

My great escape

Bri sees a new life opening up – but will he be able to stay on track? He tells the fourth part of his story



Thinking and talking about this new way of life was an odd experience for me and I found it hard to mingle with the new family that were suddenly claiming to be my brothers and sisters. They dressed and talked very differently from me and never seemed to swear!

The place I was staying in on the south coast of England used to be an old folks home. As I sat in that huge house I knew my time there was limited, and as my health improved and I began to have fewer sleepless nights, I wanted to do something constructive. I started to look around for something that I could do and be a part of.

I found a place in Sussex called Abbots Leigh. It was a Christian centre run by a community called the Bethany Fellowship that had 50 acres for me to wander in. It had 24 rooms and was not a drug rehab but a place where people like me could rekindle the life that had drained out of them. The fact was, I was not only wrecked physically, I was also very badly affected with all kinds of mental issues – mainly paranoia and a deep sense of rejection that had afflicted me since childhood.

The centre was geared around a regime of rebuilding people's lives with a living faith and belief in God. I decided I wanted to check out this wonder drug, this wonder faith – whatever it was I was hungry for it. During my time at Abbots Leigh I met people who had similar backgrounds to me, all with drug problems, and they told me of how their lives had changed and been rebuilt.

Most of my time there was spent in the grounds working and sweeping leaves off the land, but I became fed up with that very quickly. I had had enough, and I needed to move on again.

I moved to Brighton, a place full of addicts. It was a dangerous place for me to be – and I knew it. I found a bedsit in the Kempton area and worked for the fellowship in a coffee bar inside a

disused cinema. We called the place 'the city' and the cinema part was used for all sorts of meetings.

During this time my love for a lady who was helping me cope with life grew deeper, and after two years we decided to move on and have our own life. I felt that God had started to work on me and my old attitudes changed dramatically. We moved to Hampshire in 1984 and later on that year my wife gave birth to our son. My once broken-down mess of a life was changing. My free will was still there – I just did not want to stick needles into my body anymore. I had found myself changing from the inside out.

In 1985 I decided to go to Winchester Agricultural College to qualify as a tree surgeon,

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working with trees and hedges. During this time there were many tests put before me – I had several bone breakages, where using morphine was the only drug that helped.

One day I went onto a shed roof to repair it, even though my wife had asked me not to go on the shed alone and to wait for help – she was right as usual. I decided to try and repair it on my own and I had a terrible fall, breaking my leg and my hip. I was in agony for many weeks and was given 5mg diamorphine dispersible tablets, 50 tabs at a time.

Truly this was the greatest test yet – and I failed miserably. The doctor called one night, but not to see me. He had come to tell my wife I had used 1,400 tabs in eight weeks, and I felt my world crash around me. I felt I had gone right back to square one.

Next issue: Bri struggles to regain control.

Events

23 May – Dublin

Alcohol and drug use in young people: A world of solution

Organised by Juvenile Mental Health Matters. This conference aims to present a high level of problematic substance use and misuse in the context of evidence based intervention strategies and long-term community solutions. www.juvenilementalhealthmatters.com

24-26 May – Athens

The 9th Stapleford International Addiction Conference

Organised by Stapleford. For details on this year's event visit www.stapleford-athens.net

06 June – London

London Drug Policy Forum

Organised by LDPF. This one-day conference aims to look at the implications of *Drugs: Protecting Families and Communities* for local partnerships and explore issues faced in creating the systems and services for the future. www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/C05EC1CD-FE2E-42D9-832B-85109A60AFC1/0/SS_LDPF_JoiningitupFlyer2008.pdf

10 June – Glasgow

Drugs and Alcohol Today – Scotland

Organised by Pavilion and others. This is the Scottish equivalent of the London *Drugs and Alcohol Today* event and is now in its third year. More information and a booking form from Pavilion. www.pavpub.com

11 June – London

Treatment and reintegration: Delivering the drug strategy

Organised by NTA. This one-day conference aims to debate on the meaning of the new drug strategy. More information and a booking form from Pavilion – www.pavpub.com

30 June-1 July – Birmingham

UK national smoking cessation conference

Organised by Exchange Supplies. This 4th annual conference aims to provide a unique forum for professional development and knowledge sharing in the smoking cessation field. More details – 01305 262244, www.uknsc.org

3 July – London

Dual diagnosis – substance misuse: the challenges for mental health professionals

Organised by Pavilion. This conference addresses substance misuse from a mental health perspective and ask how we turn good practice into reality. More information and a booking form from Pavilion – www.pavpub.com

8-10 September – Stockholm

The International Conference, World Forum Against Drugs.

Organised by World Forum. This conference aims to exchange ideas and share experiences on how to develop methods and move forward to the visionary goal of a world free from drug abuse. Details at www.wfad08.org

27-28 October – London

National Conference on Injecting Drug Use

Organised by Exchange Supplies. The NCIDU conference aims to develop the field, share information and learn by bringing together clinicians, researchers and users. More details – 01305 262244, www.exchangesupplies.org