

SINS of FATHERS

HarperInspire, an imprint of
HarperCollins Christian Publishing
1 London Bridge Street
London SE1 9GF
www.harpercollins.co.uk
www.harperinspire.co.uk

First published by HarperCollins 2020.
Copyright © Michael Emmett

Michael Emmett asserts his moral right,
to be identified as the author of this work.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 9780310112600 (TPB)

ISBN: 9780310112617 (ebook)

ISBN: 9780310115892 (Audio)

Typesetting by e-Digital Design

Printed and bound in the UK by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted,
in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior
permission of the publishers.



MIX

Paper from responsible sources

FSC™ C007454

FSC™ is a non-profit international organization established to promote the responsible
management of the world's forests. Products carrying the FSC label are independently certified
to assure consumers that they come from forests that are managed to meet the social, economic
and ecological needs of present and future generations, and other controlled sources.

This book is produced from independently certified
FSC paper to ensure responsible forest management.
For more information visit: www.harpercollins.co.uk/green

SINS of FATHERS

A Spectacular Break from
a Dark Criminal Past

MICHAEL EMMETT

with Harriet Compston

INSPIRE

For my family and the hope of things to come.

FOREWORD

by Jonathan Aitken

Memoirs of a criminal's road to redemption have never been more colourful or more convincing than this mighty rushing cataract of an autobiography by Michael Emmett.

The author, who I have known for over twenty years, is by any measurement a big man – in physical stature, in former law-breaking villainy, in sensual appetites for beautiful women, in generous friendships in dark places, in warm-hearted family love, and ultimately in the intensity of his late-flowering religious faith.

Michael's life story began in the 1950s on a council estate in South London. He captures the boisterous vitality of this unsung subculture with a Pepys-like authenticity rich in detail.

But sinister shadows soon start falling in the forms of rampant criminality, violence, a turbulent relationship with his kleptomaniac father, the early death of his brother, and, far earlier, the sexual abuse of Michael by a babysitter.

Becoming possessed by what he himself calls 'a dysfunctional, dishonest evil spirit', it did not take Michael long to rise from small-time South London crime to big-time international drug-smuggling. His criminal exploits

across oceans and continents are excitingly told dramas. But in the end our villain, or hero, is arrested at gunpoint in a Devon fishing port and sentenced to twelve-and-a-half years' imprisonment.

For Michael Emmett, that event should have been the end of the story. Far from it.

How Michael Emmett found Christian faith when in prison, and was transformed by it, is the stuff of which miracles are made, bearing witness to the Holy Spirit in action.

However, it was no quick-fix conversion. True to form, he rebelled, relapsed, and reverted to some of his bad old character faults. Yet his companions on his spiritual journey, mainly from Holy Trinity Brompton's Prison Alpha team, saw his potential and persevered with him. So did his daughters Aimee, Lillie and Beth; and likewise his ex-wife and rock of ages, Tracy. There were many loving and praying hands involved in this transformation.

Today the Michael Emmett I know and admire is a truly redeemed soul, a brilliant storyteller, and a remarkable bringer of the Christian good news. His book deserves to be a bestseller.

Jonathan Aitken

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	7
AUTHOR'S NOTE	13
PROLOGUE	15
1. FOREFATHERS	17
2. THE FLATS	23
3. BREAKING BOUNDARIES	33
4. A BEAUTIFUL LIFE	41
5. LEARNING THE ROPES	51
6. NARROW GATE, BROAD GATE?	63
7. REBEL	75
8. NAUGHTY	87
9. MARTIN	101
10. HIGHS AND LOWS	109
11. A DONE DEAL	123
12. THE MUSTARD SEED	135
13. BAPTISM OF FIRE	149
14. DOING BIRD	159
15. SPIRIT WILLING, FLESH WEAK	171
16. TWO WORLDS	181
17. ALPHA IN PRISONS	197
18. DOWNWARD SPIRAL	207
19. FALL FROM GRACE	217
20. THE PRINCE AND THE PAUPER	225
21. RESTORATION	237
22. WORK IN PROGRESS	249
EPILOGUE	257
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	265

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is the story of my life. Not to gain favour by sugar-coating the lies: it's a book that I want to write to say I am sorry to all of my loved ones and friends who helped me along the way. I pray by God's grace that I will see the end of the problems that were caused by my cavalier attitude.

To everyone reading this book, I hope you enjoy my journey and realize that the mountains we climb take us to the valleys of peace. I pray that you read that no matter how far you fall, how many lies or deceitful actions you participate in, the Lord is always there to forgive, to show you grace, and to put your life back on track, and to bless all those you hurt.

God bless,
Michael

*Some names and identifying details have been changed
to protect the privacy of individuals.*

PROLOGUE

A black Golf with a police light tears across Bideford Bridge through the blistering rain towards us. We try to do a U-turn but I can see men with guns. We're trapped on the quayside. Armed coppers jump out. Then the megaphone: 'Michael Emmett, don't move. Get down on your knees'.

'Drive,' I say to Alan Trotter.

I get down in the front of the vehicle, out of harm's way. Peter Bracken looks like he's got measles from the red target dots of the police weapons.

'Drive,' I say again.

'They're going to kill me.'

'Al, drive, mate. Drive.'

Al panics and tries to drive off in second gear. It's all too late. It's over.

Then Peter jumps out of the car and attempts to dive into the sea, nearly killing himself. Reinforcements come up behind and start hitting him with the pistol when he resists.

I get out of the car, screaming and shouting, 'Leave him alone.'

'Put your hands on your head,' one of the armed coppers says, pointing his pistol at me. I can see one officer in front of

me, two behind. One of the geezers has a massive handgun
They have brought in the big boys, I realize.

'No, I ain't doing anything,' I tell them. It's midnight, it's cold, and there is so much noise.

'Everyone shut up!' I shout.

Everything stops. There's silence, but the chaos comes back quickly.

The armed coppers come up behind me and smack me on the back. As I go over, one of them says, 'He's got a concealed weapon.'

'He's put something in his mouth,' another says.

I've got someone's number, but they're not getting it, and I swallow the piece of paper.

They knock me to my knees. The Chief Customs Officer, who has been trying to get me for eighteen months, says, 'A penny for your thoughts?'

Starting to weep, I say, 'My three children.'

'Your what?'

'My three children. Leave me alone.'

I feel like I've taken him down a peg or two; I've taken the shine off his arrest.

'He's already talking about his kids.'

'Don't you talk about my kids, mate!' I bristle.

But I can't win.

'Stand up,' says the chief. 'We've got you, Emmett. We've got you. You happy now?'

He puts the handcuffs on me and pushes me right over. Now I am his trophy.

They think I am a tough boy. They don't realize that behind the mask is a broken soul.

1. FOREFATHERS

I was born with fear. This huge fear. I inherited it from my grandfather Charlie Emmett. A mental illness on a hand-me-down train. It was like a spiteful sting of a scorpion's tail – and it scarred deeply.

All three of us – my grandfather, Dad and I – were impregnated with the same insanity; this dysfunctional, dishonest, evil spirit. It was very cowardly, very cunning, very dark – and could be violent when forced into a corner.

Charlie was a good-looking boy but he returned from the Second World War a changed man. He had been hit in the back by shrapnel and was in a coma for weeks. When Charlie got back home to Battersea, he became the rag-and-bone man and would shuffle about with two sticks, so he got nicknamed 'Sticks'. Other times, Charlie would go to the pub. He used to drink beer, get drunk, and chew glass. It was his party piece. He hated the American soldiers and would have a pepper mill in his pocket, so he could throw pepper at them.

Looking back, my dad's family was a bit like the devil in that movie by Mel Gibson, *The Passion of the Christ*. The devil was a good-looking man, but sinister. It took you a second to see his beauty but then the dysfunction came out.

Back home in a flat in Grant Road, Battersea, my grandmother Alice would wait patiently. Born into a family of civil servants who lived in a house in Wimbledon, she was very beautiful, lovely, and kind. Charlie was the opposite: very dark-spirited and extremely violent. Then Brian – my dad – and his three sisters came along, but the violence didn't stop. They suffered a lot under their father. The only good thing was that Charlie Emmet was bright. He tried to improve his children's lives with education. So Brian was geared to working hard – and his father had high hopes for him.

Then, one day, everything changed. Aged sixteen, Brian came home to find his father with another woman. Alice wasn't well and in bed upstairs. When my dad saw what he was doing with the other woman, he attacked Charlie. He grabbed some coal from the fire and threw it on the bed. No one got burnt, but it frightened the life out of my grandfather. He stopped talking to Brian, who left home. My dad moved in with his best friend, Arthur Suttie.

A few years later, Charlie committed suicide by drinking metal acetone. They found him with the lining of his stomach coming out of his mouth. It was horrendous, and it haunted the family. He left nothing to Brian – my dad. It was Arthur who gave him a suit to wear to the funeral.

Brian, who was very intelligent, continued to work hard. He studied architecture at Wandsworth Technical College and ran at the Amateur Athletics Association Championships, finishing second. However, he had inherited his father's anger and the draw of darkness lured him away.

Soon, he and Arthur Suttie became amateur boxers.

Brian's reputation grew because of his fighting. My dad was only a small guy but he could fight. No one wanted to get on the wrong side of him. When he was making a name for himself, he fell for a girl called Betty, who was beautiful inside and out. They had three kids together.

One afternoon, my dad was in the parade of shops at Falcon Road at the end of Clapham Junction Station and bumped into a girl called Jean, who lived in his block of flats. She worked as a carpet layer in one of the shops and he fell for her instantly. Jean wasn't clever but she was bright, naturally stunning to look at, and stylish. Brian pursued her and – much to the shame of his mum Alice – left his wife Betty and their three kids. He and Jean married.

Brian and Jean moved into Stockwell Gardens Estate opposite her parents, John and Mary Watkins, who lived in a big, four-bedroom council flat. Her family was a world away from my dad's. Madly Catholic, old-fashioned, and colourful, they were very traditional south-east London people – and ate that way. Breakfast on Sunday was egg and bacon, followed by a roast in the afternoon. There would be fish on Friday nights and homemade puddings, pies, liver, and bacon throughout the week. There was always singing, dancing, and wonderful food.

John worked hard selling flowers in Covent Garden Market. He came from a deeply respectable family of handsome men, who were very honest and very smart, wearing suits and lovely white shirts. They were always perfectly clean-shaven and their hair would be styled with Brylcreem.

Mary gave all her money away to good causes. She was

a staunch Catholic; her room was filled with every saint possible, as well as water from Lourdes. Such was her faith that in the Second World War during the air raids, she wouldn't darken the house. Doing the ironing when there was bombing all around, she would tell the children, 'God's with us'.

Still, there was a little bit of criminal in Jean's family. She was one of six children, and her brother Peter was a naughty boy: a Raffles character who loved champagne and gambling, and got himself into a bit of trouble. Then there was beautiful Mary, who became a bus conductor. Johnny had schizophrenia, which devastated his mum, because it was a really tough situation to be in then. There was about 18 years' difference between Jean and her two youngest siblings: Veronica, an artist, and Tommy. They were more Aryan-looking: blonde, mousy, and blue-eyed.

Jean's family didn't like Brian at first. But she loved him, and she had the same strength and loyalty as her mother. Jean was one of those blessed people who had the capacity to love incredibly. It wasn't gooey love; it wasn't soppy love. She was just a pillar. Though she wasn't a noisy woman, you could always hear her laughing and she loved to feed you.

By the time they married, Brian had begun to fall into crime – mainly violence. Then he started to steal safes. He and Jean had volatile arguments, but he would never be violent towards her. He was very proud of her. A woman of grace, she was Brian's way out. He couldn't live without her, and he knew it. She was his sanity and his way of enjoying the nice things in life. Their life together was sexy. They would dance well together; he would sing

to her and she would sing to him. She had his back, big time. As for Brian, he thought that he had her back, but he never did. Jean didn't need anyone to protect her. She was just that lady; you couldn't hurt her if you wanted to.

Love conquers all, and their relationship was like that. But the opposite dragged him back. He had a sex addiction and a number of affairs, even though he really didn't want to do all that and it didn't make him happy.

Jean got pregnant very quickly. With only two years between Brian's last child by his first marriage and my sister Karen, born in 1956, the situation caused a lot of headaches. Karen was a really frilly baby. Jean always liked to put her in something a bit glam.

Then Jean gave birth to me, on 18 October 1958, in a women's hospital in Clapham. I had a screwed-up face and a mop of black hair. My mum said I was really ugly. She was so upset about what my dad would think; but the following morning, he walked in and saw this wonderful boy.

I think that's where the contrasts in me started: the ugly bit and the good bit.

2. THE FLATS

It was the summer of 1962. We drove through the night to Costa Brava. Dad, Mum, Karen and I were driving down in a Jaguar. Dad's partner Arthur Suttie, Arthur's wife Sheila, and their daughter Kim had come too, in their yellow Mini. The most handsome man you've ever seen, Arthur looked like Dean Martin; more playboy than criminal. He wasn't muscular but smart, with curly black hair, glasses, and lovely teeth, always puffing on a cigar. His wife Sheila was like Ma Baker in a James Cagney gangster film. She would drive around in a Mercedes, wearing a mink coat and covered in jewels. She had a big outlet in London where she used to sell cheap clothes.

On our way through France, we stopped off in the car park of a caravan site so we could rest for a few hours. It was so hot in the cars that we left all the doors open. Suddenly, we heard a noise. This load of gypsies had gone into Arthur's car, then into ours, trying to nick all our stuff. Dad and Arthur screamed and shouted. We screeched out of there. When I looked back, all I could see was the dust and the gypsies running after us. It was frightening and we were all freaked out.

Our apartments in Costa Brava were beautiful but

not very well built, stuck together like Lego. The glass between the dining room and the small balcony was very thin. When you opened the door, it used to rattle a bit. One apartment was ours, Arthur and his family had another, and a famous brain doctor was next door to us.

One morning, Dad and I were playing hide and seek in the apartment. I hid behind the chair on the balcony but didn't realize Dad could see my reflection on the glass door. He came running towards me, but he didn't know the balcony door was locked. He went straight through the glass door and fell to the floor. The glass hit Dad in the chest, knee, and right foot. He was bleeding badly. I looked at him, traumatized, crying, 'It's my dad! My dad!'

Arthur rushed onto the balcony and wrapped Dad in a blanket, then put him in his Mini. Having no insurance, we were pointed to a nunnery. They stitched up my dad with black string; he was swearing and trying to get out of there. When Arthur came back, Mum, Karen, and I were waiting. He said, 'Don't look at the car. Don't look at the car.' But I did. It was covered in Dad's blood.

Mum went to Arthur, 'He's dead, isn't he?'

Arthur replied, 'Jean, if he's dead, he's definitely not going to heaven for what he's just called them nuns. That's the truth.'

The nuns wouldn't let my dad go since he wasn't fit to move. So he escaped with the help of Arthur, Sheila, and my mum. They put Dad in a wheelchair and brought him back to the apartment, where the brain doctor looked at him.

'It's not right,' he said. 'You need to get him to a better place.'

Dad was a tough old boy, so we strapped him into the

seat of our car and drove home to England through the night. I could see Dad's leg and foot pulsating. When we got back to Stockwell, Arthur rushed him to hospital, where the doctors split him open. The nuns had left some glass inside. He wasn't far away from having serious gangrene and needing an amputation.

I remember coming home from hospital with my mum on the No. 2 bus, trundling along the South Lambeth Road. The smog hung heavy over London. I sat with my legs swinging from the worn checked seat as Aunty Mary printed off our tickets. My mum's sister, Aunty Mary, was stunning and known as the most beautiful bus conductor in town. Mum sat tall in a mink coat with her bouffant auburn hair and false eyelashes. More stylish than the average south Londoner, she was always very smart, in bright colours with nice jewellery.

Mum and I looked like two Italians wherever we went. I was a good-looking kid: short black hair, big brown eyes, and always with a tan. She was proud of how handsome I was.

I looked up at Mum. 'Mum, you've got glue on your eye.' She wasn't great at putting her eyelashes on. Still, she didn't need them; Mum was a natural beauty.

We went the four stops to Stockwell Station. Our flat was just down the road in Pakington House in Stockwell Gardens Estate.

We had been in the flats ever since I was born. After the war, with so many buildings damaged during the Blitz, council flats had become the thing: long lines of identical houses. I loved it, racing along the corridors, my

footsteps echoing in the concrete stairwell. There were no back fences. It was a community, a family community, mainly traditional British: Lee Martin, the Sullivans, the Whitmores, the Watkinses, the Slaneys, the Orams, and then us, the Emmetts. There were around twenty solid kids, from my age to about nine years old. There was a lot of love and laughter in them flats; real salt of the earth. They were incredible people with nothing, struggling along. We Emmetts had a little bit, though, because Dad was naughty.

That day, the flats were very empty. Usually women in their aprons would be chatting in the doorways, but I could see the Tally Man, the money-lender, who came weekly to collect any outstanding debts. He had a trilby hat.

'Here comes the Tally Man,' the warning would come.

'Say I'm not in,' the women would say.

Doors would close. It was exciting.

I could hear the arguments. 'I'll give you a pound a week,' Mrs Slaney said. The Tally Man grunted and agreed to 'give it a whirl'.

Dad didn't have a Tally Man, and we were one of the few lucky houses that he didn't visit.

We had one of the bigger flats on the ground floor. It was covered in flock wallpaper which felt like velvet. The bathroom, with a light blue toilet, was a bit small, but Karen and I had our own bedrooms. Our neighbours were in and out of the house the whole time. Food was always being cooked in the kitchen, where a rack for drying clothes, made of wood and rope, would dangle just above the cooker. Mum's food was very tasty. She would make corned-beef hash with egg on top, spaghetti bolognese, or lamb's liver

and bacon with gravy and cabbage. Her steak-and-kidney puddings, made old-style, were to die for. Cheese on toast with grilled tomatoes was my favourite.

On Saturdays, we would go to the pasty shop or the old Chinese restaurant. Every two weeks, we would have pie and mash with lovely jellied eels and parsley liquor – that's parsley sauce they made using the water kept from the jellied eels. The best pies were made of suet and shortcrust with lamb and gravy. Harrington's on Wandsworth Road had queues that you wouldn't believe. Harrington's also had a speaking parrot which used to swear. All the kids loved it. My friends from school would be there, along with their mums in rollers and hairnets. I would talk with my mates, but Mum would always tell me to hurry up.

Every 30 seconds or so, there was an order. 'Double pie mash!' The kitchen was by the counter so they would never write the order out. Instead, they would shout, 'Four double pies, mash, licker, more pies, more mash.' The food used to come quickly on trays like the ones in prison, but it was tasty. The tables had an old-fashioned tiled Edwardian marble top and, if you ate in, you were allowed about 10 or 15 minutes to be in and out. I always had chilli vinegar and lots of salt and pepper on my pie and mash.

Dad would often have friends to stay. They were wanted by the police so Mum would take a Tupperware and bring some pie and mash back for tea. Sometimes I would be woken up by police raiding the flat. My sister Karen and I would stand in our pyjamas in the living room while they went through all the rooms.

The living room was my favourite place. Dad had a free-standing bronze bar with a black rim which he had bought from his drinking club in Balham. It was ornate, engraved with dragons. There were two bottles on the wall, set up with optics for dispensing measures: a Cinzano and Jade Liqueur. A print of *The Chinese Girl* by Vladimir Tretchikoff hung above it. Dad would sit in the room and say, 'Wow, that's our bar.'

When I woke up in the morning, I would smell the cold ashtray and sip my mum's leftover gin and tonic. I loved that feeling. I knew my mum's glass by her bright red lipstick.

Dad never wore a shirt inside the flat, just his boxer shorts or dressing gown. He would sit me and Karen on his knee and sing us songs.

My dad tried to be the opposite of his own father. He tried to be a good dad.

Every Saturday, I had my hair cut with Dad at Alberto's, near the bus station in Camberwell Green. Dad would park wherever he wanted to. His trick was to prop up the car bonnet, turn the park light on, and take the radiator cap off, then leave the car there. If anyone came along, he'd tell them, 'No, we've broken down.' We did it all the time.

I loved Alberto's: the smell of cheap aftershave, lots of towels hanging around, the sound of cheeks being slapped after shaving. Alberto was very Italian, near-bald, with neat black hair that looked like it had been painted on. He used to rest a board across the arms of one of the barber chairs, and I would sit there with a white apron on, looking like an angel. I had a crew cut so there was nothing to cut – he would just trim the edges, going carefully around my

ears. Dad would sit there having his beard trimmed and his nails done pristine. He was spotlessly clean. So was his car; you could eat off the floor.

Dad had this thing about his weight. He was only little, but about 15 stone with a bulbous chest. Then he lost weight and became muscular. He was a smart boy: little suede jackets, colourful trousers, and brogues. He looked like a gangster, a bit like Desperate Dan from *The Beano*: a big hard face, a look of authority. Dad was a very violent man; not to us, but people were frightened of him. He had a reputation. 'Brian Emmett – be careful,' they'd say.

One Sunday afternoon, I was with Dad, Mum, and Karen. Sunday was always a family day for us. Dad used to take us to lovely restaurants, a lot of Jewish restaurants. We were on our way back from Bloom's, a very famous Jewish restaurant in Aldgate. The waiters used to be very smart, with nice white shirts and overalls. There were wooden floors, lots of reflective glass, and beams. It was very busy and very noisy, with a real sense of Mafia. My dad loved Bloom's, because he liked the traditional Jewish way. He always enjoyed things that were the opposite to how he grew up, such as nice food, stylish clothes, and being out of London.

We'd had a good lunch at Bloom's: a chicken and vegetable soup with noodles (*lokshen*) and dumplings (made from *matzo*, unleavened flatbread), followed by saddle of lamb, *latkes* (chopped potato and onion), and chopped herring. My mum and dad had the salt beef with the new greens and all that.

On our way back, we were at the Vauxhall one-way

system. Suddenly this guy started shouting at us; something to do with Dad's driving.

My dad went absolutely mad. He used to bite his tongue when he was angry; I did the same. Dad chased the guy in the car, screeching round the corners, flinging us from side to side.

'Brian, stop! Brian, stop!' Mum yelled.

After about 10 minutes, Dad came to his senses. I remember the relief.

'Get out of the car. I'm going to follow him,' Dad said to Mum. So Mum and Karen got out.

'I'm leaving Michael in here,' my mum said in the hope of stopping him. But Dad flew off with me in the car. Mum screamed.

By now, Dad was deep into crime. He had businesses everywhere, including Mac Cars, a cab firm in Clapham Old Town. Then three shops down, Dad and his partner Arthur Suttie had one of the first betting shops in London. Betting was illegal. They used to gamble on the streets, but Dad opened this office. A couple of the Great Train Robbers used to stop by, and apparently one of the cars used during the robbery was hidden back there. Although they were criminals, I really liked the Great Train Robbers. To me, they were genuinely nice people: kind, family-orientated, and non-violent. Just naughty boys.

Then Dad was arrested for armed robbery. He was bang in trouble, a lot of trouble. Dad had done small prison sentences, but up to this point he had been one of those unique criminals who almost never got sentenced. He had been on trial for some naughty things, but got

'Not Guilties' on one, two, three major cases: major cases for which he could have easily got double figures inside.

Now Dad was a Cat-A prisoner (the maximum-security category) and held on remand at Brixton Prison. My mum didn't want me to visit him, but I was desperate to go.

'Mum, Mum, I want my dad,' I said. 'I want my dad.'

So Mum borrowed Aunty Moya's car and we drove to Brixton. Dad was there in the visiting room behind this glass partition with wire mesh. I couldn't touch his hand, kiss him, or touch his face. I really wanted to, and started to cry and scream.

'What's Dad doing in here?'

I was traumatized. He was my hero.

The prison officer tried to grab hold of me. My dad snapped, saying, 'Let him go.' But Mum hissed, 'Brian!' and he came to his senses.

On the way home, our car broke down around Bon Marché, the department store in Brixton, but a guy got it started and we eventually got back.

I felt sad and was very quiet for a few days. I didn't talk to anybody except Trixie, my beautiful German Shepherd dog, given to me for my fifth birthday. We weren't allowed to keep her in the flats but we did; I was always breaking the rules. 'Look, the dog's got to go,' Dad would say. But I had fallen in love with my dog, so we kept her.

Dad continued to protest his innocence. He put an advert in the *Evening News* looking for the cockney cab driver who had driven him home on Derby Day, the day of the robbery. This would give him an alibi. The cockney cab driver answered the advert.

SINS OF FATHERS

During the cross-examination at the Old Bailey, the prosecutor asked him, 'How do you remember this man?'

He said, 'Well, it was a great fare from Epsom Downs to Stockwell. He was violently sick in the back of my car. It was very late. I remember the name Jean. The man said, "Go and get Jean," so I knocked on this door, and this wonderful woman came out, cleaned up my cab with bleach, and made me an egg sandwich and a cup of tea, and put this man indoors.'

One day, when about six months had passed after Dad had been arrested, Mum said to me, 'Go and turn the bath off.' I walked into the bathroom and Dad was right there, sitting in the bath. The cab driver's evidence had got him a 'Not Guilty'.

'Hello, son.'

Dad was back. I was so excited, I was over the moon. I was his boy.

3. BREAKING BOUNDARIES

I flew around the flats on my green-and-white three-wheeler bike, which Dad had given me. I was five and always had the best toys in the flats. I stored them in a big box. All of my friends used to put their toys in there as well, but I was always in charge because of my big bike.

It was a sunny day. I could see Dad out of the corner of my eye, in the garden training: squatting up and down, the sweat dripping from his brow and glistening on his chest. He never used dumbbells; he would get bricks and sandbags out instead. My dad was super-fit and loved to box.

I came to a halt on my bike. The big R. White van had arrived; this massive lorry with a low side, which pulled up and down. It used to deliver lemonades, Tizers, Coca-Colas – every bottle of drink that you could imagine. Mum brought our empties out.

All the kids would be standing there gathered around the lorry, going, 'Mum, get us this, get us that.'

I loved making cream soda – ice cream in Tizer. I remember thinking, *Wow!* It was such a treat.

Mum and I returned to the flat. She and Dad were going out to dinner. I watched Mum getting ready. With an eye for colour and style, she coordinated her

clothes really well, always finishing with a silk scarf in the summer and cashmere scarf in the winter. Mum had organized a babysitter called Sarah for me. She was sixteen years old, blonde, and very grown-up looking.

After Sarah had given me bacon and eggs, I went to my room and started getting changed for bed. But she followed, sneaking in behind me. She then pushed me back onto the bed and tied me up in a sheet before touching me sexually. It was like a frightening funfair ride, but Sarah behaved as if it was normal.

Where's my mum? Where's my mum? I was screaming inside.

I didn't tell anyone; I just knew not to. But it took me to a very dark place in my head. I learnt to cover my feelings up, but it was like the pea in a mattress in the fairy story about the princess: the more I ignored the trauma, the worse it got.

I raged. There was loads of rage in me at six. Attaching myself to my mum's apron, I would hide behind her leg, never wanting to let Mum go. If I couldn't see her, I'd be going, 'Where are you? Where are you?'

But as much as there was the beast, there was beauty.

Dad and Mum were really good with kids and there were always children in the house. Dad gave me the book *Tarzan*, which was as long as my legs. I carried it around the whole time. Inside, there was a jungle scene with Tarzan and his wife Jane, and their son Jack. Dad told me that he was Jack, and he would do a perfect jungle call. But he'd say, 'Never ask me to do the Tarzan call in front of anyone, because no one must know I'm Jack.'

'Okay, Dad. Do it in the car,' I whispered.

My parents would often take us to this big playground in Clapham with lots of swings, slides, and seesaws. I remember walking up the slides, and coming down facing backwards on my bum. My mum was traumatized, my dad furious.

'You wait until I get him,' he said. I ran.

I was always running away from my dad and, as much as I was naughty, I started to develop subconscious ways of coping with my feelings. The mask was always there. It wasn't madness; I just felt uneasy. The continuing sexual abuse from the babysitter triggered it big time. I felt different from other kids: a mixture of opposites; fearless yet fearful.

In September, I was packed off to Stockwell Primary School. It was an old-fashioned black-and-white concrete Victorian school with shiny floors. There was virtually no colour there, but it wasn't intimidating. The classrooms had little desks, painted either white or blue, with dusty windows through which you could see the climbing bars outside.

Most of the children in the flats went to the same school, so we used to meet under this big arch then walk together. Bonnie, a disabled child with a big head and dark hair, who lived upstairs, would see us off, singing songs over the balcony as we left. On the way to school, we used to pass this disturbed woman dressed in black, with dirty grey hair. Her husband and son had both been killed in the war, but she would sit outside her house waiting for them to come home. Everyone was frightened of her, but I wasn't. I found her intriguing.

Next door to the woman's house was Mary's Dairy, where we used to stop most mornings. It was a very traditional shop, filled with the smell of freshly baked bread. There were five of us: me; Frank, who had goofy teeth and a snotty nose; his brother Stephen; Karen; and Karen's best friend, Libby. Mum and Frank and Stephen's mother Violet used to take it in turns dropping us off. When my mum took us, she would buy a red cardboard holder containing five doughnuts. Mum would give us each one. She used to get told off by the teachers because there was sugar on them, but she couldn't help herself.

In December 1963, my little brother Martin was born at home. I wasn't allowed in the house. The screams from my mum were awful. I went around to the little park behind our flat and clutched the railings, as if I was a women's libber handcuffed to one of the fences in the city.

'I want my mum,' I screamed.

My dad came out, saying, 'Someone shut him up.' But I wasn't shutting up until Mum came out.

About two hours later, I was allowed in. Martin was a big baby, swaddled in white, lying in a Moses basket, very sweet. He became the equilibrium of the family. He had a quiet, peaceful look about him. There was no noise.

It worked out that there were sides in the family: Karen and Dad; me and Mum. But so as not to upset anybody, Mum operated in a way that you couldn't tell what side she was on. When Martin came along, he evened it out. He was in both camps.

I could never remember my brother's name. I used to run around the school and say 'What's my brother's name?' then go *Fartin' Martin* in my head. Actually, the

trauma of the sexual abuse was taking hold. I couldn't tie my shoelaces up. I couldn't blow my nose.

Noticing something was up with me, my mother over-compensated with her love.

'All you do is mollicoddle,' Dad would say, and the voices of the two of them would ring in my head. The conflict went on for years and caused problems between my parents. My dad got very jealous of my mum's love for me. He was a very powerful man but also very frail inside, broken from his own historic issues with his own father. On the other hand, Dad was dying to be a nice man, and my mother drew that side of him out into the open.

During the day, Dad would go to Hendon, where he and Arthur Suttie had a car dealership, a front hiding one of his criminal activities. There were a lot of Ford Zephyrs and Zodiacs, really stylish: big white steering wheels with the shiny metal rim of the horn and the little radio. I was always over there on Saturdays and Sundays, sitting in the office, watching the cars being cleaned, and breathing in my favourite smell of old polished leather.

The car front meant Dad always had cool cars. One day, Dad, Arthur, and me were driving up Battersea Rise in a Jaguar past Millets, a shop I loved, with its nice denim jackets hanging outside. As we approached Harvey's, a plush furniture shop that sold velvet chairs, Dad and Arthur saw this guy. They parked me up around the corner and jumped out of the car, then disappeared.

I heard screams. I couldn't see anything, but something was obviously going on. As I looked out of my window, I saw this guy running towards me, hurt, bleeding, blood dripping from his mouth. He fell against my window and

slipped down to the pavement, leaving a smear of blood on the glass.

My little mind was putting it together. Dad rushed around the corner, then remembered that I was in the car. It made him even worse.

After the guy ran away, Dad grabbed hold of me and started cuddling me, saying, 'Son, son.'

When we got home, I ran across to my nan Mary, who lived opposite us in Stockwell with my grandfather John. My nan was short with beautiful eyes, lovely chin, and a small nose. Always immaculately dressed, she wore nice patent shoes and carried a bag. She used to walk like Charlie Chaplin.

Nan opened the door in her rollers, and I immediately felt loved. I didn't say anything about my dad and the fight because I had learnt it was best mouth shut.

Still, Nan could see that something was up. She went into the larder; a place I loved, full of freshly baked pies, stewed fruit and butter. Bringing out some fish, Nan made me a cold fish sandwich, which was my favourite. Everyone loved her fish sandwiches. The fish came from a fish-and-chip shop on the one-way system of Stockwell. It was a proper fish-and-chip shop. If the fish wasn't used that day, they would throw it away, but the fishmonger used to save my grandmother fish for the following day. That's how she liked it. The guy would cook it for her, then she would collect the cold haddock or skate.

Mum was waiting for me when I got back. It was Sunday night: bath-time, and there would be no messing around. Dad was adamant about cleanliness. Mum used to wash our hair with Vosene anti-dandruff shampoo

3. BREAKING BOUNDARIES

and vinegar to make our hair shine. I loved Sunday-night baths, spending time with my mum. I felt I was in the presence of an angel. She would comb my hair and say, 'I love you.'

But life in the flats was about to come to an end. A child was raped on the estate. My dad and Arthur chased the man around the back of Stockwell Tube Station, but that rape turned it for me. After that, I was full of fear in those flats. What had happened – the rapist taking this child into a shed – took the cream off the place for me. I was always spooked after that, and I just switched off.