

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS

---



# Straight Up

Danny Dyer

# Contents

Cover  
About the Book  
About the Author  
Title Page  
Dedication

Chapter 1  
Chapter 2  
Chapter 3  
Chapter 4  
Chapter 5  
Chapter 6  
Chapter 7  
Chapter 8  
Chapter 9  
Chapter 10  
Chapter 11  
Chapter 12  
Chapter 13  
Chapter 14  
Chapter 15  
Chapter 16  
Chapter 17  
Chapter 18  
Chapter 19  
Chapter 20  
Chapter 21  
Chapter 22  
Chapter 23  
Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Acknowledgements

List of Illustrations

Picture Section

Copyright

## About the Book

Growing up in the eighties in East London was no picnic. Proper hard bastards, wannabe villains and cockney wide boys everywhere you went, all looking to make their mark. With trouble at home and more at school, Danny Dyer didn't have many options. He was a rascal, running with a tough crowd, getting himself into scrapes with the Old Bill, on the verge of becoming just another nobody.

Until he started to act.

It came naturally to him. He landed role after role, working with big stars, making a name for himself. And then came *Human Traffic*, and his career went into overdrive. Fame opened doors into the best clubs, the best booze and even better drugs. But with the highs came the lows, and as the drinks flowed, the work dried up. Shut out of an industry that didn't understand him, that heard his reputation before bothering with his talent, he had no choice but to turn it around and sort himself out.

This is the real story - straight up.

Funny, honest, full of swagger, and jammed full of antics and anecdotes, this memoir tears it up proper and delivers on every page.

## About the Author

**Danny Dyer** was born in 1977 in Canning Town, East London, and is a well-known film and television actor. A lifelong player and fan of football, he is an ardent supporter of West Ham United FC. He currently lives with his partner and two young daughters in Essex.

**DANNY  
DYER  
STRAIGHT  
UP**



arrow books

This book is dedicated to the three most beautiful girls in the world - Joanne, Dani and Sunnie. Thanks for putting up with me.

# 1

## CHAMPAGNE SUPERNOVA

One of the most miserable times of my life was in the summer of 2000. I was just twenty-three years old and I'd moved into Noel Gallagher's old gaff - Supernova Heights - with a girlfriend who was worth millions and who was killing me with her non-stop party lifestyle.

She'd bought the place and had it redecorated in an amazing style - a floor-to-ceiling fish tank separated two rooms, an incredible kitchen stocked with all the beer you could drink, and a chill-out area in the basement with a massive TV and fuck-off sound system.

In the evenings I'd jump into her brand-new Range Rover and drive to a play I was in at the National Theatre - the top playhouse in the country. It was a role other actors would have cut their bollocks off to get and I'd been put into it at the personal insistence of the bloke who wrote it - Harold Pinter, the greatest playwright of the age. I was getting rave reviews for my performance and pats on the back from everyone who came to see it.

When the play was over, I'd sink a drink in the bar with the theatregoers and then do one out of there. They're not my sort of people, to be honest, nothing wrong with them but I just haven't got anything to talk to them about.

And why would I want to wait around? Back at Supernova Heights there would be a party going on - twenty or thirty people. I'm not going to go into exactly

what went on there - lots of very, very famous people - but it was like the last days of Rome with added Charlie.

I'd get a hooter full of class As, a skin full of beer, talk bollocks all night and then take a couple of sleeping pills and crash out in bed at about ten in the morning. Then I'd wake up in the afternoon in time for the evening performance and start the whole thing again.

So why was I miserable? Because I didn't want to be there. I've always taken drugs and I probably always will, but there's a difference between having the odd crafty bump up the snout as a reward for a job well done and letting it rule your life. I wasn't respecting that difference and I hadn't been for the month before when I was in Ibiza shooting a film called *Is Harry On The Boat?*

At that stage of my life Ibiza was the wrong place for a geezer like me. I went fucking mad with drugs and drink and all-night partying, fucked up my relationship with the producers of the film and fucked up my body. If you look at the film now I seem quite fresh-faced but I was so run down I got an ulcer on my eye. The hospital had never seen anything like it. The director of the film had to shoot me from one side to stop it showing on-screen. It makes me heave nowadays to think how I was treating myself and, worse, how I was disrespecting the people who were paying my wages.

But none of that would really have mattered - or it would have been fixable - if I hadn't fucked up my relationship with Joanne, my childhood sweetheart who I'd been with since I was fourteen, the only girl I'd ever loved and the mother of my daughter. In Ibiza I betrayed her with the rich bird - I won't say her name out of respect to Joanne - and Joanne found out through the papers. She went out one morning, bought the *Sun* and saw pictures of me with this girl splashed all over it.

I phoned her up and she gave me a straight red. Joanne's an aggressive little fucker, five foot tall and a right

trap on her, a very strong woman. She told me I wasn't seeing my three-year-old again, my beautiful Dani, changed her phone number and cut me out of her life. It shattered me, knocked my feet out from under me. My own dad had left when I was nine years old and I vowed I'd never make my kid grow up in a single parent family. Now I had.

I had nowhere to go but Supernova Heights. I was homeless. Now I know going to Noel's old pad accompanied by a bird with a blank chequebook beats stopping at the fucking Salvation Army so I don't expect much sympathy. But I'd lost contact with everything - with Joanne and Dani, with the mates I grew up with, and even with my love of acting.

That, if anything, should have told me to turn it in. Acting is my passion; it's what I live for. I'm fascinated by it, how the great performers do what they do, how I can improve my performances, where to stand, how to move, everything. It gives me a bigger buzz than any drug I've ever taken. But in that summer of 2000, for the first time in my life it had become hard work. For me it had always come so easy. I used to wonder how other people found it difficult. But now I wasn't enjoying it at all. I was turning up, saying my lines and fucking off back home to get on with the party.

I was doing OK, no one noticed and the reviews were brilliant but I was cheating myself, the other actors and the audience. I could have done ten times better. Acting's about bouncing off other people, reading the other actors and the mood of the crowd. I was just reciting the lines I'd learned. It ain't the same.

I was desperate to see my little Dani again. I'd drive down to Custom House in the East End to stand outside our old maisonette when I knew Joanne would be bringing Dani back from her mum's. Joanne'd just blank me completely and usher Dani inside. The worst thing about it was that I didn't have a leg to stand on. It was all my own fault,

completely. What's Joanne going to do? Let me walk all over her? I couldn't blame her in any way for elbowing me.

I'd stand there on the pavement with an empty feeling, looking around at those streets where I grew up. This was where I'd had such a laugh with my mates, where my mum and my nan still lived, where I'd lived until the spectacular OG in Ibiza. I felt like a shadow in my own life.

I was losing who I was in the company I was keeping and in the drugs I was doing. I missed Joanne and I missed little Dani, really, really badly. For a lot of lads from my background their ambition would have been to get out of the flats and into the rock star's mansion. I didn't realise it at the time - I was so fucked up with drugs that I didn't realise anything much - but mine was to get out of the mansion and back to the flats.

## 2

### I FEEL LOVE

I was born on 24 July 1977 in Custom House in London's East End, near to the old docks on the Thames. Donna Summer's 'I Feel Love' was number one that day and it doesn't make a bad theme tune for my youth. The area I grew up in would be described by some as rough and ready and by others as a shithole. It was a tough neighbourhood, the most deprived in London, but that made no difference to me because I did feel love all around me.

I had my mum, my cockney nan, who we called Nanny Mother, my cockney granddad Jack and, out in Essex my dad's parents, the lovely Nanny Joyce and Granddad John.

I don't include my dad in this for two reasons. The first is that he's an old-fashioned dad and doesn't show his emotions very much, unless it comes to complaining about stuff - his job, the state of the country, anything. If Donna Summer did a song inspired by him it would be called 'I feel the country's going to the dogs and them cunts in the government are to blame'. Probably wouldn't have been as popular, though you never know.

The second reason is because he fucked off when I was nine so he wasn't around that much. I never felt as close to him as I did my mum. He wasn't a shit dad, far from it, but like a lot of blokes of his generation, he wasn't very good at expressing himself when it came to the more tender feelings. He never changed a nappy, never got involved

with that side of it at all. I love him and I know he loves me but it's sad to say that the only time I really felt that from him was when he was drunk. You read a lot about how some kids suffer at the hands of big drinkers but it was never like that with Dad. He got a lot nicer when he was pissed which, luckily, was most nights. However, it wasn't all positive when he drank. Most people assume that my name is Daniel. It isn't. It's, in fact, Danial. My dad was so pissed when he filled out the birth certificate that he spelled the name wrong. That's why I changed my name to Danny smartish when I hit secondary school. Danial's a bit too near to Danielle.

Me and my dad do have a heart to heart about this sometimes - when we're both drunk. It's a strange feeling. When he has a few beers his face changes. There's a gentleness about him. When he's sober he's bitter, moaning about everything. And being the old-school fucking dad that he is, he don't show affection. It's not the done thing.

I used to feel safe when he'd hold my hand, though he'd hold it quite loosely. I got to an age, though, when he wouldn't do that no more.

Then there's the kissing thing. My mum would always kiss and cuddle us kids and my dad would too but there came a moment when he said, 'All right, boy, we shake hands now.' It hurt a little bit. You don't question it because you think it's normal. I remember once we were waiting to cross the road and he wouldn't hold my hand. He said, 'Go on, boy, go!' and I went to go and there were cars coming and he grabbed my arm and pulled me back, laughing.

That laddy banter sort of set me up for the rest of my life, which is what it's about coming from East London. Men, we banter, we take the piss out of each other, we don't show emotion, we don't give too much away, otherwise it's a weakness and people jump all over you. I understand that. So it was nice for me to go home to a

loving, caring affectionate mum where I could just lie there in her arms watching telly. I needed that in my life.

Although we didn't have a pot to piss in for most of my childhood - especially after my dad left - that never mattered. I had a great upbringing in many ways.

Weekends were best. On Saturday we'd all cram into Nanny Mother's little maisonette - twenty-five or thirty of us, all my aunts, uncles, all the kids.

Saturday's still my favourite day even now. I love getting up in the morning, fucking about, going over the betting shop and then down the drinker. I like an old-school boozier, few and far between nowadays. Old bit of carpet, little telly in the corner, same barmaid you get on well with, not that packed. I love the smell of the stale beer, the noise of people playing pool, the old boy sitting in the corner with his racing paper.

When I was a kid, of course, I didn't get to experience that. I stayed at my nan's and fucked about. The women would cook the dinner while the men went down the pub round the corner, The Angel, to have a booze. Then when the pub shut the men would come back and we'd all have a bit of dinner, watching the racing on the telly where the blokes would shout and scream for the horses they'd bet on. Then it was final score where we'd see how West Ham had got on.

Sometimes my dad would take me to the football. I remember my first game - West Ham against Coventry and we lost 1-0. David Speedie scored, I think. It was an overwhelming experience, the size of the crowd, the noise of it all. Everything about the football seemed big and I loved it - the cockiness and confidence of the men going in, the feeling that you were part of something really special. I know I'm a West Ham fan so I would say this but I think there's something unique about Upton Park - it's the people, the real East Enders, tough, colourful, hard and beautiful. You see some of them going in and everything

about them says 'don't fuck with me', the way they munch their pies, the rolling way they walk, their beer-bloated faces, big bellies, big hearts, swearing up a storm. I fucking love them. They're people with a lust for life.

My dad was always a bit of a tight bastard and sent me in on my own through the Junior Hammers entrance - £2.50. Two pound fucking fifty! How much does it cost to take your kids today? Forty fucking quid. That's a disgrace. And back then the team was quality - McAvennie, Brooking, Devonshire, Alvin Martin, Billy Bonds. The opposition would fear the team as much as the fans. We finished fourth one season, that's my memory. In fact we finished fucking third. Third. It's like my brain can't actually believe that and has to move us down a position.

This was the days of the terraces and years before CCTV cut the amount of trouble down. I'd stand in the supposedly safe part of the ground looking out at the north and the south banks. That's when I first got a taste for what the ICF was all about - the Inter City Firm, West Ham's feared mob of dedicated hooligans. We were the club that started all that bollocks; we were the most game. My dad wasn't involved in all that, he was old school and just liked a piss up with his mates.

The south bank was where the ICF were. I'd watch as it would kick off between them and the rival fans. Sometimes some of the away supporters would infiltrate the West Ham terraces and then it would all come on top. I was fascinated by it as a young kid. I can remember the chants: 'You'll never make the station' and 'You're going home in a West Ham ambulance'. What I couldn't believe was that they'd start even if we were winning. I could see them wanting to get into the opposition fans if we were losing but that didn't make a difference to the ICF. Rain or shine, win or lose, they were going to have it.

I never felt tempted to join them, though. A lot of young kids would hang around them and try to prove themselves

and become the next generation of hooligans. To be honest, I wanted to be a million miles away from that. I'm not a cunt and if someone has a go at me I'll be right back at 'em but I didn't have that bubbling aggression a lot of young blokes seemed to have. I was a happy-go-lucky kid.

Sometimes us kids would do the boot sales on a weekend with my dad. He'd buy us old *Beano* annuals. Well, sometimes. Most of the time he didn't buy us anything. There was a real old market in Brick Lane that would go through alleyways and through houses. I always remember the smell of it, leather, old things. This is why nowadays I love stuff like *Antiques Roadshow* and *Time Team*. These are my guilty pleasures. I love anything to do with old stuff. My daughter Dani can't believe I watch them things but I don't give a fuck. I like 'em, I'll watch 'em.

On Sundays my dad would drop us at my Nanny Joyce's house in Hornchurch where I saw a glimpse of a different world. My Nanny Mother would eff and blind and loved the word 'cunt'. At my Nanny Joyce's house you couldn't say 'fart', you had to say 'blow off'. It was lovely there, though.

I can still remember the smell of the house, my nan's roll-ups mixed in with Shake 'n' Vac. Nanny Joyce's was immaculate. She used to roll all her cigarettes at one go and lay them out in a neat row, so precise. We had dinner round a table there and talked about stuff. Granddad was a security guard at Tate and Lyle's and I was impressed by his uniform. I used to kid the other lads that he was a policeman and say I'd get him to come and arrest them if they fucked around with me.

I have to say, nice as it was to all sit down for a proper meal, I don't believe all this bollocks about eating round a table bringing the family together. At home I never ate round a table in my life, and almost never with my mum and dad, and I'm as close to my family as anyone I know.

We did have a weird sort of little bond up over food, though. My dad used to get in from the pub, have his chops

and then give me the bone to chew the last of the meat off, like a dog. That sounds awful but I loved it and it made me feel close to him.

So that's my early life, with my mum and dad and, eighteen months after I was born, my little brother Tony. I'm gonna come and say it from the off, I fucking hated him. Everything I was, Tony wasn't. I was a proper boy, into football, trying to be cool and in with all the hard kids. My brother was the complete opposite, very feminine, quite sensitive - a good talker and a good listener. We went to the Scott Wilkie school - a standard 1960s brick-and-metal-panels sort of place. In the school playground he'd go skipping with the girls and playing hopscotch. Skipping, in a fucking shithole primary school in the middle of East London! He didn't even gel down his hair and it all used to stick up in a big haystack. I'd call him Mullet and he'd call me Big Ears.

Why couldn't he just conform? But he wouldn't. He'd get battered and the next day, he'd be back at it, skipping away. I was trying to be cool and he'd make all that crash down round me earholes by doing something bollocky. He was always getting bullied, Tony, which meant I had to step in and defend him. I fucking resented that. Any chance I got I'd give him a slap or a dig. I beat him once with a wet flannel when he'd just got out of the bath. I didn't realise how much you can hurt someone with one of those. I gave him a couple of clumps with this flannel and it marked all his legs up so then I got a clump from Dad. I wasn't a violent kid but he just fucking irritated me.

My brother's always got on with women much better than he has with blokes, it's just the way he is. At home, after my sister Kayleigh arrived, he'd play with her dolls, combing their hair and stuff. My dad, who had left us by then, would come round to see us but end up going mad at him. He'd say 'He's queer that boy, fucking queer.' And then he'd start on at Tony: 'Look at you, fucking sitting

there combing a dolly's hair. Give me that fucking doll, give it to me!' Tony would be defiant, Mum would say 'Leave him alone' and Dad would snap and try to grab the doll. Our old house was all corridors and Tony would run off with the doll in one hand and the brush in the other with my dad chasing him. Then he'd lock himself in the bog so Dad couldn't get at him, and sit combing its hair in there, just to wind him up. The irony is that, despite what my dad thought, Tony isn't gay at all - he's just had his first kid. He just liked playing with dolls and no one was going to tell him he couldn't.

I respect him now, really respect him. It takes some bollocks to be getting that sort of abuse at school and at home and just stick to your guns. I hated having to take him round with me, though. I'd sit him up the corner in the park while I played football and try to pretend he wasn't there.

He wasn't the only one tagging along with me, as it happens. My dog Sam would usually come with us too. He was a mongrel, bought for me when I was about five. He was a ginger dog with a big question mark in his fur. It curled all the way down his back and the dot was on his head.

This dog was my little mate. I never put him on a lead - he wouldn't have one. He'd come out with me and stay by my side when I was out and about. He was a very streetwise dog, like the Littlest Hobo. Sometimes in the morning I'd let him out and I'd see him around. I'd be out with my mates and he'd be out with his, he'd walk past me with half a burger hanging out his mouth. He was smart, very protective of me, but a real free spirit.

He would bark at everything, be lairy behind the back garden fence but when you came in he was dopey soft. I loved that dog and he loved me. Like I said, when you're a boy growing up in a man's world you sometimes need

something to express your softer feelings to. I had my mum but I also had Sam. I felt I could tell him anything.

He used to live outside in the back garden. 'Garden' is probably not the right word. My mum and dad aren't exactly fans of Alan Titchmarsh, if you see what I mean. The back yard was always a shithole - holes everywhere that the dog had dug, a rotary clothes line leaning to one side and an old cupboard with one door off where the dog lived. My dad built a little shed out there once and started breeding zebra finches to sell. It was a little aviary. The birds got some disease, though, and I came in one morning to find all thirty of them dead at the bottom of it. He didn't bother after that.

Before he left us, my mum and dad used to argue - largely about him coming in pissed. There was never any domestic violence as such but, on the other hand, there wasn't one door in our house that hadn't got holes punched in it by my dad when he lost his temper.

Still, like I say, Dad wasn't a bad bloke, it's just that him and mum were so different. They met and had us when they were very young. They met one night in a pub called The Peacock. Mum's a 'peace to all nations' sort. She's left wing, believes in judging people on who they are, not the colour of their skin, and would give you the last coin out of her purse. My dad's the reverse of that, right wing and likes to hold on to his money.

An example of what my mum's like is that the other day this pregnant girl knocked on the door, said she wanted to use the toilet. She was obviously a crack addict. My mum let her in and, surprise surprise, she nicked all her jewellery. Mum felt sorry for her, though, wasn't angry at all. If she came back again she'd probably try to help her. My dad would have kicked her straight in the fucking head. To be fair, so would I. So why did they get together? Well, my dad is very funny and quite charming when he wants to be, and Mum fell for him.

I like to think I take the best from my mum and dad, kind and funny. That's what I was like as a kid - a bit scatty, a bit nutty, was always having a laugh.

I appreciate I may not have seemed so pleasant to some of the fellow residents of my estate as me and my mates were always up to some sort of mischief. There was fuck all to do when I was growing up, really fuck all. At all. I'm convinced that the reason areas like mine have such a high crime rate is because there's just nothing for the kids to do. They need some excitement. You have to keep your brain entertained. That's why you take drugs, that's why you fuck around. I don't understand the mentality of stabbing people for no reason but I totally understand the idea of breaking into cars, just generally trying to get some excitement into life. You've got nothing at home; you've got no discipline, no money, nothing other than the estate you live in. Therefore you go round robbing people - I'm not talking about mugging, I don't believe in that - or getting chases off people. It's quite a laugh to get a chase off the Old Bill.

Where I grew up is quite a depressing place to look at so it's not like you could exactly lose yourself in the natural beauty. It's classic 1960s fuck-up architecture - a grey estate, rat runs and walkways, piss-soaked steps up to flats above, alleys with metal barriers to stop people dodging the Old Bill on motorbikes, the whole thing clearly designed by some cunt who never had to live there. You've got one bit of scrubby park to play football in with a bunch of fucked swings and a cast of lunatics hanging about, the odd big square with a broken seesaw or a burned-out climbing frame. And that's it.

So what are you going to do for fun? Cause trouble, obviously. If you build a concrete jungle you can't be too surprised if you get a few monkeys swinging about in it. And me and my mates were them monkeys.

I don't mean we did anything particularly nasty, for the most part. To us it was just fucking about, but I can

appreciate it seemed a bit more annoying if you were on the receiving end.

We'd play stupid things like Knock Down Ginger, mostly just winding people up. There were characters about the estate you could get a little chase off. There was one bloke called Elephant Man, so-called because he was an ugly fucker. He had two big dogs, an Alsatian and a Rottweiler. If you went outside his house and went 'Elephant Man!' he'd come out with the dogs.

If it weren't him it was another guy called Baldy, on account of his bald head, and he obviously didn't like it. If you threw a stone at his window and called him Baldy, that cunt would chase you all night. You'd run a few streets away and he would come out hunting. The cunt could pop up anywhere like Freddy fucking Krueger. He caught us one night and he had a spring cosh. He caught my mate round the legs. He hit my mate so hard the ball pinged off the end of the cosh. He made his fucking point and we never wound up Baldy again. It was always tempting, but no one ever had the bollocks to throw the stone because this geezer meant fucking business.

When people start going bald you don't mention it, it's an unspoken rule. So to have kids throwing stones at his windows, screaming 'Baldy', you can understand why he got so angry. I get a little bit of that myself nowadays because of who I am, kids ringing my bell and trying to get a chase. What goes around comes around.

As I grew older and started smoking weed, things did start turning a bit more serious. When we were eleven or twelve me and my mates - we called ourselves the Great Eight because there were eight of us - would start doing 'earners'. We'd say, 'Right, we're on the earn tonight.' This involved things like waiting for the Parcelforce van to pull up and the driver to go up to a front door. Then we'd nip in and nick what we could. Or we'd take the train out to

Barking and wait outside a newsagent's until someone leaned their mountain bike up the window and then nick it.

You'd have to build yourself up. 'Right, I'm going to do this fucker, I'm going to get his mountain bike.' You never knew how long they'd be in the shop and your heart would be thumping. I never got a thrill from it, though. I got more of a buzz out of the fact that I'd be getting some puff later on. All we wanted was puff money, twenty Benson, and Rizlas.

As soon as the geezer was in the shop one of us would jump on the bike and ride off. When it was my turn it got a bit hairy sometimes because I wasn't that big. I'd jump on the mountain bike and it would be too big for me, so I'd sort of wobble around on it and stay on as best I could. On a couple of occasions the bloke would come running out of the shop trying to catch me and I'd just have to wobble as quickly as I could, driving across traffic, through red lights - anything to get away. We never did get caught, though. We'd sell the bike for a fucking pittance to a bloke in Custom House and get a bit of money for weed.

I am ashamed of that now. It must be fucking horrible to come out and find the bike you've had for Christmas gone but I didn't think about it much then, though I'd have my little guilty moments. I don't really think crime was for me. Anything you do in life you need to get a buzz out of, and it just didn't happen for me when we were on the rob.

We were never into nothing serious. I think mugging people is disgusting. It makes you feel horrible if you're on the receiving end. Like when a mob of black kids mugged me for a computer game I'd bought in the shopping mall at Upton Park. I was a melt and I let them take the game off me. They could see I was a cunt. Bullies know who to bully, something I'd bear in mind later when meeting certain well-known actors who like to throw their weight about.

The other entertainment we had was videos. This was my first introduction to film. We didn't go to the pictures

when I was a kid, we didn't have the money. But there were plenty of videos about. It was when that flood of American horror came into the country. We'd nick the video off my mum and dad's shelf and watch that. *Salem's Lot*, *Fright Night*, all that old slasher stuff.

I also saw *Scum* and *A Clockwork Orange* because I had a few pals a bit older who were naughty fuckers. *A Clockwork Orange* wasn't available in the UK at the time after someone set fire to a tramp after watching it, but my mate had managed to snag a pirated copy. I saw a snuff film round my mate's house when I was very young, about ten years old. I was fucking freaked out. I won't name the kid whose house it was, but it was his mum's snuff movie. A bit strange. She had a bit of porn too so she was clearly a dirty old bird.

The first scene has this kid bungee jumping off a block of flats but the rope he's using is too long. You watch him fall and splatter. That's the fucking opening scene. You can't believe what you're seeing. Then there's this montage of people being run over by motorbikes and shit. There was this other one with a magician who had to get out of this cage before this tray of spikes dropped on him - he didn't get out. You see the thing come down in his face. Another one was CCTV footage of a mental patient who's taken someone hostage. And he just cuts her throat.

I walked out of that house freaking the fuck out. I felt really vulnerable. As a kid you feel invincible. Suddenly, with watching something like that, you're alert to this sense of danger and feel incredibly guilty about watching it.

I couldn't tell my mum because I know she would have had a word with this other kid's mum about it. I took my brother round there to freak him out but he took it in his stride. He's so strong mentally, my brother. I thought he was going to sob his heart out, but he didn't. He just

watched it, came home and went back to playing with the dolls.

Apart from videos it was TV. We watched all the usual stuff kids watched back in the eighties - *EastEnders*, *Grange Hill*. When I was really young my dad would let me sit up and watch *The Sweeney*, which I loved. My dad loved *Only Fools and Horses* and I can see why. He is a bit of a Del Boy. Take our house, a little box of a maisonette. In the living room he stuck wooden beams on the ceiling and hung fishing stuff off 'em - starfish, fishing rods, horseshoes, fish. It looked like the sort of thing Del Boy would have loved. My dad's also a big one for a bargain. He'd take us to all the boot sales and was always digging stuff out of skips.

My main mate when I was really young was a really sweet kid called John Guilder. I envied him, though, because he had proper holidays and his parents seemed quite well off. Our holidays were always the same - Canvey Island. I'd always think it would take hours to get there but, of course, it's only about forty-five minutes from where we live.

Dad would drop us at Canvey Island, fuck off for a week and leave us there. My nan had a caravan and my granddad and my aunt were all on the same site too, so it was a good little holiday.

Canvey Island had open space, grass, greenery, this mad smell in the air - the sea wall, the smell of the sea - seaweed, fish and chips and the freshness of it after East London. We'd walk from Thorney Bay caravan site to the sea wall and follow it round for twenty minutes and then you'd see the front - all the rides and the arcades. Just that smell of doughnuts and candyfloss would excite me. My mum would give me a couple of quid when it was 5p to have a go on an arcade game. Later on we'd meet up with the family and have a drink at the pub, The Monaco. It was

great, going around on our own but knowing Mum was quite near.

One of the reasons I never complain about the fame side of my job is because I know what it can mean to people, especially kids, to see someone famous. The first time I saw someone famous was on holiday. I saw Zammo out of *Grange Hill*, Lee MacDonald, who was also in *EastEnders* later. It was by the arcades and it was a massive thing for me.

He looked so tall and big and smart and clean. I couldn't believe I'd seen him in the flesh. I ran to get my mum and grabbed her by the hand. She wasn't too interested, to be honest, but she came anyway. I took her back to the spot and he'd gone. I spent the afternoon searching the arcades but I never saw him again. It wasn't about me wanting to be an actor or wanting to be famous but I just remember this feeling it gave me.

It was excitement, like that Christmas type of feeling you have as a kid, and I just wanted to talk to him or touch him. I felt special just for being near him. It was my little moment. It was a weird tunnel vision - just me and Zammo.

The other person who would be at Canvey Island with us was my great friend, my uncle Gary, who was only three years older than me. He came along late - his brothers were twenty-five years older than him and they called him a power-cut baby. My nan was pregnant with him at the same time her own daughter Jackie was knocked up with her son Brian.

I thought Gary was the coolest thing. He was the one who gave me my hand-me-downs - he had Nike Air Max trainers and a yellow puffa jacket, a Chipie jacket - that was the stuff back then. He was a really good fighter as well. He was from Stratford. He went to a school called Lister school where there was a lot more black and Asian kids, and he hung around with this group of really tough black kids. He'd wear his jeans rolled up with his socks

showing and people would always try to give it to him, but he'd tell them straight.

He's a hard fucker and once three kids tried it on with us on the crazy golf course at Canvey. I remember one kid saying to Gary, 'You think you're hard because you've got a golf club in your hand.' Gary said, 'Do you want it round your head then?' and that was it, I was off. I just ran for it while he stood there and had it with them. I must have only been about eight but I felt terrible for leaving him. He didn't have a go about me running away, though, which was nice of him.

So my entertainment when I was growing up was videos, TV and a week in Canvey Island. No wonder I ended up doing a bit of mischief. Unfortunately, one of the hazards of going around handing out shit is that you might encounter other people bent on the same idea. You might become their little bit of fun for the evening. That's exactly what happened to me with this bunch of gypsy kids.

For the most part I was OK with the hard kids in my area, of which there were a few, some from families of proper hard bastards. From a young age I knew the types that other adults feared. My dad used to drink in a pub called The Nottingham Arms on Prince Regent Lane that had been there since the 1700s. The pub got demolished not too long ago. It's where the dockers used to go because the Royal Victoria Docks are right next door. I'd be in the pub with my dad and this geezer called Jango would walk in, a boxer from years back - brick shithouse, big medicine ball head. He'd stride in and all the blokes, even my dad, would put their head down. Jango'd bowl in this pub and there'd be moments where he would turn on people and he'd slap 'em or smack 'em in the mouth or he'd just lose it and start throwing bottles into walls. It was almost accepted. There was a lot of characters like that. Sometimes it'd filter down to their kids and they'd be the kids you'd avoid.

I didn't get battered too much, not unless I went out of the area or some strangers came in. That was the problem when the gypsy kids got me - they were outsiders and I didn't know them.

The gypsies had plotted up next to a big building site near us. You knew they were something because a lot of the adults were wary of them. Remember, this ain't fucking Knightsbridge they've pulled up in. There are some right tasty fuckers about but even they were saying 'watch out for this mob'.

Me and my pals were swinging about on the building site after it had closed for the day, just for something to do. I went to go home but I got caught by some of these gypsy kids on the way. Five or six of them got hold of me and they tried to rob me but I had fuck all, just a pair of hand-me-down trainers three sizes too big for me. So they just thought they'd have a laugh with me and start bullying me. I remember feeling so skinny and vulnerable. They were taking turns holding my head down in this pile of building sand. I couldn't breathe and I was panicking. I felt I was fighting for my life so I wriggled free and punched one kid in the mouth. Then they were on me, kicking the shit out of me. Luckily, they took mercy on me in the end and let me go home.

I ran home sobbing my heart out, couldn't wait to see my mum. I was embarrassed to tell her, I don't know why because I knew that whatever I'd tell her she'd be sweet with, she always was. She held me and I just cried. I remember lying to my mates saying I put up a good fight but really, I was like a little girl.

Apart from that, and that time I got robbed by a bunch of black kids, I didn't get in too much bother. The hard kids liked me and would want to be around me. To be fair, it was probably helped by the fact I was quite naughty with the teachers. I never clicked with any of the subjects at school. I just couldn't get my head round 'em.

If, when I left primary school, you'd have asked my teachers what was going to become of me they'd have told you I'd make nothing of my life. I'd have agreed with 'em too. I couldn't see any future for myself other than doing what my dad did - going to work, hating it, coming home, getting pissed, going to sleep, repeat until retirement or death.

There was certainly no hope that I'd click with any of the subjects at senior school - the big Woodside Comprehensive. It all meant nothing to me, it was just a case of fucking around in lessons and being silly until I got kicked out at sixteen. maths, English, science, I just couldn't understand any of them. And then, on the first Tuesday afternoon at senior school, I walked into a class that was to change my life for ever. From the second I walked in I loved it like I loved nothing else, had a bigger thrill than any chase, any fight, any spliff could offer me. For the first time since I could remember, I had a reason to go to school - Miss Flynn's drama class.

### 3

## QUICK CHANGE

I thought I was the first actor in our family. It turned out I was wrong – that was my dad. Up until age nine he was in our lives and after that he was out of them. I didn't really see all that much of him when he was at home. He was always at the pub, down the bookies, doing something else. Plenty of nights he didn't come home at all. I don't moan about this, it's just how blokes of his generation were. Or so we thought.

I can remember the very second he and my mum split up. It was a summer evening and we were all in the house, quite late I think because I was home and normally I'd be out and about for most of the night. She answered the phone, holding baby Kayleigh in her arms. I was at the other end of the corridor, fucking about, I can't remember what I was doing exactly.

Have you ever been in one of them situations where you just feel the air change, a chill come into the room? This was one of them. I stopped what I was doing and looked at my mum. I saw her on the phone, literally going white. And then she just said 'Oh no' and dropped to her knees, still holding my baby sister. That image sticks in my head, her there helpless, shaking and struck down, clinging on to the baby with the phone limp in her hand.

I still find it difficult to believe what had happened to this day. My dad had been working up west in Paddington

at this woman's house - not a posh woman or anything, just a normal bird. Anyway, he'd ended up having an affair with her and had fathered not one but two kids with her. He had an entire separate family in Paddington. The mother of the kids knew about us but we didn't know about them. Obviously he'd been giving her some chat about how he intended to leave us eventually. In the end she'd got sick of waiting, called my mum and told her everything.

Mum wouldn't tell me what had happened, she didn't shout and scream, she didn't say anything at all. She didn't half give it him when he got in that night after work, though. Me and my brother lay in our bunk beds listening to them going for it. The next morning he wasn't there. When we asked where he was, she just said, 'Daddy's gone. He won't be coming back.'

When I did discover the truth, it suddenly made sense of a lot of his behaviour. Christmas morning he'd open our presents with us then drop us round Nanny Mother's. He'd fuck off, we presumed, up the pub. In fact, he'd been doing Christmas morning all over again with his other family. Then he'd come back later in the afternoon to us. Maybe that's where he was going when we were at Canvey. I don't know.

As much pain as it caused me as a child, the two kids he had have turned out to be beautiful human beings and I love them very much.

My brother Tony handled the whole thing really well, which irritated the fuck out of me. I needed someone to confide in, to cry to, but he wasn't bothered by it. Bottling it all up didn't do a lot for my behaviour. My mum took me to see a counsellor because I'd got so angry. She was the one there so she got the brunt of it. I'd tell her it was her fault - no way was it her fault - I'd tell her I'd rather be with Dad.

The counsellor did nothing for me. I had to draw stuff or play with shitty dolls that didn't even have any arms. He