately put in a special learning class where I was the only student. I felt unwanted by everyone.

Maybe in their eyes, they thought my mum did something wrong. There was evidence against her, it was fair enough they would see my mum as guilty. But that should not be reciprocated towards me. I was 10 years old, I didn't even know how to do my multiplication tables.

Unbiased support from a teacher in school would have helped a lot. If there was just one person there for me during my time at school, to see me as an individual, it would have been much better. I probably wouldn't have had the feelings of hatred I felt towards my mum, if it had been explained to me what actually happened.

My mum used to be the heart of the community in our village. We lived in a small village in Surrey, a tiny community. Everyone that went to my school was about two minutes walking distance from my house. After school, I remember we all used to go to my parents' shop and my mum always gave my friends ice creams and chocolates.

We had to sell that shop and I never got to bring my friends back again. My dad started a new business driving taxis, and he tried to hide the fact that my mum had been convicted. Sometimes at the end of the day, he would get physically attacked. He was beaten up because my mum, his wife, was labeled the pregnant thief. He would yell for help and no one would do anything.

Since we were completely isolated by the community, my dad sent me to a prep school a bit further away, where not many people would have known about my mum. I moved to a cricket club further away too because there was a lot of animosity. I grew up not having any close friends at all until university.

I remember telling my dad the feelings I was having of not belonging and having zero friends. I remember his loving reaction vividly. He bought me a bunk bed and he started sleeping on the top bed, and me on the bottom. Simple things like that meant a lot.

I had so many fights with my father back then. Our financial situation became very bad. We had previously been very comfortable, but that ended when my mum went to prison. Bailiffs continuously came to the house. I started working when I was 13. I had a weekend job and I didn't save up any money or spend it on myself. I gave it all to my mum and dad because I'd realised that we were in a bad financial situation.

Before my mum went away, I had a birthday party every year - and it was always big, like laser quest or bowling. My parents always made sure all my friends could come. My younger brother never experienced that. We couldn't afford it anymore, and no one wanted to come because of the stigma.

My mum didn't show her face in public after being released from prison. She never wanted to pick me up from school because she didn't want to cause any unwanted fights. My brother grew up his whole childhood not having a birthday party, not having many friends, and my mum never being with him in public. I used to pick him up from school when he was 5, 6, 7... he was sitting by himself almost every time. It was

something he was used to, but it wasn't something he deserved. He deserves everything. He deserves birthday parties, and he deserves having friends.

He was the son of my mum, and my mum was the one that went to prison. He wasn't even born when she was sentenced, yet all of this stigma was passed on to a newborn baby.

When my parents told me in 2019 what they sheltered me from, I was in tears. It was all over the news, so they had to tell me. I needed to take a break from my exams and a break from Uni. I felt like I wanted to die the same way my Mum wanted to die. I feel so guilty for the way I had treated my parents.

Somehow, my parents made sure I still had a normal childhood, just minus the friends part. I played cricket, did my SAT, my GCSEs, sat my A levels, and I went to university. I did decent, finished my master's and I got a good job. None of that would have happened if it weren't for my mum and my dad.

Now that my mum's name has been cleared, it's simple things that have changed. Especially for my 11-year-old brother. My mum is able to do way more with my brother. She goes and watches all his cricket games, takes him to training. Two years ago, we hosted his first birthday party with his friends coming over. His emotional stability has definitely improved.

It's not just me and my brother. There are a lot of kids like me whose parents were wrongfully convicted for stealing from the post office. Some of them lost their parents to suicide. My mum would have been one of those people if she wasn't pregnant.

Learning what really happened changed me a lot. Never judge a book by its cover. People believe the media and that's understandable, but you should also listen to the person affected by it.

People also need to understand others as a whole. People just looked at me as the son of my mum and they didn't think of me as an individual. My name is Aditya Misra, but everyone thought of me as "the son of Seema Misra". I'm my own person, my own human being. And at the end of the day, I didn't do anything wrong.