

DOMINOES

Yesterday, I was looking through all the stuff in our old home, as Mum and Dad aren't with us anymore. I found my 1995 diary from when I was ten. That was twenty years ago, and a very different world.

Wednesday, 25th January.

Dear Diary,

My parents! It's happened again. What should I do? Maybe I should tell someone at school, but I don't want to get anyone into trouble. Anyway, if Les and his mob find out, they'll just start picking on me again. 'You're just some kind of pathetic worm.' Then he'll do one of those headlocks, like he's a wrestler. I know I mustn't cry, or that will make it even worse.

Teachers keep on talking about this stuff, but I just don't know if it means people like me. When I went to bed last night, I could hear them downstairs.

'You're not fit to be a mother!'

'Brian! Please!'

'At least I bring them up to have backbone. You're way too soft!'

Then it went all quiet. They must have shut the living-room door. Anyway, I think it's just normal stuff for families.

Thursday, 26th January.

I've had a really bad morning. I don't know why, but Mum was in one of her moods. Dad had gone to work. He works shifts. Mum had this plaster over her eye because she had tripped over the step when she was putting the bins out. It made her look even more scary than usual. But when I looked at the plaster, she smacked me around the head and told me I had to show her my maths homework. She started shouting and told me that I was soft. Then she changed all my answers and told me to copy them out, so it looked like I'd done it.

Friday, 27th January.

Some good news from school! I was joint top with the maths homework. It didn't stop Les picking on me. He kept calling me a teacher's pet. Anyway, Dad seemed really pleased with me when I got home. He told me I was 'a chip off the old block'. When I looked at Mum, she put her finger over her lips and shook her head from side-to-side.

I've come to bed and I can hear shouting from downstairs. Now it's gone much quieter. Maybe they've shut the door, or they're in a good mood because I've done so well. I keep wondering if, in secret, Mum has told Dad the truth about my homework. Anyway, I'll be really glad if Mum hasn't. He's not the one who yells at me. She's the one that does that. But I think he yells at her when he thinks I'm not listening.

Twenty years later and everything is so different now. Later that year, 1995, my parents told me that Dad had to go abroad on business for a few years. I thought it was a bit strange, as he was a lorry driver, but Mum explained that Dad had got a new contract with a British firm, based in Germany. Mum and I left the area and I had to move to another primary school in North Wales for my last six months. We lived in a flat near Mum's parents, my grandparents, 'Nain' and 'Taid'. It was horrible at first. It wasn't the kids that were the problem. I just didn't know anyone, and I felt really stupid because I couldn't speak any Welsh.

Time passed, but Mum and I never went back to our real home. She explained that that was Dad's home now, and that they wouldn't be living together anymore because of his new job. It didn't make any sense, even then, but I had learnt not to ask questions. I didn't see my father for years. I blamed my mother, of course. It was all her fault. She was the one who had been horrible to me. As time moved on, and things got better, she started being much less strict. At first, I reckoned it was because of Nain and Taid, but, as I grew older, I started to wonder if it was for another reason.

Twenty years on, and I know so much more. Dad didn't move job. He had been put in prison for domestic abuse. Mum had stopped being so horrible to me, because Dad wasn't around to be horrible to her. I think it's called 'the domino effect'. It was on my 18th birthday when my mother told me that I was old enough to know the truth. 'You're a man now,' she said. All this happened a long time ago, but the scars stay with me today, as a man, aged thirty.