

## JEZZ'S STORY



**\*WARNING: this story mentions the topic of suicide\***

***Jezz, 46, describes how his high expectations and brutal self-criticism led to suicidal feelings in his forties, but with the support of the NHS and his family he is now recovering and gives valuable advice to others in a similar position.***

Life begins at 40 I once heard...but for me it almost ended.

I hadn't been abused, poverty stricken, had to witness my parents tearing themselves apart in a terrible divorce, been bullied, or any of the other 'typical' causes of depression and suicide.

No, my childhood, was quite the opposite. I had two wonderful parents; was an only child spoiled with love, heck, even both set of grandparents got on, and were all amazing. I had friends all around me both on the army bases where I grew up, and also at the very privileged private boarding school I went to in Bristol from the age of 10.

Somehow though there was always an inner darkness in me. I was a professor of seeing my faults, everything I did wrong, couldn't do, or lacked when compared with others. I completely missed the genuine achievement and the parts of me which were great. Consequently, the set-backs or disappointments, which I've later learned are fairly normal in life, became magnified in my own mind.

As I got older, I developed a very deep-seated dream to be something extraordinary in my adult life, largely fuelled by break-ups from girlfriends. To make matters worse, they broke up with me just when I was falling in love with them. I felt they were always looking to get the 'bigger, better deal'. Invariably their next boyfriend was 6'4, and with me being vertically challenged, that played greatly on my ever-growing male insecurity.

That was OK though, as I'd show them: I was going to be the first person, I thought, to win both a Brit award and an Oscar (I think Sir Elton John's done that, but I was going to do it both as an actor and singer/songwriter!) Yep, I wasn't kidding about 'extraordinary'!

Throughout my 20s, 30s, right up to my psychological explosion, in my 40th year, I had experiences which were amazing in themselves, but I could only see them as stepping stones to a greater hope, eventually taking me to that unbelievable dream.

I got into the National Youth Theatre, appearing in their main show, with a main part in 1993, even getting newspaper interviews. It was in the NYT that I also met actors Chiwetel Ejiofor (12 Years a Slave) and Orlando Bloom. So those dreams can come true for some. 'Why not me then?', I thought.

Personal life always took a back seat. I thought that even though I was 5'6 and had less hair than Mr Potatohead, I was on the way to stardom, and so finding a woman then would be easy (shallow, I know, but that's what I was using to cover my own insecurities and previous heartbreaks).

The straw that broke the camel's back for me was when at 39.5 years, I realised that those dreams were never going to happen.

The counterbalance to that bombshell was that I was hoping to get back with an ex of mine. We were both university sweethearts and I always thought had a very special bond which had manifested itself several times after Uni when we were single. When she said we should just be friends, EVERYTHING just exploded in my mind: all the disappointments of my failed dreams, failed personal life, and failed life situation.

I remember literally wailing in the car to my parents with such despairing misery that my mum, one of the strongest people I know, broke down as she couldn't offer any solutions. It was horrific. I very quickly felt a genuine pain in my heart, and immediately felt 'What's the point? I always lose'.

It really hit me when I started to consider taking my own life.

There it was: 0 – 12000000 MPH on the mental health/suicide train, without collecting £200 for passing Go.

I didn't take my life, but I was lucky. The closest people in my life - my parents - realised something had changed. I wasn't just sad. I wasn't even in despair. I was further on, and even more than that I was angry. I think that's why the NHS put me on the critical list quite quickly, and rushed me into preliminary counselling with a highly trained nurse practitioner.

Indeed, it was the NHS that saved me. My GP surgery in Bedminster was the first point of call and the trainee GP calmly listened, and having offered various options, asked the question which even now sends shivers down my spine: "Where do you see yourself in six months?" meant very much as 'Things will get better my friend, have no fear.'

I answered even more chillingly, "I just hope I'm here in six months."

We both agreed that antidepressants were a good idea and he also gave me the details for 'Lift Psychology', which was a free service, giving those in genuine need access to cognitive behavioural therapy, and various self-esteem courses. They were just superb, as were Relate, with whom I also got (private, but very reasonable) counselling.

My employer at the time also played a key part. I have to single out my amazing manager, Ali, who took the pressure off and took my mentions of suicide seriously, showing great empathy; as well as getting me professional, occupational help. During this time, my wonderful father also came down and stayed with me for a week at the most serious time.

The key thing here - no matter what the 'triggers', circumstances or your perception of the future - asking for help and confronting that you are having a dangerous, tough time are vital.

We have an amazing NHS, charity sector and you may often find support in the unlikeliest of places. People do care and want to help.

My GP was a game-changer and started the recovery ball rolling. 'Lift Psychology' (a primary care psychology service in Bristol), my lovely parents and friends kept that positive journey going. I also had access to the internet, so scoured that for local counselling courses, persons and other information.

Having always been a heart-on-my-sleeve bloke, I didn't find it difficult to reach out and never felt much of this masculine, non-communicative, doesn't cry etc stereotype. Please disregard that old-fashioned and downright incorrect label!

We feel. We can cry. We can communicate and I promise you that there are those out there either in your life directly, or who you can contact, who will listen and help.

Tomorrow may be so, so much brighter. Please just let that sun rise once more.

*If you have been affected by this story, you can call the Samaritans 24-hour helpline on 116 123, email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) or visit [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)*

## TOP TIPS:

- **Be aware of any possible gaps in your psyche between your expectations, brought about by years of hopeful dreaming/believing and your reality. Life can be beautiful in itself, and certainly shouldn't be seen as a factor of whether you achieve your dreams or not! I'm still way, way off and that still grates, but I'm much more able to see my great experiences and life being a journey, NOT a destination!**