

From addiction to freedom in Christ

By Peter Jamieson



My name is Peter and I am 40 years old. I was (for about 20 years of my life) an alcoholic and a drug addict. Twenty years ago I never thought I would find myself saying that but nevertheless, here I am. It is October 1st '07 today as I try and write this brief account of my life, how life has changed for me and how it has been restored, but only as far back as April '06 things were very different.

In April of last year I found myself in a rehab on the tiny Island of Papa Stour, Shetland Isles, and it was a life changing experience for me and one that probably saved it. You see prior to that I was and had been (for many a year) a major drug dealer in Aberdeen, but I had also been for many years a drug addict/alcoholic. But this had not happened over night and came as a result of a very troubled upbringing. I had suffered a lot throughout my childhood with various issues concerning trust and love and in some ways I held these responsible for the kind of person that I turned out to be. From a very young age depression became a prominent part of who I was. I was very cold and very uncaring. I used these beliefs as a foundation throughout my growing up to nurture the kind of person I was to turn out to be. I was led to believe from a young age that I was in some ways evil or undeserving of love and I fed those feelings with my own ideas, I knew the kind of person I was and I had always hated myself.

I won't go into any great detail about my life Growing up in Shetland as it is far too complicated but I will just say that I have very mixed emotions about it and things happened to me as a nine year old boy that never should have, things that should never have happened to anyone. But as a result I was always in trouble when I was growing up and from a very young age I got involved with drinking and then a few years later, when I was about fifteen, drugs. I took to these things quite easily when the opportunity first arose, you see Shetland's culture is steeped in alcohol and it is a part of everyday life, in fact, you are almost encouraged, but that attitude which was ingrained from childhood was just as easily adopted when drugs became as readily available.

I was the kind of person who would always be looking for some excuse or other to drink and to take drugs and by the time I had left school at fifteen my future already looked quite bleak. By the age of 17, I was involved in selling drugs in Lerwick and was making regular trips back and forth to the mainland; I was becoming in my own little world quite a big shot but I also began to stand out. I quickly out grew the pond in which I thrived and by the age of 20, in about '91, was forced to move to Aberdeen, the drug squad having failed on a couple of attempts. But everything just went from bad to worse and my alcoholism and drug use went on to incorporate heroin addiction. I was in a real state before too long and within a matter of some years I had been on various drug programs, ending up on methadone.

All the while however I was always involved in the supply of drugs and by about '98 I was supplying vast amounts of cocaine in and around Aberdeen city centre. I had been working for some time by then for a group of gangsters, from mainly Liverpool/Glasgow, and although I was seen and known as a bit of a 'fun loving criminal' there was a very serious side to what I did. I was always seen as someone who was very fair with people, much to my own cost at times, but also someone who was only ever in it for the laugh. This held me in quite high regard amongst most people but no one really knew the extent of what I did. I have had to do things and have been involved in things that would shock most people, even hardened criminals would find a lot of what I did quite difficult. I have walked in the kind of world that most people wouldn't understand. I have seen people shipped off to prison to do double figure sentences for things that I have been involved in and I have seen people getting really hurt, to what extent I can't say, but I will add that I personally was never once physically responsible for any of the things that I know happened, I was just not in a position to do anything for them, and God knows what and who I am talking about.

I was never altogether happy with my life and nothing ever really mattered that much to me. As long as I could get drunk each day and take vast amounts of drugs I could tolerate it. But as I say these things had to be paid for, everything and everyone always has its price in this game, and my situation was no exception to that rule. I was always looking for that next big deal or I was always looking for the next scam or robbery. By the year '00 I was in a right old mess, I had done some serious things around that time that resulted in a lot of people being hurt and my conscience really started to haunt me. I wasn't at this time able to command

myself in a proper way and I was always on the crack pipe or I was injecting cocaine. I just never wanted to have to think about anything and I did things sometimes that were extremely reckless and not of a sound mind, like sharing needles or using the water out of toilet bowls in bars and nightclubs simply because I didn't care about myself. I was and always had been very self destructive and I never once cared about myself, but underneath it all was a caring person who was just too caught up in corruption and in far too deep, to ever be anything else.

And that was how life was in Aberdeen, 16 years of making a complete mess of my life and why, because I hated who I was. It was in April of '06 when, after being let down by the mental health dept. at Cornhill Hospital, that I finally attempted to take my own life. I had just got so tired of life, so sick of everyone and everything and decided that enough was enough. I took what I thought would be a lethal amount of cocaine and injected it but only succeeded in being rushed to hospital. For years I had been wishing for it all to end but I could never quite find the courage to do it. I would lie in my bed every morning and think about ending my life but as would always happen, when I had been there in my mind, I would always find the strength to go one more day. That one day however I did find that courage and with tears running down my face, broken by years of torment and pain, wracked with guilt and full of hopelessness, I tried to kill myself. I just couldn't go on with some of the things I had done and seen, I wanted it all to stop.

It was shortly after release from hospital, while I was alone at a friend's apartment, a thought suddenly jumped into my head. One minute I was sitting there on the edge of my bed in tears, cursing my life and thinking how I won't fail the next time when all of a sudden a voice entered my mind telling me to go home. I just thought for some reason I should go home and see my sister, but why? What would she think? I sat there thinking about her and how, with her being a lot older than me had always been there for me as child and tried to look after me. Well for some reason that was the only thing that made any sense to me and for the first time in my adult life I suddenly found myself wanting to go home, and I somehow knew I had to go. So that very same day I boarded a ferry in Aberdeen and, leaving everything behind, headed off back to Shetland. I remember how happy I already felt in myself as the ferry left the harbour, it was like an almost age old joy entered my heart, I was excited to being almost childish and even at that early stage I knew that something amazing was going to happen. It was like a confidence came over me, warm and assuring, a feeling of safety and expectancy, I was filled almost instantly with the knowledge that all was going to be well.

The next day however I turned up at my sister Vera's door and, after giving her the biggest shock of her life, just broke down in front of her. She, nor anyone else from my family, had any idea as to how bad things had been for me and this had all come as a bit of a shock but despite warnings from other members of my family she decided that she would try and help her baby brother. Well she was as tough as I had always remembered and nothing was going to stand in her way, no alcoholism or addictions were going to stop her and she completely took over the situation. She had me at the doctor the following day and, after taking blood tests and the like, had me on a detox program within a week. This was to be the start of my recovery program and unlike any other program I had been on (and there has been a few) I was full of optimism. I somehow knew that this was going to be different; I somehow knew that something had changed.

Any way after a ten day detox program, including Librium to regulate the alcohol withdrawals, I was then sent to a rehab. This was purely voluntary but my sister really wanted me to go, I mean I had been an addict most of my adult life and there was years of mental health issues in my head that a week of detox would never unravel, so it was advised that I go to this rehab and at least take time to come to terms with my new life. If I wanted to move on and be truly healed then I was going to have to make some big changes, I was going to have to come to terms with my life and that it could never be the same again. I finally agreed to what the lady from the alcohol advisory centre suggested and I went to this rehab. I remember thinking as they came to pick me up "what have I done?" but knowing how happy this made my sister I knew that it was the right thing to do.

One of the deciding factors about this rehab (Papa Stour Project) was that it was on a Christian basis. This had been something that I had always been interested in, I always knew that there had to be more to life, that there was more than just this. I somehow always knew that part of the reason I had always been addicted to substances was because I was empty inside and if drugs could never satisfy this emptiness then I knew there had to be something else. I mean, there was many a time when I was out of my mind on drink and drugs that I would bring this up in conversation, that I thought there was an after life and that I believed in God, but no

one ever took me seriously. Looking back I can't really blame them but 'I knew' that deep down there was a truth in it somewhere.

It didn't take me that long to settle in to life in Papa Stour, the fact that it is a working croft on a tiny Island meant that you had peace and quiet but you also had the opportunity each day to go out and work. Rounding up the sheep or feeding the chickens, fencing and dry stone dyke building, all the jobs involved with running a croft. I would be staying there, or had agreed, for an initial term of one month (as opposed to the usual 6-12) and I knew that while I was there I had to make the most of it; I had to try and find some sort of meaning to my life. My plan was to make the most of each day there, to eat well and hopefully sleep well, to just generally recover from my years of physical and mental abuse of drugs and drink and to hopefully kick start my liver back into shape.

You see one of the things that the doctor found was that my liver was in extremely bad shape and he hoped that while I was away in Papa Stour, my liver count would come down. I was told by the doctor that my liver count had been dangerously high to the point that it was verging on collapse but he said that I wasn't to worry too much about it and hopefully it would show signs of improvement with my time in Papa "if it doesn't though" he said "then we would start to worry" But the main reason that I went there was not to just get back to health but to find a new meaning and purpose to my life, I knew that I had to change and this was going to be that time.

Every morning after feeding the chickens and taking in the eggs we would all have breakfast together and afterwards we would read a little about Jesus. I always looked forward to these little meetings in the morning. Andy and Sabina (the project managers) would join me each day in the client lounge, a place where I could have some privacy and watch television or read from their library, and we would sing a couple of Christian songs and speak a little about the Christian message. I always took a lot from these meetings as it was something that I could at least have an opinion about, I mean there is no one in this world who doesn't have an opinion on it in some way or other, so if you ask me everyone has a belief whatever that might be, you would have to be alien not to. I had my own ideas as to what was what but when I started to hear about this Jesus fellow things began to happen in me.

One evening, nearly one week into my stay, Andy and Sabina came up to my lounge and did some bible reading with me and after a brief discussion they asked me if I wanted to give my life to God.

"Ok then!" I said rather excitedly "It can't do any harm can it?"

So they explained to me that I could no longer live as before and after saying some words about believing in God, I gave my life to Him through prayer and through the death and resurrection of His son Jesus Christ I asked to be saved. I gave up all that was in my heart in order that I receive from Him the promise of a life made new. I was so happy to have finally done this and I couldn't wait to tell my sister on the phone the following day that I had become a Christian but, that night and the following morning, I didn't really feel any different. When I asked about this I was simply told that I had done all that was expected of me and that it was now in God's hands, I had done what was needed and now it was down to Him.

Three days had passed and I was still feeling nothing had changed, I was still frightened at the prospect of leaving, I was still frightened that maybe I hadn't really changed and I was frightened that the moment I got the chance, or the first thing to go wrong, I would reach for the bottle. I just didn't have that much faith in myself. That night however as I sat in my room and read from John's gospel, I started to cry. I closed my bible and laid it down next to my bed. I had made such a mess of my life and I could not trust my self to ever be anything other than what I was, I just knew that I needed more than what I had been given. I couldn't ever be sure that when I left there I wouldn't one day go back to what I was, I mean, I would try and go to church every Sunday and I would read my bible but would that be enough. Life had taught me never to expect anything positive and I didn't hold out much hope even now, so I did something that I hadn't done before and I started to pray.

"Dear Father, I have given you everything, I have given you my heart and my soul and my life's in your hands now. But I need something more from you, I need to know that I won't go back to what I was because if I do it will be the last thing that I ever do, I can't go back! Please God I ask you now, let me know that you love me, let me know that you are really there!" I then put the light out and went to sleep.

That night I had a dream,

'A man came to me in my local bar in Aberdeen (my office) and told me that he had come to give me a lift. So I got into his car and we drove up this really steep hill and then we were standing in front of these two

massive big doors. I remember thinking that this was a bit strange and then something told me to turn around and right behind me was a garden. It was the most amazing garden I had ever seen, it had archways and paths that stretched of for miles, it was lined with ponds and fountains and water falls that fell out of mid air, it was so peaceful and there was not a sound to be heard but the most amazing thing about it was, everything was made of crystal.

The man who was with me stood patiently at the door and smiled at me very reassuringly, almost as if I might change my mind and want to go home, making me relaxed. As I turned back to face the massive doors they opened up and standing there before me was another man. "Hello Peter" he said "come in and let me show you around"

The three of us walked off down this enormous and elaborate hall and I noticed that the walls were all made of gold, that the ceiling or what should have been the ceiling, was like the yellow of the sun and off to each side of us were great archways made of crystal that shimmered and glistened.

The two men that I was with had appeared to me as, the drummer from the Manic Street Preachers and secondly, at the opening of the door, the lead singer of the Manics. I knew however that this was not who they were, that they looked nothing like them but I was somehow aware that this was just a dream and I allowed for this discrepancy.

Any way as we walked along the singer invited me to go with them and hear them record a new song. We came to this little room where all these musicians were setting up their instruments and I was told to go and sit down. They played the song and the singer was singing away but it didn't sound anything like the Manics that I knew and loved (I always listened to the Manics when I was a bit down or when I was home alone with a bottle of vodka). Anyway they finished playing and the singer came over and sat down next to me. He smiled at me and asked what I thought about the song and, after laughing at my lie about how good it had been he asked me a question. All of a sudden his faced changed to one of seriousness, not in a threatening way, but in a wise sort of way.

"What is your narrative name?" he asked me.

I just didn't know what that was supposed to mean and I looked away from him totally confused.

I turned back to him and said with almost a little panic in my voice "what do you mean?" I somehow knew that this was important and I had to get this, I was also aware that this was no longer a dream and it was then that I knew who I was talking to.

He looked at me again, with eyes so large and sapphire blue, and in my heart and mind I knew that He was Jesus.

"What is your narrative name?" He said again.

This time however I knew what He was asking me. I bowed my head and with tears welling up behind my eyes I tried to answer Him, within my mind was everything that I ever been in my life, when I conjured up what my name really meant to me it brought up with it all the pain that I had ever suffered, all the years of depression and hurt, the sexual abuse that I had suffered as a child and the life time of pain it had caused me, trapped in my name was the guilt that I had carried for a family ruined by addiction, in that name was an unspeakable heart ache, in that name was every negative that I had ever held about myself, I lifted my head and turned to Him and almost trembling I looked into His eyes and I said "P.J"

What I saw was like the Glory of Jesus before me, his smile and his revealing it all, revealed to me was all that was truth, was all that I would ever need to know, I was no longer captive to my name, I had been forgiven and I could forgive, and from that moment on I was no longer "P.J" I was free.

This happened to me one night in May '06 and my life has never again been the same. When I left the Papa Stour Project in June '06 I did so knowing that my life would never again follow in the paths it once had, I had been given a new heart and a new mind and Jesus had become real to me, Jesus was my savior. I have since encountered many great healings in my life and have been witness to many miracles, not only in my life but also in that of my fellowship. I have been thoroughly blessed throughout my walk with God and through my faith in Him I am going from strength to strength. I have been asked to speak about my experiences in some of Shetlands churches and I feel blessed with the opportunity to share. I know that a life invested in Jesus is one that will be tasking at times but when you give yourself like I did and have received so much, it becomes a pleasure, I find it a pleasure to give something back and I do so daily, at any opportunity.

But although I have had my life so greatly restored, my family, my friends, my son who I had all but lost contact with who is now 17, I have had difficult times too.

Life was never always going to be without some trial or other but I find that whatever life may throw at me, God is the answer. I found out last year in June after leaving the rehab that I had the Hepatitis C virus and that I'd possibly had it as long as 12 years but like everything that I have had to face I gave it over to God and I learned to deal with it.

But miracles do happen and I have been so blessed as to have had a few happen to me personally. I have had lumps and scars from years of injecting disappearing off my body during a prayer meeting right before my very eyes, my liver which was damaged was likened within a few months, after being sent for a scan to see just how bad it was, to someone who had never had a drink before and a few months later, in Aug '07, after beginning 6 months of drug therapy for the Hepatitis (combination therapy: ribaviron and interferon alpha) which in only 60-70% of cases will eradicate the virus, I have just found out that within only 12 weeks of treatment (3 months) the virus is no longer detectable in my system. The list of what God has done in my life goes on and on and the transformation in my life is a true testimony to the love and the power of our Father above, the God of Heaven.

A prayer for the suffering

I pray that anyone reading this, who may need the kind of help that I once needed, will not hesitate any longer but will give their life over to you God. And I pray also that the love and kindness that you have shown to me, you will also give unto them, from that very moment in which they ask you into their hearts. Lord God I thank you for all that you have done for me and I know that I would be nothing without you but I just pray that someone will read this, give their life to you, find the reality of Jesus and begin to live again as I have. Thank you Father God. Amen.