

# IS THERE ANYBODY OUT THERE?

**M**y story starts before I was even born. My parents' marriage was doomed from the start. I was only two when my mother ran off leaving my three year old sister and me with our grandparents. From that point, childhood memories are a mixture of anger, pain and loneliness.

Abandoned by my mother, I was often clueless about my father's whereabouts, while his girlfriend—a cruel, angry and



violent woman 'looked after us'. She wasn't nice and would get angry with us kids and hit us. She would get angry a lot.

One day, Dad left us at a big house. He said we were there to stay for a while. I cried a lot, but nobody hit me and there were loads of other children. I celebrated my seventh birthday at the big house. They gave me my first ever party with a cake and everyone sang 'Happy Birthday'. But Dad wasn't there. I felt so alone.

This was my first experience of the social care system.

Eventually Dad came back and took us to our new home. It was cold, damp, grey and bare, apart from a bed, a blanket and a billion bed bugs. We were always skint. At least there was no money for food and clothes, only cigarettes and beer. Dad kept the bookies busy, always blowing his wages on the horses. His girlfriend would send me to fetch him. I daren't return without him or she'd hit me.

Sometimes I'd lie in bed imagining a life without beatings. I counted myself lucky if I just got a slap on the head. Often she punched me in the kidneys. That hurt! A lot! If I curled up on the floor, she'd whack me in the testicles. So I tried to avoid that.

One day she took the broom handle to me. 'You didn't dry the dishes fast enough,' she screamed flicking a cigarette butt at my head and spitting in my face. Perhaps if I was kind to her, she'd be kind to me. So I bought her a box of chocolates; she punched me in the jaw. I really was alone.

Why could she not just die?

I had to run away. I reached our road end and hid in a bush—but cold and then hunger sent me home and for that I got a hammering.



I ran away again. The police picked me up. I begged them, 'Don't take me back.' But they did. I got another beating as she yelled at me, 'You're useless, thick, stupid. Nobody likes you. Your mother hates you. You'll never amount to anything.'

# I'LL NEVER BE BEATEN AGAIN

I proved her wrong. I passed my 11+. I had asked God to help me pass the exam, the first time I'd spoken to God in a long time. I'd often asked him to stop her beatings. He hadn't – so I thought he hated me too.

But when I passed the exam, I knew she could never call me stupid again!

The grammar school, however, wasn't what I'd expected.

I had a uniform, but no gym kit. I had to play sports in my new grey trousers and they got muddy. When I got home she beat me again. I didn't fit in at the school. All the other boys had nice clothes and fancy watches with calculators. I would

