

John S's story

John was convicted for the attempted kidnap of a 16-year-old who regularly walked by his home. He approached her from behind and threatened her with his bread knife. She was able to push him away and ran to get help. John returned to his flat straight afterwards and waited for the police to arrive, which they did within the hour. He pleaded guilty.

My only previous crime was for stealing women's underwear off a neighbour's washing line. I was drunk at the time. I was ashamed then. I felt stupid.

Nearly twenty years later I tried kidnapping a 16 year old girl. I was 53. I'd been on the beer the night before that too.

I am thankful that I was caught before anything even more serious happened. And I regret not getting help before that as perhaps it could have been prevented. I think maybe I could have done more harm though. If I'd carried on unchecked.

I've never actually physically harmed anyone. Not me. I don't think I ever will now. Prison and probation have helped me straighten out my thoughts.

I've had to face my alcoholism. And many other problems, including my social isolation and loneliness.

I'm not on the sex offenders' register. I'm not a schedule one offender.

I hope talking about it here helps you understand. And from understanding me then other people like me can be helped. I'm not excusing it though. What I did is beyond the bounds of decency. It's not acceptable. I am not excusing myself. I deserve my sentence.

Why did I nearly go there? I'll tell you why I think it was - loneliness. Really bad loneliness though - not just being alone on a Friday night.

It was like having toothache for years. I didn't even feel the ache anymore. It was so much a part of me. It ended up discolouring everything including my thoughts. Everything I was thinking.

I'd run out of money for the escort girls. They helped me with my sexual frustrations and needs. They provided a relief.

I'd been working extremely long hours 60-70 ish a week. For months of end. I had a week off work hitting the drink. I drunk a few bottles of sherry a day. That's quite a lot isn't it?

I'd been leading a very lonely existence for a number of years. I'd got very few friends.

I never married although I always wanted to. I nearly got engaged when I was 19. She was 17. But I let my family interfere. I listened to my father too much. He didn't like her. I felt he didn't want me to be happy. I was brought up with Victorian attitudes. My parents set high moral standards.

Looking back now I was weak. I opted to let my father influence me. I opted to accept his constant criticism. I stayed living at home until I was 30. I did all this to myself. You see for years & years I thought it was done to me. I didn't realise I could make my own decisions. I didn't think straight.

I didn't take responsibility for my thought, my actions or myself.

It was a big shock for me when my father admitted to having an illegitimate child outside of our family. I felt he was a hypocrite.

I took an apprenticeship as an electrician at a local factory when I left school. I did well at school. I had lots of cousins there. I got a few CSEs.

I worked there for 21 years. There was a change of management. I'd reached a full stop in the job. I left and drifted around from job to job for a few years. Things went bad.

I'd had girlfriends. The longest relationship was for about six months. I met people at the pub. I drank 5-6 pints a night. But I only had friends as long as I had money to buy my rounds. I tried dating agencies but found them too clinical.

Mum died in 1998. All three of her children loved her. She was gentle and kind. I remember in 1983 my mother said she wouldn't come and visit because of my drinking.

I first went to get dried out in 1990. I did 6 weeks in the treatment centre. But I kept going back to alcohol. It was my best friend.

As soon as the police arrived I admitted it there and then. I knew as soon as the girl ran off that they would come for me. I went back to my flat and waited for them. I appeared in Magistrates Court the next day and was on remand for two months before appearing in Crown Court.

I was sentenced to three years imprisonment.

It was a shock that everything had culminated so. I wanted to write to the girl to say how sorry I was. But my solicitor said it was best left. She must have been terrified. I am so, so sorry.

I was put on an isolation wing so I didn't have any threats. I got on with the lads. I wasn't lonely anymore. I had people to talk to.

I started waking up to reality in prison. I had counselling. I looked at myself and saw it all. I didn't like what I saw. But it wasn't too late to change. Prison enforced abstinence from alcohol on me. I needed that.

I learnt about the cycle of offending and the triggers – drink, drugs, relationships. I realised I took the easy options all the time. I didn't stand up for myself. I should have left home years before I did.

I did group work in prison. Enhanced Thinking Skills was a programme with eight of us. We did different scenarios and role play. It helped me to rethink how I am and how not to get into certain scenarios which might lead to offending – such as avoiding alcohol in my case. And also moving away from my dad's influence.

I was released from prison into a probation hostel (approved premise) after serving 18 months. I've done a lot of good work here too. I've been through a specialist counselling course for people who've committed sexual crimes. I've done a basic skills course and go to college every morning for an open learning IT course. I've also carried on with alcohol counselling.

I have really appreciated the art group run at the hostel. I've produced some excellent work. I've never done anything like this since 40 years ago at school. Because of the good work I produced, a local voluntary group gave me a grant to buy more art materials. One of my drawings has featured on a corporate Christmas card.

I've spent a lot of time thinking about relationships. How I've seen women as sexual objects to meet my needs. I was frightened to go into a proper relationship. I realise now that it has to be an

emotional bond. Feeling you care for someone. Caring for their feelings. Not being too pushy. Give & take.

I'm still hopeful that I can meet someone. I am more realistic now though.

I am hoping to move into a new flat in a new area in a few months. Then I will make a big effort to keep going to college and making daily contact with other people. I must not let myself get lonely like that ever again.

I have spoken with my father on the phone since I got out of prison. He wrote to me in prison. But I don't want to see him just yet.

I am still a bit wobbly about disclosing this conviction to other people. I feel people can look at my sort of offences without seeing what is behind them.

My advice to other people in my situation is that whenever you think there's no way out – then that is when you need help. This is the warning sign. So you must try and admit you need help. Admitting this is the be all and end all of all your problems. For once you've done this then you can look out for the hand that helps you. Then I say – hold onto it firmly and don't let go.

ends

