



My Journey by Emma Price

The journey through life is not one that can be mapped out or programmed into a Sat Nav, I wish we could but sadly humans don't come with sat navs and don't follow the road mapped out for them, many, including Mum veer off the road travelling instead as if in some slow motion car crash.

My journey began 46 years ago, my family started with brother, then I came along followed by my younger brother 3 years later. We seemed like a perfect family. Dad worked hard as a carpenter to ensure we lived comfortably and Mum stayed home to care for us.

Sadly by this time my Mum had veered off the road and the sad, lonely journey into addiction and mania had already begun but no one seemed to notice....

She had suffered such an horrendous childhood that coping with a family of her own brought about pressures she was not equipped to cope with. Perhaps the pressure of having this perfect 'family' she had built in her mind was too much to live up to.

For the first few years of my life I was unaware that my Mum was different to any other Mum. She would be there to collect me from School; a beautiful vision of long dark hair and big brown eyes. I never noticed the slight wobble on her heels or slurred speech; it meant little to a 7 year old. She would be there every day to take us to School and waiting to walk us home. She would cheer us on during Sports Day and see our Nativity plays etc.

I think I was probably about 11 the first time she went 'away' to hospital for a rest. My little brother and I went to stay with Nan, she was my **first** saviour and guardian angel always; her warm comforting home was our place of sanctuary. There I didn't need to worry if I'd have clean pants and socks for

School or bread for toast. Nan took care of everything and we thrived there, her door was always open to us.

I was a model pupil, A stream classes, lead cellist in the Orchestra, gymnast, hockey player, netball player, It didn't seem to matter too much that Mum stopped showing up to watch performances or turn up to parents evening. Life still seemed good, sadly my utopia didn't last.

My bubble burst when Mum didn't collect my younger brother from School one day and the local vicar took him home to **find Mum had overdosed on valium and vodka**. She claimed it was accidental but that was the moment my childhood ended. An ambulance took Mum away and she was sectioned to the dreaded D Block. A place whispered about in hushed tones, a place never really spoken of. Only Dad could visit her but on Sundays she could come out. We would go to Country parks and the vibrant woman who stood teetering on heels with her hair flowing in the breeze that I adored so much as a little girl was gone, she was just a shadow. She wasn't really there, her sadness was palpable even then and I would count the hours till it was time for her to return to her sanctuary and we could return to Nan.

I could list the awful, the embarrassing and sometimes violent moments that followed in the years after but there are too many to list. The odd cans of lager were swapped for whole bottles of cider on days she had access to the shop, those days were filled with dread and a sickness in the pit of my stomach. Her GP happily supplied her with enough valium to start a pharmacy, there was no need to buy illegal drugs, she managed to screw up just fine with valium and booze.

Some memories are etched in my mind with such clarity I can still picture those moments when I close my eyes. I came in from horse riding and she went to slap me because I had muddy boots, in her drunken/drugged up state she missed, unfortunately for her I was faster and full of anger. One slap from me sent her flying to the floor. She didn't get up. My little brother and I stood over her. I thought I'd killed her and for one tiny moment I hoped I had thus stopping that feeling of unending dread of the increasing times she would turn into a drunken drugged up mess and either seek attention through claims of terminal illnesses or attack us mentally, verbally or physically.

I hadn't killed her, she had just passed out drunk& drugged, we dragged her into a chair and left her to sleep it off. When she woke up she had wet herself such was her stupor, my loathing for her in that moment still makes me feel sick inside, and yet she couldn't remember any of it.

I went from being a model student to careless one, missing homework deadlines, giving up the cello and using sport as a way of venting my anger. I was regularly sent off the pitch for tackling opponents **as much venom** in my veins as the drugs and alcohol that flowed through hers. Teachers would ask what was wrong. My excuses were varied but never the truth. The truth was a shameful secret I kept from everyone. One School report read 'we cannot

understand the change in Emma's behaviour; She is more vocal and disruptive in class. I couldn't tell them the reason I hadn't handed in my homework was because I had been busy cleaning up her vomit or making tea for the family desperately trying to restore some normality to our chaos, ironing our School clothes or that I had lain awake all night after she came screaming at me in the middle of the night.

I would save money from my dinner money to buy personal items such was her lack of care and understanding. She would never think to ask me if I needed tampons etc and I took on part time jobs to pay for everything from deodorant to underwear.

After leaving School I went to college and work. I went through a phase of going out on weekends and drinking to complete oblivion, stealing her valium. I wanted to know what the attraction was, why she found such comfort in it. I found no comfort there, it only led to more vicious rows and after one particularly horrendous weekend where I failed to come home she threw me out. My Dad who I adored didn't stop her and save me, he thought it might help in some sad crazy way.

I moved into my **boyfriend's parent's house**. I hated it there, despite the hell that was home, I missed my brothers, On the weekly occasion that I went home she was usually drunk and drugged up, her eyes unable to focus, a row would ensue and I would head back to a place that was never my home.

That was a time in my life I when I thought maybe I was destined to take that same insane road Mum had followed. I partied too hard, drank too much and rebelled like my life depended on it. If there was a party I was always there, people thought I was cool, little did they know....

I discovered I was pregnant on Xmas Eve 1986 and the second of my saviours, Laura Louise was born on 24th May 1987, that sweet baby saved my life, finally all the love I craved from my own Mother I was able to bestow on my baby girl, that baby is 27 now and not only is she the best daughter any Mum could wish for, she is also my best friend.

Sadly her father resented the fact that I had heaped the responsibility of being a parent on to him as if I had conceived her alone! His resentment turned into controlling me, suddenly he was able to call the shots and so began yet another cycle of mental and physical abuse which led to self harming, bulimia and on occasion drinking and taking prescription pills much like Mum. I could see my own spiral into darkness staring at me as my self esteem was eroded once again.

We had bought a house together but he preferred to be out spending cash with his mates or picking up some random girl in a club so when a job came up with a local Carpet company as a Head Dyers assistant I applied hoping the extra money would make life better for us all and ensure Lo had everything she needed.

That day was to change the course of my life forever. I went for the interview and the man that interviewed me became my 3rd saviour and continues to be

to this day. He had no idea that he saved me from a fate much like my Mums. I thought he was a bossy slightly arrogant task master, he thought I was likely to last 5 minutes in a mans world and be off to have more babies before the year was out! How wrong we both were! That arrogant boss become my Knight in shining armour, a wonderful father to my little girl and some 20+ years later we are still happy together as a family and expecting an additional member courtesy of Lo next year!

My husband has been with me through all the highs and lows that we have endured as a family and he is a true hero.

Mum had a massive stroke at 59 and for a time she forgot she drank or took pills. She was sober and drug free for the first time. I visited and cared for her doing a 250 mile round trip every other week staying for a few days, we had a precious few months together with love and clarity, I finally had a Mum, she was doing really well when sadly the wrong person stepped into her life and she chose a path I begged her not to take but I could not travel it with her again and keep my own sanity in tact.

Her path eventually led to complete organ failure, dying alone in a hospital with no one that loved her there to hold her hand and tell it was okay to let go or that she was loved.

My Mum died on 24th May 2010 on my daughters 23rd Birthday.

I didn't grieve for Mum, no one seemed to expect me to, was she worthy of grief? After all she had chosen alcohol and drugs over everything!

Our hearts and soul aren't programmed like that though and it took the words of an ex addict to make me see my Mum wasn't weak willed or selfish, she was sick but couldn't reach out and admit she needed help. Reading Russell Brands Booky Wook made me see addiction from the other side of the bottle, the hopelessness, the feeling of being able to drown in a fog that makes you forget your troubles, to numb the pain even for a short while.

Then I read an article which directed me to an online charity called COAP. Its a place where young people can talk openly and confidentially about their feelings, to seek help and advice. Finally I could reach out and turn my negative experiences into something positive.

I began to reply to posts and eventually became a senior mentor; it took reading these posts to see I wasn't facing my own demons or dealing with my own grief, and in order to support others I needed to seek help myself too.

I sought out my Mums final resting place and wanted to ensure that those who loved her and needed closure could say Goodbye.

My Dad kindly bought a plaque for Mum even though they had been divorced many years before as nothing marked her grave, I know he loved my Mum and she is still in his thoughts every day. On a summers afternoon in August we gathered together and gave Mum a fitting Goodbye. The next day I went to visit my Nan's grave at our family church. I went to say a prayer for Mum, I felt

such peace knowing she was finally at rest and remembered. The Vicar remembered Mum in the service prayers and so Mum had finally found peace, something denied her in life.

I want people to know that addiction has a ripple effect like a stone dropped on a pond. It affects everyone it touches, children still hide the shame scared that they will be taken into care, partners blind themselves to extent of the problem in the hope it will go away. It won't. Often marriages fail and children are left to cope with the addict alone with no support network. Many of the messages I read on COAP's website reflect this. That fear and sick feeling I had all those years ago as I walked up the path to our house persists in the stomachs and minds of so many young people more than 30 years on. Nothing has changed, still the silence screams in their minds, still they try to hide the awful truth and shame.

We need to break down those barriers of shame and silence. That is why groups like COAP and DrugFAM are vital. Young people need to feel they are being listened to and that they are not alone. We can't change their lives BUT we can listen, share our experiences and support them.

We also need to take care of ourselves, I am lucky to have a wonderful family and a close group of friends. My addiction is not alcohol or drugs, I don't need oblivion. I continue to love and ride horses, it's my escape from life's pressures, a time to be me.

Saying Goodbye to Mum and finding some kind of forgiveness was a huge part of my journey; it helped enormously as forgiveness is easier to carry than bitterness. It closed a painful chapter in my life but the experiences can't be forgotten, they will linger with me in the shadows but I can use them with positive aims now.

The next step on my journey is to train as a counsellor specialising in supporting those bereaved through addiction as I feel specialist counsellors who have had similar experiences are vital to support others like myself.