

Hidden Voices: *A Shame-Induced Silence*

Peter's Story



Below is the 27th in a series of blog posts created by adults with lived experience of parental imprisonment. By sharing these hidden voices, we hope to raise awareness of the impacts of parental imprisonment to inspire immediate change for the children of today.

Reading the previous 26 blogs on this page, I feel like a bit of fraud. Whilst my dad did go to prison, it happened when I was 4, which means I have very limited memories.

I am convinced I remember visiting Dad 'at work' (which was the excuse used for his absence) in a large room with lots of men wearing high-viz jackets. This could be my earliest memory but I can't be sure. What I can be sure of though, is how deeply this affected my entire family and the spectre that still hangs over each of us.

My dad went to prison for stealing money from the Post Office, where he worked as a sub-postmaster. He was not a malicious criminal, he stole because our family had fallen on hard times in the early 90s during the recession. He maintained he was going to pay the money back but stealing is stealing. He was sentenced to 6 months in prison, serving 3 for good behaviour.

The shockwaves that this conviction sent through my family were severe: both my parents were made bankrupt, they subsequently divorced and my two older siblings began struggling with their mental health. We also lost the house we lived in and have rented ever since (as a child we moved multiple times as landlords sold the homes we lived, this upheaval is another story of instability all together).

Whilst I was relatively sheltered from all this at the time, it cannot be understated how much this has affected me since. This is mainly because as a family, we never ever talk about it. This shame-induced silence means that it feels like the family is burdened by a deep dark secret. And secrets breed secrets.

This means we are an emotionally detached family. My siblings are also both over a decade older than me which means they feel like an older generation, and older generations are of course less likely to talk about their emotions. They both still struggle with their mental health, one has depression and has been on and off medication for a long time and the other has very bad anxiety. But again, this is never discussed.

I am relatively lucky; I went to drama school which means I have a slightly more 'enlightened' understanding of feelings. I have also paid for therapy. And the only reason I feel capable of putting these feelings on paper is because of the work I did on myself. Indeed, I would never have made the connection between why I was abusing alcohol and food and my family's trauma.

The work that Children Heard and Seen do shows that this adversity does not mean people affected should feel held back. I have been so lucky in my life in many ways: working hard to play the lead in a West End show and now having swapped the theatre for a job in politics.

The bravery required to be open with yourself and your family is something I still have to battle with. There is still so much pain that my family is too ashamed to delve into and I feel so sad that I don't have the gumption to ask them about this time. One day, I will. Reading the inspiring testimonies on here, should be the catalyst I need.