

My True Story - by Simon Merchant

I left school at the age of sixteen with no job: just a dream of living a riotous life, becoming a rock star and dying young.

Born to a middle class mother and father, I had three older brothers - Mark, Alan and Ian. My Dad was working a lot when I was very young. My Mum was working, too. I spent my days with my Gran, who lived a five minute walk away.

I was very eager to start school. I went to 'Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Infant and Junior School' in Kingswood, Bristol. I went there because my brothers had. My days were spent staring out of the window, day-dreaming. It was a very confusing school for a five year old. At the time, it was the only education I knew. We were taught that if we behaved ourselves, we would go to heaven. There was no assurance: just an 'if'.

At the age of eight, we moved across town to a village near Bath. I attended Saltford Primary School with about one hundred pupils. The year was 1978, and within a year I was playing lots of football and listening to punk music. I was given the choice of whether or not to go to church, but I chose not to, because I wanted life

my way.

In my last year of Primary School, I was in trouble for hitting someone so hard a neighbour had to carry him home. I decided to run away from home. I left for school in the morning and did not return. I was found later that evening in the woods. After a struggle, I came home.

I left Junior School and went to the Comprehensive School with over a thousand pupils. It was later that year that I had my first alcoholic drink. It made me feel very relaxed, which at that time seemed good, because I was an uptight, shy boy. With what I thought was the answer to all my problems, I would drink - when money allowed.

I left school at the age of sixteen with no job: just a dream of living a riotous life, becoming a rock star and dying young. I worked in a warehouse and progressed quickly, soon becoming a van driver for the same firm. My evenings were mostly spent in the pubs and nightclubs of Bath. I was in a small rock band at this time. I soon got in a bad way, and

was fired for being lazy. At that time, it wasn't a bad thing, because I soon got a better job with more money, and I could get finished by 2pm.

I was now twenty years old, and spending a lot of days in the pub. Well, the inevitable happened: I got a drink-driving conviction after an accident on a steep hill. The car was written off. The engine ended up in the passenger compartment after being pushed through the car. It missed my knees by a few inches. I awoke in Bristol Royal Infirmary with a police doctor ready to take my blood. I knew the result already, though. I spent the summer of 1991 out of work, spending my dole money on drink and lazing about, annoying my family.



I picked myself up again and became a chef and passed my first real exam. It was in 1993 that I realised I couldn't stop drinking, and went to a counsellor. She told me not to worry: just to come along for a chat, so one afternoon a week, I would

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Speak to her about anything but my real problem.

It was time for another move - a little further afield, as things were getting too close in this country. I had no friends, so off I went to Australia. On the way I went to Indonesia, but was unable to enjoy it, because I drank all day and night.

There were many incidents in Australia which I was brought through. One afternoon, I sat around the back of Sydney Opera House. I looked to the left and saw the Harbour Bridge, with the blue water of the harbour on my right. I was so unhappy, but couldn't understand why, because I was in what some say is paradise.

I bought a bike, got on the train to Cairns and rode back to Sydney. On the way, I stopped in a few towns: Townsville, Brisbane and Surfers Paradise. I overstayed in Australia and handed myself in to Immigration. They sent me on my way, with a ban of eighteen months.

I was not happy at all, and didn't settle very well in Britain. I spent a cold December evening with the 'down-and-outs' of Bath, but not even they wanted to speak to me. I tried to buy them drinks, but I was just an embarrassment.

I started work with Royal Mail, and at the same time made my first attempt at suicide. However, I woke up and decided there would be no more attempts. I pulled myself together for about a year. I was beginning to be accepted by my family again, until the inevitable happened. I lost my temper in Calais while waiting 24 hours for a train, and drank again.

I kept myself together until a year later in the Isle of Wight, where I drank again and tried to stab myself. I was thrown off the island by the Police. I cried all the way home on the train because I knew that that was it. I felt that I would not last long if I carried on like this.

The following May, I started working night shifts. In July, I went on holiday to the Lake District. It was a disaster. I got drunk on the way up,

arriving in Kendal in the middle of the afternoon. I spent the next morning in the sun, shaking like a leaf with sweat on my forehead. The next night, I moved into a Bed and Breakfast in Windermere. I tried to do normal things - even a boat trip on Lake Windermere. After one more session, I got the train home and stayed in the New Forest with a friend who tried to keep me in line. I didn't go back to work: I was too unwell. After that, I went back to Bristol to my Mum and Dad. By that time, I could not stop drinking. I was frightened to leave the house and afraid to stay in. I felt like an outcast of the society which I had once felt part of.

I was very fortunate to survive the next two weeks. I locked myself in my room and tried to kill myself. I drank and took pills. My brother broke in and rushed me to hospital. I survived, only through the grace of God. I left the hospital three days later, but was back again within eight hours. This time, they sent me off to a rehabilitation clinic. I spent four days there. I was attacked by two patients and signed myself out. Then began a distressing two weeks for all concerned. All my brothers came to visit on the Saturday. We had not all been together in two years.

One hot afternoon, I was on the sofa with a thick coat on. Lonely, shivering with cold, sweat dripping down my cheeks and tears in my eyes, I said, 'If there is a God, help me now!' I fell down on my knees. The Bible says, 'And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.' (Jeremiah chapter 29 verse 13). Later that day, I was in hospital again, drying out for the last time. After becoming a little fitter physically, I wanted a change.

I was living at home with a very worried Mum and Dad, whilst attending a Treatment Centre three times a week. During that time, a decorator came to paint our house. We struck up a friendship. He told me about the Lord Jesus Christ and what He had done for me. We talked about

creation and evolution, and he also told me about his own preaching, which at that time did not make any sense to me: the only preachers I knew were not preachers but priests. He invited me to Pensford Gospel Hall, but the first week I was busy. The second week, I entered the Gospel Hall and sat near the front.

The preacher told me about the Prodigal Son from Luke chapter 15 of the Bible, and how the father had two sons and one of them asked his father for his inheritance. Subsequently, he left his father to live a riotous life. When his money ran out, he came to his father again. His father had compassion and forgave him for all that he had done.

I had always thought that I was too sinful to be forgiven. I had been taught that if I behaved, I would go to heaven. I had been full of sin and hate, so I figured that there was no way out, but now the Gospel was telling me that there is forgiveness of sin by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ as your own personal Saviour. I heard the Gospel again the following week and the third week. I was told that if I did not trust in Christ as Saviour now, I would go to a lost eternity.

I was saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As the hymnwriter says, 'My chains fell off, my heart was free. At the cross was where I first found the light and the burdens of my heart rolled away. It was there by faith I received my sight, and now I am happy all the day.'

The Bible says, 'That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.' (Romans chapter 10 verse 9). God loves each and every one of us so much that He gave His only begotten Son to die for you and for me. Amen.

