

Episode #1: Reece

[00:00:00] Empathy Museum presents *A Mile in My Shoes*.

You're listening to *Our Justice*, a series of true stories and conversations co-produced by three young people with experience of the Scottish Justice System.

I'm Reece.

I love working in a night club. Gay nights are just that much better. At a gay club you can just be freer, and I just love that feeling. The job as well, because the job is fun 'cause I do PR so I get to do a lot of chatting and bantering, which is quite fun.

When you're on the scene, there's a lot of pressure to either be skinny or be muscley. There's a lot of pressure to look as best as you can. So that causes a lot of insecurity, which is a kind of downside, I'd say, to the scene.

[00:01:00] Hi, my name is Reece and I'm 25 years old and I live in Glasgow. I grew up in Glasgow in a kind of housing estate and my mom was a very kind of harsh person in the sense of... Because of the area we grew up... And I think she was maybe scared because I was quite a sensitive child as well, was very emotional, and in the area that I grew up in that wasn't kind of a good thing.

And I think she tried to push that out to me. My mom, I guess, tried to create this kind of person that was gonna defend themselves and all this, but I think that she'd done it in such a extreme way that it caused a lot of problems. And on top of that, I've seen a lot of stuff growing up. Like I've watched her being countless fights with her boyfriends.

I've had to get involved and I would be like trying to take on this grown man. It was just filled with a lot of violence from my mum towards like neighbors or police or many times she'd been arrested over Christmas... Even though there was a lot of things in her parenting that I would say was questionable and probably not right, there was also a lot of parts that were good and that she was very protective and that she was [00:02:00] very caring and that she would've put a life mind for me and my sister.

She was also sexually, mentally and physically abused and always admired growing up how strong she was and how much she was put up with.

When I was about 10 years old, my mother was driving home from work and she stopped at a set of traffic lights.

Her doors were locked and a guy ran up to her passenger side and tried to get in her car. And then a car pulled up on her side, rolled down the window, pulled a gun out and shot him. And my mum became the main witness to a murder investigation.

So one day I came home on a Sunday, I remember it's so clear, I'd just been out cleaning my friends, and I remember walking at my house and there was these two guys in suits and they were standing in my living room and there was all these bags packed and it was like, it must have been like seven / eight o'clock at night. I just remember getting in and them telling me, oh, we're going a little trip.

I must have sensed something was going on because the first question I had was 'are we coming back here?' [00:03:00] And they kind of just glossed over the answer. They took us away to this, like, middle of nowhere hotel. They just kept moving us about under witness protection. And at this point I was missing out on, like, lots of school and I was just all over the place and my mom was all over the place and her mental health just started to really deteriorate. I just remember her getting really delusional and having kind of frantic behaviour.

And it was just so confusing and not knowing what was going on and not knowing why she was acting so different and so strange all the time. Every day, like, before I would walk in, like, open the door, I would always think: either she's gonna be really ecstatic and happy and everything's gonna be great, or she's gonna be a raging bull, screaming the place down, or she's gonna be having a delusion, or she's gonna be in her bed for two weeks crying.

She was eventually diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and post traumatic stress disorder. And it just got worse and worse and worse. And then she started becoming quite into the [00:04:00] alcohol and stuff. And she started to just look really ill. Every year it just felt like, you know, she's given up more on herself.

A lot of the responsibility fell on me to kind of help my mum, protect her, to keep on

top of bills, to keep on top of the house, to try and encourage her, to try and get her to clean, to try and do school. So there was just all that going on. I had a very, very chaotic home life all the time, and I was very angry.

In high school I started to get really aggressive. That's when I'd say my temper started to really get off the chain. People in high school as well, like, other students would go out their way to try and make me snap and I would get, obviously, the blame. And no matter how many times I tried to tell teachers, listen, they've been trying to wind me up this whole class, yeah, they just never believed me because I was kinda like the boy who cried wolf, in a sense. Most teachers hated me cause I'd walk out their class, I would go to the toilet when I wanted, I'd talk when I wanted, I'd go on my phone when I wanted, I wouldn't do work if I didn't want to.

And they would try and argue with me about it, I'd throw textbooks at them and there was points where I had to be moved English classes and all that because teachers couldn't handle me. I had to be moved [00:05:00] math classes, I was barred from geography entirely. I had so much built up, like, from what was going on at home, that when I went to school, I just unleashed kind of hell, I guess. And I was suspended near enough every week.

Then at the time, as well, I was kind of dealing with coming to terms with it that I could be gay. You know, I kept convincing myself that I wasn't. And then when I was like 18, I went onto the gay scene for like the first time. And I was going out, at this point, maybe four or five nights a week.

I thought I was having a great time because I was gay and it was all new and everything was fresh and it was exciting. And I was like getting all this, like, a good amount of attention and stuff. Um, I was drinking excessively, took a lot of drugs. I probably didn't realise how damaging it was, like how much that was probably having a big play on my emotions and stuff at the time.

When I was 18, I got arrested because I'd gotten into this altercation with a police officer. And then after that, the next couple of times I got [00:06:00] arrested was with my ex. I got in a relationship when I was 20, ended up going out for like three and a half years. And that relationship was very, um, there was a lot of stuff that happened.

He'd had some addiction challenges and he had also some challenges around being faithful and some challenges around lying. From day one it was just chaos. My mum

had died as well, by this point. So I also think, with that relationship, that I was kind of maybe attached to him cause I just felt so vulnerable, and that's probably why I accepted a lot of the cheating and all that.

I kept trying to, like, be like: right, I can deal with it. And I basically forgave him and said that I was over it, 'cause I thought at the time that I would be able to get over it. And about, I think it was maybe a few days later, we were out and I [00:07:00] dunno what happened, I just got drunk and I just remember it playing round my head. Then the next minute I just snapped, screaming at him about all the cheating and all that, and then next minute we ended up fighting for ages, until we got arrested.

So, we got bail conditions, we got bail conditions that we weren't meant to see each other until obviously the court case was done with. We secretly got back together, obviously without the police knowing and stuff. And then by that weekend, we were arrested again. And then that was my kind of rock bottom. That was at the point that I was like, I don't want this anymore. This has been my whole life for 20 year, I was like I don't want this for me, um, I want something different. And then I ended up breaking up with him.

And when I seen the judge, she was gonna remand me in custody until my court date. And that would've been my first like prison sentence. And I burst into tears in the courtroom and was staring at the judge, just hoping that she would change her mind. And luckily she did. Because of my upbringing and because of everything I'd been through, she said that she really felt for me, and she felt that I've [00:08:00] just not been given enough help and stuff, and that I could still do it, that I needed to go get the help.

So from that point on, I've not been in trouble with the police.

A friend actually brought up to me, one of my closest friends at the time, said to me, I think you have borderline personality disorder. I'd actually been to my doctor a couple of times. And he kind of was very like, shut down about it. He basically kind of said to me that as I get older, that my anger would reduce, and kinda sent me on my way. And then I remember the third time I went back, which was after court and after everything, and I was about 20 and I just walked in his office and I just remember snapping at him. I completely snapped. And I just started crying and I was screaming and I was shouting his office down, and I was like I can't control it, I dunno what to do. I'm scared I'm either gonna do something really drastic to myself or that I'm

gonna end up in a fight and it's gonna go wrong and something drastic is really gonna happen to someone. I don't want that to happen. You need to help me please.

So, um, he referred me and I got assessed and then we were doing therapy and cognitive behavioral [00:09:00] therapy. And DBT therapy is specifically designed for people with borderline personality disorder. I did those two for a year. At the beginning of therapy, I remember thinking that this wasn't gonna work. Like I didn't believe at all. I was like, how is me sitting down and talking going to change anything. And then about the 10th month, I just remember looking back at all my old behavior and who I was at that point, and I was like, my whole mindset was very positive and I was a lot more happier throughout the day. And I was a lot more nicer and I was a lot more empathetic towards people. And I think that was who I was always. And then everything that happened, obviously built up all these kind of aggressive defenses and therapy obviously helped bring that down, and the real me started to show.

I obviously still have moments and stuff, but majority of the week, I'm a lot happier than what I was for most of the first 20 years of my life. So I think therapy was the best decision, the best thing that ever happened to me.

I currently study social work at university and I work in a nightclub and [00:10:00] do a lot of work with government and charities, usually around mental health, community justice, and poverty. And like, teacher conferences where I've trained them, I've done police training. I've met with government officials and helped them with budgets.

Uh, worked in prisons for a year, um, support work for people coming outta prison, and we'd take them to doctor's appointments, help them with housing benefits, help 'em sort out their debts, try and find them jobs or clubs or things that can try and get them out that life of crime. And get them to reintegrate back into the society and stuff.

I've done a lot.

Thank you for listening to *Our Justice*. This is a Boldface production, in partnership with Community Justice Scotland, and Empathy Museum.[00:11:00]