
Opening Extract from...

Beware of the Dog

Rugby's Hard Man Reveals All

Written by Brian Moore

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Rugby's Hard Man Reveals All

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Preface

Why write another autobiography, given that the first one covered the important parts of a career in rugby now long past?

I wanted to write the previous book myself, but in 1995 I had neither the time nor the ability. Some may say the latter still escapes me, but at least I know I can only blame myself. Stephen Jones, who wrote the first book, did a very good job, yet even he will agree that he could never fully capture my personality. I hope this new book does that and, whatever the impressions gained by its reading, this one is closer to whatever I am.

The first autobiography was written against the background of a prospective retirement and a divorce. Both events are and were immensely emotional, and coloured the tone of that book. The events and experiences in the intervening years have given me a different and, I believe, more accurate insight into earlier matters that has altered my thoughts about them and their importance. Towards some of these matters, I have softened my attitude; towards others, I have toughened it; whilst other, new matters have only become apparent relatively recently.

In many ways, this book is darker than its predecessor, and this is inevitable given that a number of events are revealed here for the first time. Even at this point, I do not fully understand how my character has been defined by these incidents, or how they contributed to past actions and decisions that appear illogical and sometimes self-destructive. Perhaps I will never discover their full

significance, but at least I now have some insight and realise that they are powerful influences in my life.

As a former international sportsman, I have had to confront the difficult fact that, when only half my life has passed, the abnormal and extreme sensations I experienced during my sporting career have gone for good and nothing will ever replace or match them. Inevitably, this loss is not easily absorbed and tends to make everything thereafter seem mundane.

With the passage of time, I am unable to explain why some of the things in the following pages have remained in my memory and others, which once seemed more important, have faded. That is just the way it has turned out.

Finally, I have to explain the references to Gollum in the book. I am a Tolkien nerd and, having read *The Silmarillion* and *Unfinished Tales of Middle-Earth* and *The Complete Guide to Middle-Earth*, I believe I have earned the right to that epithet. However, it was not until I saw Peter Jackson's brilliant translation to the screen of J. R. R. Tolkien's epic *Lord of the Rings* that the relevance became apparent to me of Gollum, who is what remains of an ordinary hobbit after years of change wrought by his carrying of the One Ring.

In *The Two Towers* part of Tolkien's book, there is detailed a conversation between the two contrasting parts that make up Gollum's psyche. As I watched this scene, it so accurately described the conversations that take place within my head that I decided that Gollum was the name I would attach to my *alter ego*.

One of the consequences of events in my early life was the accentuation of the 'dark' side of my character. I am not alone in having contrasting sides to my nature. Most people have a negative side, but it will surface infrequently. In my case the arguments between the two sides are real and powerful, they are a daily running battle. There is hardly anything that Gollum will stay silent about, and though I did not name him/it until relatively recently, I now see that he has been with me from my earliest years.

The above paragraph will not be comprehensible until the rest of the book is read but, if you stay the course, I hope you agree with my assessment of Tolkien's character and its applicability to me.

Prologue

The Field Trip

In 2008, I was asked to go to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre in Vauxhall, London, to see the astonishingly worthwhile and traumatic work they do in tracking and prosecuting online child abuse. It is an uncomfortable fact that 70 per cent of child abuse is domestic. When you have children and see their utter vulnerability, their unalloyed joy at seeing your face in the morning, you cannot imagine that any parent could harm their offspring. Child abuse is one of the last taboos; rarely spoken of in any circumstances, other than with outrage to 'string 'em up', periodically prompted by media reminders that bad people are out there.

There is no easy way to tell this story, so I suppose it is best just to take it chronologically. I will leave the fallout for later.

I was at Whitehill Junior School, and although I cannot remember whether I was nine or ten years old, I was in what was called Year 3. An overnight field trip was going to Stoodley Pike near Todmorden, West Yorkshire, a monument erected in 1854 to commemorate the defeat of Napoleon. Unusually for Yorkshire, it was paid for by public subscription. I don't suppose it occurred to

them that, of all the places Napoleon would *not* bother to visit, Todmorden would be in the top one.

These days the trip would not have taken place due to concerns about the youth of the students, but what could be amiss? A respected teacher, member of the church and a family friend – who would you trust more? Sharing a tent with three other boys and the teacher didn't seem amiss either, nor did the night-time story-telling. Though the word 'sex' was woven into the story-lines, it was something that, even at that age, we had sniggered about.

In retrospect, much of the pain, much of the shame, lies in the fact that at the time I couldn't recognise what is obvious to an adult, and that at the time the experience was partially fun. I have not seen any of the other boys since leaving for senior school but I sometimes wonder if they were able to exorcise the effects more successfully than I was.

Bragging about the size of your cock is something that few men need much encouragement to do. So when it was suggested we all get them out and compare it was mildly embarrassing, but nothing threatening. Of course his was much bigger, a fascinating erection when you are that age. None of us declined the invitation to 'touch it', 'move it about a bit'. It was almost flattering when he asked us to do the same; it felt naughty, there was a vague *frisson* that we were doing sophisticated, grown-up things.

Though intellectually I can rationalise the reason why we, I, was not appalled and did not protest, it has been almost impossible since to rid myself of the feeling that I should have done something.

He said it was a dare as to which of us would taste the sticky stuff on his cock, but when none of us actually volunteered, boys were chosen and forced. When it was my turn, it stopped being a bit of fun. I didn't see what anyone else did because by then I was numb.

Similarly I can remember some of the times we were lured into the classroom storeroom to be reassured that it wouldn't go so far

this time. We need only show him, maybe let him touch, or touch him. He was deviously clever, and that is what would happen, but as described above, wanking just seemed naughty and felt good. The fact that the physical response was not one of repulsion was the thing that was to cause me the greatest shame and pain thereafter.

These incomplete accounts would be rich fare for a defence QC, when cross-examining at a trial. The natural conclusion is to disbelieve partial testimony. That I cannot recall all the details of the field trip and the other occasions may lead you to doubt the veracity of what I am writing. All I can say is that some bits are impossibly real, viscerally so; others partially so; other elements that I know must be there, because of the time factor, are simply missing. This amnesia is not deliberate; indeed it is sickeningly frustrating. Part of me wants to remember, to complete the picture; the other part dreads doing so for fear of what may emerge.

Though it is tempting, I do not think there is now any point in naming the man. He is dead, and why should anyone innocent connected with him bear his shame? No matter what the *Daily Mail* says, this sort of thing is not commonplace, so only those who are involved professionally or victims can understand why it can take anything from a few weeks to a lifetime for people to come forward and complain. I cannot speak with certainty for anyone else, but I am sure all, most, or some of the following will resonate with any still-silent victims. Some may even take this to their grave.

What were the reasons for my silence? First, by a long way, is the shame and guilt at the fact that I did not resist. Did I deserve it, encourage it? Surely any normal boy, even of that age, would know what was unfolding and would struggle, or at the very least protest? Additionally, to other people, after the first time the subsequent episodes indicate willingness, or at least a lack of coercion.

I can rationalise the explanation given to me: at that age, my emerging identity, which would develop from child to man, necessarily involved my first contact with sexuality. As I didn't fully

comprehend what was happening or the extent of the wrongdoing, it meant I would respond physically because there was nothing in my head that registered the situation as being nefarious. Yes, I understand all that, but I do not feel it; that is the vital point about resolving things. If I, or anybody else, cannot learn to go beyond the purely rational and get to the bottom of the emotions that have been lying deep inside the unconscious, it is impossible to move forward.

At the time I cannot remember asking these questions, even in a childlike way. What was happening was illicit and although I believe I felt it was not normal, it was with a figure of authority. When I finally began to understand a little later that what had happened to me was indeed wrong, I faced the difficulties other children confront in this situation.. Who would believe my word against that of a teacher and family friend? I felt I couldn't tell, partly because of this, but also because of other reasons which to the reader might seem improbable.

In other respects this man was pleasant and fun. He was a good teacher. What if I told and he was taken away? That might upset my parents. I felt I could not tell my parents because of the friendship they had with him; also because I had not fought back, and at least initially had enjoyed some of the acts. Any mother or father would be mortified and feel guilt if their child felt they could not so confide. This guilt is wrong because they are also victims of this man. A person's social setting also has an influence on how they deal with such things and whether they tell anyone. My family were, and are, decent people. They are known by many in the church and from other connections. I thought of the incredible furore that would ensue if I told them. There is absolutely no fault that can be aimed at my parents – but still they will feel ill about this.

There is a part of me, the child, that responds as a child does by crying, 'Where were you?' Then the rational appears and it very reasonably states that they could not have known and it is very wrong to say such things. As there has been no resolution, the

resentment continues, but the whole thing is made worse by the fact that I now have the added guilt of making such accusations – albeit in my head – against my innocent parents.

A number of times I came close to telling my parents, but I just could not get the words out. Instead I stayed silent and cursed myself for not being brave enough to speak out. The nearest I came to disclosing what had happened was when I found out he had been invited to drop round to our house. Although I tried, I could not tell them and instead stormed out of the room. At the time, my parents wondered what on earth had provoked such a response. They put it down to the stroppy behaviour of a child. They, like everyone else, could not have imagined it related to such dark matters.

There would clearly have been repercussions if I had told. I do not just mean the immediate ones – police, social services, family. There is something else that is hugely powerful in dissuading a child from making a complaint: I have no doubt that, whilst everybody would deny this, the revelation by someone that they have been abused leads to a subtle tainting of that person. So difficult is the subject that, if you have been abused, you feel tainted by association with the awfulness of the crime. 'People will think I deserved it, invited it, enjoyed it,' you tell yourself. Rape victims often feel the same way, but in my case I have to add to these acts the fact that they were same sex. Nudge, nudge, wink, wink, and not just from the uneducated. Hands up all those reading this who intellectually sympathise with me but who also have somewhere inside them a devil that sniggers before it can be buried by the decent thought. Don't worry: even though I experienced the above, it is the same for me. That is why I know this is a fact, not my imagination.

Only recently, however, has a further point come to me, and in a way it is as bad, if not worse, than the acts themselves. The ability and desire of the perpetrator to continue to smile, laugh and extend heartfelt best wishes to all – to me, my parents and siblings, mutual friends – requires extended cruelty. Not content with the

things he had done, he also relived them by this façade: the warm chat at social and church meetings, that leering smirk at me over the shoulder of someone he was talking to. In doing this, he was reliving the acts and receiving smug satisfaction from knowing that not only had he violated me, he was violating my family – particularly satisfying as they remained oblivious to his mendacity.

The CEOP visit in 2008 left me stunned. Their tour took me to all departments, starting with the people who log every report from those who have pressed the 'report' button on a website in order to report something they feel is suspicious; from there, I progressed through the different departments, just as a particular case would, each section adding and refining the case for attention in whatever manner is thought necessary.

As the departments began to deal with cases that were thought to involve criminal behaviour, the gravity of the work began to unfold. Of all the departments, the people who work in the victim and abuser identification unit appeared to have the most challenging jobs. Identifying the people involved by minute scrutiny, for hours on end, of every frame of film, every photograph, often revealing the most horrific offences against very young children, must be severely taxing. The people work in pairs and, I understand, have to have regular counselling to retain their sanity. I asked if they ever became inured to the things they saw, and they said no. They felt it was absolutely necessary for them to retain the element of revulsion at these despicable acts so that they could maintain their focus and the will to catch the offenders.

When I left the building, I sat on a wall near by and didn't move for half an hour. I never even raised my head as I stared at the floor. I thought about the many images I had seen and the courage of the people who dedicated their hours to preventing as many children becoming victims as possible. This triggered thoughts of my own experiences. Though not as extreme in nature as some of the cases witnessed, it was nevertheless abuse. I sobbed, trying to turn my head away from anyone walking by. When this was not

possible, I walked down the road and found a small park where I had a chance to compose myself. I made a decision not to keep private that which I had buried for so many years, and to seek assistance in dealing with the consequences that I now realised had affected me so deeply that in many cases I had not even realised what had happened and why.

The CEOP visit gave me the courage to ask for help, though being helped is a searing experience in itself. I thank all who work at CEOP for giving me their examples of bravery to follow.

Once I had taken the decision to write about these experiences, I had to face the moment when I would let my mother read the text. The days before this took place were amongst the most difficult of my life. I was distracted, incoherent and frightened. I knew that the revelation would cause pain; who amongst us would not do almost anything to avoid inflicting this on a parent? Many times I concluded that I could not do it, but fortunately I was able to hold on to the feeling that this was absolutely necessary for me to have any chance of dealing with this issue. Furthermore, a prescient point was put to me by a professional counsellor: as a parent, would you be more hurt by the discovery of the facts, or by subsequently finding out that your child had felt unable to discuss this with you? It would be the latter, unquestionably.

After my mother read this chapter, she was naturally very upset but told me that a few years ago my fourth-year teacher at the junior school had made a comment to her about my abuser to the effect that he had been told what went on during these camping trips, but not until many years after retiring.

I cannot explain why, but not until this moment had I realised that, at the time these events took place, my mother was working as the Whitehill Junior School secretary. The depth of this man's deceitfulness was then laid bare for the first time. The ability to interact with a parent of a boy you were abusing, as if nothing was untoward, requires chilling dispassion.

What had previously been in my head a one-way question – my mother asking 'Why didn't you tell me?' – was thus reciprocal. For many of the reasons previously listed, we explained to each other why we had not been able to raise the matter. Confirming all I knew of her, my mother dealt with things quietly and with compassion. Nothing she could say will resolve all the effects of these incidents, but at least from the moment I told her, I genuinely felt that I could start to move on.

1

My Family

Not being born in the county, strictly speaking I do not qualify as a Yorkshireman, but being resident from the age of eight months I feel like one. I still have a recognisable accent, which I have no intention of losing. I also occasionally display the clichéd traits of one brought up in 'God's Country'. For example, calling a spade a spade and speaking your mind can be laudable, but sometimes it means insensitivity and not listening to anyone else.

I brush over my birth in Birmingham, largely because of the accent, and because I spent only a few months in the city before I was adopted in circumstances that were not to become clear until over thirty years later, and then in dramatic fashion. Having been placed for adoption, I stayed for a few months with foster parents and, through the National Children's Home, was seen by a couple from Halifax. Forms were signed and I was off to start being a Yorkshireman.

Ralph Stuart Moore and Dorothy Moore, both children of Methodist lay preachers, had two girls of their own, Catherine and Elizabeth, and an adopted daughter, Ai-Lien. To attempt some balance in this female-dominated environment, I was adopted.

Subsequently my brother Paul was adopted to keep me company, and our final sibling, Gwen, was adopted much later.

It was not my parents' intention to gather such a large flock; rather, one decision led to another, gathering an independent momentum. As I understand it, things went like this: my parents, wanting, but not able, to have another child, Ai-Lien (Chinese) was adopted as a baby and was four years younger than Elizabeth. My father was then outnumbered severely and they decided it would balance things up if a boy was adopted: me, Anglo-Malaysian and two years younger than Ai-Lien. Being the only boy, attention was lavished on me by my three older sisters. My parents then decided it would be good for me to have a brother, so along came Paul, of Welsh-Pakistani origin, and two years younger than me. This series of adoptions was natural in one sense: each addition was younger than the other siblings. I think that helped. Gwen, who is Chinese, was adopted when she was seventeen and, as such, had a much more difficult task in assimilating herself into an already large tribe, and although we have always remained civil, she never fitted in in the same way that we, the three adoptees, had done. Inevitable, I suppose. In any event, we were a 'rainbow' family long before Madonna and Angelina Jolie came on the scene.

There was very little discussion of our differing ethnicity, which was never hidden from us. When we were old enough to understand, my parents told us things about each of our non-English countries. I remember having a book about rubber plantations in Malaysia, and I pictured jungle tigers stalking the land. This probably explains why one of my favourite pieces of poetry is 'The Tyger' by William Blake. From this distance, I realise that the approach that was taken by my parents was to raise us as English and no different from any other children. Once they had told us about our ethnic origin, they provided information about it, but only when we pushed the topic. I think this was the correct approach.

Today no parent would be allowed to adopt children with such

disparate backgrounds because ethnicity is seen as such an important 'right' for the child. Moreover, according to friends of mine who have gone through the invasive and often patronising interrogations of an adoption worker, race and racism is stressed so hard that at times it is forgotten that the child will live in England, under English law, with English traditions.

It is now deemed politically correct to revel in and be proud of your background, but in my case and that of many others, I believe this approach is overstated and possibly harmful. Although I had to listen to others' moronic jibes of 'Chink' and the like, I always felt English to the core. When I did find out about Malaysia, it was interesting, but not relevant to growing up in Halifax. Being part foreign is a difficult issue for children anyway. When I was young I looked far more oriental than I do now, and I was taunted because of it. Had I had my differences and not my similarities accentuated, the feeling of alienation would have been far worse. What would have been the benefit to me of trying to actively celebrate my 'Malaysian-ness'? I don't feel Malaysian, I don't live there, and my ethnic origin never impinges on my everyday life.

The barmy race theorists may denounce this as a betrayal of that part of me that is not English. Further, that my attitude hides a shame or embarrassment about this fact. Neither of these points carries much weight. I never hide the fact that I am half Malaysian, nor have I ever felt ashamed of it, but nor do I think it very relevant to who I am, other than aesthetically and because Malaysians are famous for being brilliant between the sheets. Had my difference been stressed, I might well have conveniently blamed all my setbacks on the racism of society; or I might have been one of those devastatingly misguided people who will not let anyone forget that they are from such-and-such a country and proud of it, and what do you mean you don't know anything about the place, you colonialist, imperialist racist?

Within the context of our family, a 'differentiated' approach would have undoubtedly led to a sibling's origin being added to

the arsenal of abuse that all kids throw at each other when they fall out. Yet none of my siblings ever said, 'You're not my real brother', because they never felt that was the case. These words can lead to shame, but as race was never an issue with any of us, it was never used in a negative way – *ergo* we didn't feel it was a stigma. In addition, the fact that I had siblings of different race and got on well with them meant I could never accept the lies of real racists who insist that with such diversity comes inevitable conflict. How could this be true when I lived a life that proved otherwise?

Having Malaysian roots is no better or worse than having roots from any other country, foreign or English. But frankly, who cares? The dissimilarities I had/have with my family are because of my different emotional make-up and the experiences – positive and negative – that I have had, not for any other reason. That this is so attests to the remarkable wisdom of my parents.

So. Then we were six. I have no idea how my mother and father coped, but cope they did, and rather successfully. I was always told that I was adopted. When I did not know what that meant it didn't bother me; when I did, I was familiar with the fact. For many years I thought that my adoption was of no consequence and had no effect on me. I was wrong, as I will try to explain later.

Both mother and father, the latter now sadly deceased, were also Methodist lay preachers and, as you can imagine, the church played a major role in all our upbringings.

Methodism is traditionally non-conformist and strictly so. The core values of the Methodist tradition are described in *The Character of a Methodist* by John Wesley as:

1 Rejoicing over the goodness of God
2. Belief in the power of prayer
3. Belief in purity of heart and holiness
4. Keeping the commandments of God
5. Glorifying God in all that is done
6. Doing good, for the body and soul
7. Belief in the unity of the church

I have failed on all counts.

Although devout, my parents were not moralisers and always surprised me with their ability to adapt to changing attitudes without sacrificing their values. Throughout the seismic social changes that took place around them, they did not, like some, become censorious. They never said 'Things were better in my day', and they retained their optimism, always trying to see the good before the bad. Their faith sustained them through the crises that all families have. The fact that they were each one of five children themselves meant the extended family and its attendant problems required some dedication.

At the age of fourteen, as I was developing into my version of the 'I know everything; you're wrong' teenager, I announced to my parents that I did not believe in God and I would not go to church any more. This declaration was not based on anything approaching knowledge, but rather a feeling that I didn't agree. My subsequent study of the Bible for two years at 'A' level would later enable me to bang on about inaccuracies and contradictions in the text, the multiple revisions to the Vulgate Bible (the official Latin version of the Bible of the Roman Catholic Church), and the fact that many of the Gospels remain unauthenticated. But because I didn't have a dangerous little bit of knowledge at the time, my parents were saved from being lectured by a know-all fourteen-year-old.

As on many occasions when a predictable response was expected – this time, of disapproval and possibly anger – my parents surprised me with their ability to disagree profoundly, but not lecture me and to accept that with which they did not concur. They said that they were disappointed, not for themselves, but for me, because throughout their lives so many burdens had been lightened and resolved through their faith; my decision to reject such help would leave me alone to face similar things. If their response was unpredictable, mine was not, though I fortunately didn't voice my thoughts that this was all nonsense. I have since moved from atheism to agnosticism as it seems to me to be the

only intellectually honest view: just as they cannot prove the existence of God, I cannot disprove it. As I get older, I do wish that I had faith and was able to accept its comfort. My world would be less frightening. But I cannot and it is my loss.

We lived in a medium-sized terraced house in a district of Halifax called Illingworth. For a long time we were two to a bedroom because of the numbers. I did not get my own room until I was in the sixth form. My earliest memories are of stoned-flagged floors in our house and empty roads. At the time, Illingworth was not the rough place it was to become, and it had large open spaces. Mixenden, close by, had once been a beautiful valley, but it was the first district to be affected by social engineering and it had hundreds of inferior social houses built on its fields. It had the first tower blocks ever built and all were filled with the poor and problem families. (Incidentally, it became the first ward to elect a BNP councillor some years later.) A few years later, Illingworth 'benefited' from the Mixenden experience and large council estates were built around us. One, Abbey Park, became a symbol of how not to build communities, eventually being torn down and begun anew.

Halifax had been a mill town, with some large factories and many light-engineering firms. In the 1960s the indigenous textile industry was dying in the face of cheaper foreign competition. One of the main employers, Crossley's Carpets, had a huge factory complex at Dean Clough, just outside the town centre, which employed hundreds of people, but it was to go the same way. However, as neither of my parents was directly tied to manufacturing we did not have to face the spectre or reality of unemployment. Dean Clough now houses more employed people in its small business units than it did in its days of pomp. The big difference is that they are all in service or public-sector jobs.

Unlike neighbouring towns such as Bradford and Huddersfield, Halifax's town centre retains a coherent architectural theme. You may not like the stark Yorkshire-stone buildings, but at least they are complete and not interspersed with 1960s prefabricated office blocks or, worse still, cut through by a dual carriageway. In fact,

now that the accumulated pollution that turned Halifax's buildings black has been cleaned, they exude the solidity you would expect from a former industrial Yorkshire town. The credit for the retention of so much history has to go to Halifax Council. So useless and indecisive was it in the era when all things new were adopted that it failed to agree and implement any major scheme for redeveloping the town centre. Thank God they argued and bickered like true Yorkshire folk.

I do not have many clear memories of my very early years, though I am glad I do not remember having a shave with death when I was four. At that time Meccano sets had metal screwdrivers; they don't now, for good reason. Whilst building a structure that, to my mind was the equal of the Clifton Suspension Bridge, I stuck the screwdriver into a live power point and electrified myself. By chance, my father happened to be only a couple of feet away and, on seeing me stiffen, had the presence of mind to kick me away from the power point. I escaped with bad electrical burns to my hands and wrists.

This was the first of a number of potentially serious scrapes from which I emerged alive and whole. I realise now that only fate – or would my parents say God? – kept me from the catastrophic injuries suffered by others. Some years later we were on the way to a family holiday in the ruggedly beautiful Shetland Isles. Having crossed a dual carriageway in the centre of Aberdeen to look in a shop window, I heard my father shout to me that our bus was coming. Without looking, I ran straight out into the road from behind a parked bus. A car in the outside lane of the oncoming traffic screeched to a halt. A clearly shaken driver leapt out and proceeded to give me the loudest road-safety lecture in history. For having saved my life, that man may now not be very popular in Scotland, but his driving within the speed limit and his sharp reactions almost certainly prevented a serious collision. Think of it: I could have died in Scotland.

Climbing trees is natural to most kids and when I was ten I was no different. This was before you had to do a risk assessment

before embarking on any activity in which you night graze your knee and which is carried out at any height above four inches. Unfortunately, on one climbing jaunt I fell backwards and landed flat on my back from what must have been a good fifteen feet. I suffered no more than shock, bruising and being winded. In my university days a fellow student fell only eight feet whilst climbing and ended up paralysed from the waist down.

For the sake of completeness, I will mention my most recent dice with death, though this happened when I was supposedly grown-up. One evening, in 2005, I went to bed and placed a tea-tree light on the large, 'old-style' TV in my bedroom. I thought that, having a metal base, it would not pose a hazard and would eventually expire whilst I drifted off to sleep.

Suddenly, I woke up, to see the TV in flames and my bedroom filled with acrid, thick, black smoke that was beginning to make me cough and retch. Most people who die in fires are killed by the toxic fumes before they are touched by the flames, and although I am no expert, I think that, had I been asleep for as little as one minute longer, I could have died in my sleep. I got out and the fire was contained in my flat, leaving the flat above undamaged, but for weeks afterwards I coughed up black solids from deep within my lungs.

Until I announced, aged fourteen, that I no longer believed in God, I attended church with my family every Sunday, and for a few years twice on Sunday. Moreover, through Illingworth Moor Methodist Church, I played in whist drives, helped on old people's trips to the seaside and went carol-singing. My father was a Licentiate of the London College of Music in singing, a level of musicianship that I didn't realise was so high until I looked it up. He could play several instruments – anything guitar-like or keyboard-based instruments – and was able to pick up tunes with little effort. We were all musical. My mother was the church organist; Catherine played the clarinet; Elizabeth, the violin; and Paul, a number of instruments as well as being a very, very good

rock drummer. He was later to join the Royal Marines Band at Deal in Kent. All this meant that I was lucky enough to hear a wide range of music when growing up; from classical to the Hawaiian guitar, folk to progressive rock, it was all there.

We were Yorkshire's answer to the Partridge Family, either as the Moores or as part of the church. We gave a number of local performances, though strangely no record executives seemed interested. We terrorised old people's homes with songs and sketches, but I seem to remember a few of the audience were so senile they understood not one jot. Lucky them.

As for me, I played the piano, to a fashion, but at the mature age of eleven I announced I would not be doing any more lessons and that I wouldn't regret it anyway. Wrong, wrong, wrong. However, I did have a good singing voice and won an Eisteddfod held in the Halifax Civic Theatre, singing 'Have You Seen My Little Dog?'. Oh the shame of it. When my voice broke it never retained its previous clarity and, though I can still sing, it is with nowhere near the ability promised.

My father was a schoolteacher who worked in the specialist area of mentally and physically handicapped children, at Holly Bank School on the outskirts of Huddersfield. He did this until his retirement and I do not know how he had the empathy and most of all the patience to spend so many years in this difficult environment. 'Special needs' is the present term for such children, but the original description was better. These were not kids with mild dyslexia, or minor attention-deficit disorders, but ones with severe disabilities that required much specialised care.

I remember visiting his school only once and it upset me so much that I couldn't return. All I saw was the awfulness of these children's predicaments. My father had the necessary discernment to be able to separate the disability from the humanity of each child, seeing what they could do, as opposed to what they could not. In fact, father's gentle and patient manner suited this type of teaching; that plus the fact that it allowed him to talk all day.

By saying the latter I might be giving the impression that he

liked the sound of his own voice, but that is not what I mean. Rather, he was the type that would start a story about going to the shop for something and it would wend its way in a meandering fashion with lots of digressions, and eventually this was so frustrating that I often wanted to shout, 'Get on with it!' At the time, it drove me crazy. I wish now that I could hear justone more of these stories.

When I recently watched a few minutes of one of today's seemingly endless reality TV documentaries, it dealt with people who had obsessive-compulsive disorders. This one was about people who obsessively tidy things. I laughed fondly, because I wondered what they would have done had they been my mother. She could have throttled my father daily because he was always mending things. In fact he really could mend almost anything: TVs, radios, computers, anything electrical and all manner of other things. But his storage systems were non-existent. His workplace for mending things – which in our house in Raw Lane, Illingworth, was in the cellar, part of his bedroom, part of the sitting room and most of the garage – was . . . well, to say it was cluttered would be like saying the Great Depression was an economic blip. Thousands of transistors, cables, plugs and other spare parts were strewn around in an order that only he could determine and which led him to complain that he couldn't find anything if anyone ever had the temerity to move something to enable them to carry out a trivial task. Like make space on the table to eat.

Dad was a compassionate man, but was not one comfortable with discussing intimate things. He loved me and was kind, and I feel tremendous guilt for having sometimes wanted him to be a different type of father. Though he would watch me play, he was not a sporting dad, nor a forceful leader. Why should he have been? It is a remaining source of pain to me that I could not fully accept him for the exceptionally good and normal family man that he was. Like so many children, I wish I could have found a way to talk to him about how I felt. He would have understood; he would have forgiven me.

When he died in 2007, hundreds of people took the time to write to my mother to mark his passing. All had their own story of how he had helped them in some small way or mended something for them. It was not until I read those letters that I understood the enormous impact my father had had on those he met. Similarly, until he died, I had thought an obituary in a national newspaper, hundreds of anonymous letters and perhaps mentions on TV were a better estimate of a person's worth. This failure of perspective is something that caused me trouble in the past and still does.

My mother has this single description attributed to her by many people who meet her: serene. Through many years of change, after raising six children and being the core of our family, she remains supremely positive. There are so many things I could write, but there are a few stories that are examples of the manner in which she has mixed pragmatism with an ability to retain her own values.

When I was still a sixth-former, my girlfriend came to stay overnight. As we had insufficient space in our house, she was to sleep in the small single bedroom and I had to sleep on the landing. During the night, Mum had obviously got up to go to the bathroom and discovered I was not where I should have been. In the morning, when challenged about this, I tried to lie but it was so apparent that I gave up. She told me that she did not want me sneaking about and, worse, lying about it. Furthermore, she supposed that there was nothing we couldn't do before six o'clock that we couldn't do after it, and therefore we could share a bed. From a Methodist lay preacher in her late fifties, this was a remarkable concession. She then casually requested that I might be more careful with where I put the Durex, as leaving them strewn in the bottom of the dustbins didn't really make a great impression on the binmen.

When she was in her early seventies, I found out that she had been helping out on the Abbey Park estate in a centre that was dealing with addicts and youths with various social-delinquency problems. When I asked her about this, she merely said that

everybody had some sort of problem and if she could help, she would. This was in between continuing to play the organ at church and doing Methodist Committee work which at one point took her on a visit to Ghana. She would not recognise these things as being anything other than an ordinary person trying to help others, and indeed that is all they are. However, if there were more people like her, the world would be a more decent place.

That I have always felt different from the rest of my family is perhaps not surprising, given that I don't share their genes. The environment in which I was raised was loving and kind. I was not deprived, though we were not rich, and there were rarely arguments – brotherly skirmishes excepted. Yet I cannot recall a time, for example, when I was not competitive, often regarding ridiculously irrelevant matters. Nobody else in my family is remotely similar in this respect. An add-on to this competitiveness is a stubbornness that has proved both useful and unhelpful throughout all phases of my life. The refusal to relent is rewarded in sport and sometimes in business, but it is destructive in relationships, and if it becomes directed at oneself it is exasperating. Furthermore, it is exhausting. I need mention here but briefly the way this trait aided my rugby career: the refusal to accept that my size would render me unable to be successful at international level; an unwillingness to be cowed by various threats of deselection from the RFU. Both these characteristics ultimately stem from contrariness.

As a further example of this stubbornness, I once stood for a week at every break time with my face against the wall outside the masters' staff room because I refused to apologise for comments I had made during a games session that I felt strongly were justified. Had I understood that, by apologising, I was not betraying an important principle (and in the grander scheme of things, there were other, more important issues), I would not have been punished at all.

I suppose it was around the age of thirteen that the interests I pursued, sporting and otherwise, started to create a significant gap between me and the rest of my family. From that age onwards,

that gap was to grow and eventually become something that I felt made me so dissimilar that I was completely different from them all. I had nobody who could explain to me that this was partly a feeling experienced by all teenagers and partly a feeling caused by issues surrounding both sexual abuse and adoption. At the time, it just felt lonely.

During that period, I could express myself only through rage and shouting, often concerning things that ordinarily did not merit such extreme reactions. This element of rage, which I have always had in my behaviour, this edge which tinges much of what I do, would surprise and, looking back, frighten people around me, making them wary in my presence.

Another repercussion of all the sport I was now doing was that I was attending various sports clubs – and, as a result, drinking alcohol. Whilst both my parents did drink, it was so seldom that they would have been considered teetotal by most people. During my childhood, as far as I was aware, they never once went to the pub. At the time, I did not realise how unusual this was. But all their time was spent at church, with family, or with friends, and they were perfectly happy with that and never at a loose end. In contrast, the state in which I sometimes fell through the door was not one that anyone else in the family ever found themselves in, and whilst I imagined I was being witty, the reality is that this was very unlikely.

The expected response, taking into account my parents' background and the principles to which they adhered, would have been condemnation and demands that, whilst I lived in their house, I was not to repeat this or similar behaviour. Why they chose not to react in this way, I know not. Perhaps they realised, correctly, that it would have had the opposite effect: my natural reaction to being admonished and lectured is to fight; all the more so if I know I am in the wrong. The possibility of self-destruction does not seem to stop this, even when it is fully considered. What they did instead was make their feelings known; gently but firmly, and then say no more, hoping that this would appeal to any sense

of decency I had and lead me to moderate my actions. Most of the time, this worked.

This was not the way they dealt with all of us. My brother, Paul, had a far harder time, but that too appeared to work. This ability to discern the best approach to what were very different children is another thing that I marvel at, now that I am a parent. Letting your children make their own mistakes is something that is at times necessary, but the risk involved is that they may do something that causes them serious harm. No parent wants to see this happen and I go through mental contortions trying to decide which course of action is correct with my own children and how much freedom to give them.

My parents' acceptance of how different I was from my siblings means that I have always felt guilty about not being as thoughtful or attentive as my brother and sisters, but they accepted without disapproval that this was, and is, what I am. I think they had an inkling, though they could not know its extent, of the irrational sudden panic that I would, and still do, get into before a big family get-together. It must appear from the outside that I dip in and out of the family unit when it suits me and need to be able to leave when I want.

My own difficulties apart, we remain a reasonably close family considering we are now scattered around all parts of the country. I live in south-west London, whilst Ai-Lien lives just outside Dallas, Liz in Knaresborough, Paul in Maidstone, Cath is still near Halifax and Gwen is in Essex. We're not the type of family where you have to call everyone every week, and fortunately we don't suffer from the sort of claustrophobia that afflicts some families where missing a birthday or Christmas is taken as a grave insult. But we're close enough that, when Mum and Dad celebrated their Golden Wedding anniversary a few years ago, we all got together, along with all our own children, which made for a very big turnout – thirty-four in total.

I am enormously grateful for the sacrifices my parents made for me and the rest of the family. Not just monetary, but those of

time. I am also enormously grateful for all the understanding and love they showed me and my siblings. Though I fall short in many ways, I have their example to keep in mind, and for me to be able to aim for some of their ideals is a legacy that some children do not have the good fortune of inheriting.