



Addiction

Social influences on addiction

Brian Mingins

There's a whole family history in here just scattered all over the place.

Narrator

One important aspect is the siblings' social environment. For Brian, recovering from his addiction has meant facing up to his past. It's taken a lot of courage. But for him it's been essential to taking responsibility for his actions.

Brian Mingins

I don't want to look to blame anyone or anything for my addiction or my alcoholism. My dad was a drinker, I lived in a club for twelve years, I'm from the North, hard drinking culture, but I'm not looking to blame anyone.

Ann

Look at your eyes – zonked!

Brian

Absolutely

Narrator

Nevertheless many professionals believe the social environment is important.

Dr Jane Marshall, National Addiction Centre

Basically we can think of the environment as being the common environment, or the social environment that somebody is living in, and also the specific environment, how the person reacts to their environment, how their personality relates to the environment.

Narrator

This is the house where Brian and Anne grew up. A similar environment - but no two people have exactly the same experience.

Brian Mingins

Mum had a go at me and I decided I was going to run away.

Ann

How far did you get?

Brian

To the corner - then I came back!

Narrator

The runaway would later find other escape routes.

Brian Mingins

Contemplating a future as a soldier

Narrator

Brian went into the army at an early age.

Brian

Killing machine.

Jane Marshall

The army and the armed services are a particular case in point because like catering and medicine they do seem to be associated with high rates of alcohol problems. Now in the army it probably related to the fact that there is a macho culture that you're expected to drink and be able to hold your drink but also drinking, or alcohol is subsidised, and anywhere where you have a drinking culture and alcohol is subsidised you're bound to have problems particularly when you have young men with money.

Brian

It's like a ghost town isn't it?

Ann

It's horrible.

Narrator

After the army Brian gravitated here. This estate was so notorious for social problems and drugs that now it's due for demolition.

Brian

These streets used to be heaving; you couldn't walk fifty yards without bumping into someone you knew.

Jane Marshall

There would be the regular use of alcohol and drugs amongst his peer group and if he wants to have a social life and see friends, alcohol and drug use would have to be part and parcel of it.

Brian

Probably some of the best times in my life I've had while I was drinking or taking drugs. You know I can't deny that, I had some great times, but it was before I accepted that I had a problem so I wouldn't have classed myself as an alcoholic or an addict then.

Brian

Jackie lived in that corner there, Yompa lived just round here ...

Narrator

Surrounded by mates, it was a tearaway existence. Not a period he shared much with the rest of his family.

Brian

I remember I got arrested in there.

Ann

How many times?

Brian

Er, the police kicked the door down and arrested me for armed robbery. It wasn't me.

Ann

Was it not?

Brian

And I was still hiding in the cupboard with no clothes on!

Narrator

At the same time he was frequenting some of the roughest pubs in town.

Brian
Ah, the Dragon!

Ann
It's changed hasn't it?

Brian
Mmmm, crazy men in there, crazy. And it was good at the time.

Narrator
Once one of Brian's favourite watering holes, the Dragon has now reopened as a coffee shop.

Girl
Hi can I take your order?

Ann
Two coffees please.

Girl
Two coffees.

Brian
Um, it hasn't changed that much. It sort of feels a lot stranger than what it does, but it just, it was just madness in here all the time. Everybody come in here. Everyone just drank and smoked and just done whatever you wanted to do and there was never any questions asked. It was just accepted with whoever was running the place at the time. Lovely, thank you.

Ann
Thank you.

Jane Marshall
There would be the issue, perhaps, of being fed up, unemployed, and have really no outlook on life, and then in that situation they might well say "what's the point, I might as well drink and take drugs because there's nothing else to do", they might as well continue to press the self-destruct button.

Brian
And most of the people who I used to come in here with are dead now anyway.

Ann
Sobering thought.

Brian
Sobering thought yeah.

Jane Marshall
It's very difficult to climb out of this abyss. The best way then to recovery for someone who has developed a serious alcohol or drug problem is to remove themselves from the community situation which serves to perpetuate the problem and go into a situation where they are surrounded by folk who are not drinking, not taking drugs.

Narrator
Brian's done just that. But Brian and Anne's different social experiences may also have left their mark in the form of deeply held thought patterns. And these can be unpicked at the psychological level.