

# WAYNE BARKER



# BORN TO FIGHT

THE EXTRAORDINARY STORY OF  
A BARE-KNUCKLE BOXER

BERNARD O'MAHONEY

## About the Author

Bernard O'Mahoney is the bestselling author of *Essex Boys*, *Essex Boys: The New Generation*, *Bonded by Blood* and numerous other acclaimed true-crime titles.

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I dedicate this book to my children,

**JAMES, HENRY, WAYNE, CHARLOTTE, KANE AND  
BENJAMIN.**

# Acknowledgements

**I WISH TO** thank Wayne's sister Lorraine for the help she gave me in completing this book. Also Wayne's partner Claire for being so humble. David Fraser, I thank you for being so compassionate about your friend. Wayne thought the world of you.

A huge thank you to my beautiful wife, Roshea, to Paddy the Laddy, Adrian, Vinney, Karis, Daine and Lydia, as well as to my grandson Charlie-Joe. I look forward to welcoming into the world my granddaughter Poppy, courtesy of Karis and Paul, and twins Alannah and Micky courtesy of Vinney and Hayley. The only wealth in this world, as Wayne discovered, is our children. Treat them well - because they get to choose your retirement home!

Bernard O'Mahoney

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# Preface

**MY PLAN FOR** the future is to stay alive as long as I can and beat this cancer. We all share the same destination and every man that has ever lived has tried to avoid arriving there. I have accepted I must die, but I refuse to accept that it will be cancer that will kill me. To concede that would be like throwing in the towel midway through a fight and that won't ever happen in my life. I have to focus on the fight ahead and ensure that my family are looked after.

I am 52 years old as I write this; I have at least another 23 years of my life to live. Here's hoping that any of my future addresses are not preceded by the letters HMP, my health improves and all those I have wronged in my life can forgive me.

Wayne Barker, January 2012

## **Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr Wayne Barker**

**10.42 A.M., 21 December 2011.** I have received some distressing phone calls in my life but few have alarmed or moved me in the way Wayne Barker's did this morning. 'They have given me six months to live, Bernie, but I am not having it. I have found a surgeon in London who will operate on me tomorrow. It's going to cost me a lot of money, but if it's successful I get a little while longer to live. If it goes wrong, I will probably die on the operating table. There are no guarantees, so if I do die I just want you to know that it's been a pleasure knowing you.'

How do you respond to such a statement? What do you say to someone knowing it may be your last-ever conversation? As Wayne himself would say, 'My head fell off.'

'Don't say that Wayne,' I eventually managed to reply. 'You've been on the canvas before and got back up fighting. Let's not say goodbye. Let's just say that we will meet up when you get out of hospital.'

'That will do, Bernie. I shall see you soon. Take care and make sure you finish my book,' Wayne said before hanging up the phone.

Unsurprisingly, Wayne emerged from the operating theatre ready for the next round in what became the hardest fight of his life. That is what Wayne Barker was all about: never backing down and never giving up, regardless of the opposition. I am not implying that he was some Terminator figure who couldn't be beaten - like any honest

man, Wayne would admit that he had tasted defeat – but it was his spirit that I personally found unique and admirable.

I first met Wayne Barker while working on a book titled *Faces*. His name continually cropped up during interviews with some of the most notorious villains in the UK. ‘You must include Wayne Barker,’ Mad Frankie Fraser had said. ‘He is a man’s man, the real deal, a true face.’

Arriving at Wayne’s Manchester home one morning some weeks later, I felt as if I were walking onto the set of a *Godfather* movie. At the head of a large boardroom table sat Wayne and all around him were villains from Manchester, Bradford and Leeds, who listened intently as he addressed the smoke-filled room. No sentence was completed without his phone ringing; Nick from Manchester, David in London and Ryan in Leeds all had problems that Wayne told them he could resolve. ‘Fuck him. He’s a fool. Tell him to come to my house in the morning or he’ll lose a lot more than he owes if he doesn’t pay’ was one of the pearls of wisdom that was passed to a caller. As well as the insistent phone calls, every 30 minutes or so somebody would knock on Wayne’s front door and either a wad of money would be handed over or a group of men would be hustled into the kitchen, where Wayne would tell them in no uncertain terms what was going to happen next.

I instantly liked Wayne and after talking to him at length thought that his life story would make a fascinating book. In the past, Wayne had been approached by a journalist who wanted to write his story, but he had felt it was too early in his life to do so. By the time I met Wayne, he had been diagnosed with cancer and he felt it would be at least worth recording his story on tape. However, he insisted that it was simply a precautionary measure and not an admission that he was preparing to die – not just yet.

Over the weeks and months that followed, I spent many hours with Wayne as he told me all about his unorthodox upbringing and remarkable adventures in life. From Salford

to St Louis, Missouri, Wayne Barker has left a lasting impression on every man and woman he has ever met. I have tried hard to categorise Wayne; con man, wise man, fighter, thief? He fits none yet all of those descriptions, because he is simply so much more. That statement may not make sense to you now, but after reading a few chapters about this gentleman's life it will dawn on you that it makes perfect sense. So, without further ado, ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to introduce to you Mr Wayne Barker ...

Bernard O'Mahoney

# ROUND ONE

## Stairway to Heaven

**I WAS BORN** on Sunday, 29 November 1959. That very same day the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., preached his final sermon as pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, after resigning to devote more time to the civil-rights movement. Rahm Emanuel, the former White House chief of staff and current mayor of Chicago, Illinois, was also born that day. It's interesting that Martin Luther King, who represented oppressed people, and Rahm Emanuel, who represents a city synonymous with gangsters, should both be linked with the day I was born. I say that because I am a man who, not unlike the Reverend King, has always backed those perceived to be the underdog, and, like Rahm Emanuel's city, my day-to-day activities have often involved people whom society has deemed to be gangsters or villains.

My youth was like an Open University course in criminality, with practical tutorials in many of its fine arts, such as fraud and deception. But after considering the many diverse aspects of crime, I was only ever going to major in one: the profession of violence. It has been a part of my life for as long as I can recall, and when my time comes I hope I am strong enough in mind and body to leave this particular stage the only way I know how: fighting.

My grandfather, 'Potty' Barker, was well known in Manchester during the '50s and '60s. He frequented the pubs and clubs where the city's most notorious villains socialised. He was known as 'Potty' because he was from Stoke-on-Trent in Staffordshire, which is known as 'the Potteries'. It is so called because the town is considered to be the home of the pottery industry in England. My grandfather had a soft spot for me. He would take me out with him while he was conducting his business, and he taught me how to earn money, deal with situations and, of course, conduct myself in the company of others.

When I was about 15 years old, my grandfather and I went into the Long Bar in Piccadilly, a busy pub near Manchester railway station that was very popular with the criminal fraternity. As we entered, my grandfather noticed a mixed-race man named George King standing at the bar and made his way across the room to speak to him. My grandfather and George were good friends going back many years. George was an ex-boxer who had a car pitch on Chorlton Road. I wouldn't describe him as a villain, but he used to wheel and deal in cars and contraband, and he had a reputation as a hard man based on his forthright attitude and boxing skills. George was an imposing figure; he was in his mid-50s at this time, a big, thickset man, always dressed immaculately in a suit and full-length Crombie coat. He shook my hand and put a ten-shilling note in my pocket. It was customary for villains to give the young and old money if they were in their company back in those days. I knew I shouldn't stand, mouth agape, listening while men spoke, so I found a seat for myself and my grandfather and sat down.

When my grandfather had finished talking to George a few minutes later, he bought us both a drink and joined me. Shortly afterwards, a man in his early 20s named Brian Dolan entered the bar. He walked straight up to George King and punched him. George hit the ground like he had been shot. Dolan, or 'Crazy Horse' as he was also known, stood

over George and said, 'Stay down, old man, because if you get up I will write you off.' He then picked up George's pint, drank it in one go and walked out of the pub. Everybody in the bar continued to chat and drink as if nothing had happened.

As my grandfather drove me home, he said to me, 'What happened to George is known as Gunfighter Syndrome.' I didn't have a clue what my grandfather was talking about, so I asked him to explain. He replied, 'It's when a young pup comes up against an old dog. Everyone gets old, son. You just have to know when you're past your best and accept that fact.'

Those wise words have stuck with me all of my life. So much so, I was planning for my retirement long before I had grown into an adult. I decided that when I reached 50 I would throw in the towel and retire to enjoy whatever was left of my life in peace.

Everything went pretty much according to plan until just before I reached my 50th birthday. I can't stand by and watch people do things in a way that doesn't meet with my approval. I like things done right. My home, my clothes, even the way I eat and drink, have to be just so. It's the way I was brought up and it's the way I shall die. It's that meticulous attitude to life and the orderly way in which I conduct myself that saw me clambering up a 16-ft stepladder above the stage of my nightclub in Droylsden, Manchester. I had sat and watched a young guy messing about trying to adjust the stage lighting rig for what seemed an eternity. That evening an all-girl band were due to perform at a function and I wanted everything ready before they arrived. The way the guy was tinkering about the band would have retired, never mind arrived to perform, before he had finished. My club - the Manchester Prize Fighters' Club - had a reputation for efficiency and good service, and it was a status that I wished to uphold. When I watch 'messers', I just get more and more irate until I either

intervene and do the job myself or explode into a rage. I rarely do the latter, so I said to the lad, 'Get down the ladder. We haven't got all day. I will do it.'

A few weeks earlier I had undergone minor surgery for a repetitive strain injury to my right arm. I had fought on the cobbles and in the ring throughout my entire life and the constant pressure from pounding heads, bodies and punchbags had taken its toll on my joints. As a result of the operation, my right arm was in a sling, which made climbing the stepladder a little more hazardous. Even more testing was that having arrived at the top of the steps I then had to let go with my left arm in order to adjust the lighting rig. Cursing the young man's inefficiency, I pushed and pulled the rig until it was finally where I wanted it to be and then I began to descend the steps. With the benefit of hindsight, I suppose it was inevitable: I somehow lost my footing and fell. The full impact caught me just under the ribs. I have taken some powerful body shots in my life, but this felt like I had been hit by a freight train.

People ran to my aid, but I leapt to my feet and told them to keep back. 'I'm all right, I'm all right,' I lied. I couldn't breathe and I instinctively knew that my ribs had been broken. I have suffered more broken ribs than I care to remember while fighting. Damage of this nature caused to a fighter is usually to the left or right side of the ribcage, but this injury was at the front. The pain was extreme, but there's nothing one can really do to treat broken ribs other than grin and bear it until they heal. So I didn't bother seeking medical attention. I just strapped my chest with bandages, grimaced and got on with taking care of business.

A few weeks before my 50th birthday, I began to suffer with chronic indigestion and ended up drinking Gaviscon, a medication for heartburn and indigestion, by the bottle. I assumed that my broken ribs had trapped something inside me that was causing my body to produce excess bile or

acid, so I went to my GP, Dr John Danson, for advice. As I am financially secure, I refuse to burden the NHS with any health problems that I have and so I pay for private health care. I have total faith in Dr Danson. He is no ordinary GP. The care and dedication he shows each and every one of his patients, private or otherwise, is second to none. I admire him as a man and a professional immensely and am proud that he considers me to be a friend. Dr Danson carried out a few tests and then sent me for an ultrasound scan at the Highfield Hospital in Rochdale. My chest and abdomen were smeared with some sort of jelly and the staff then used a machine that produced sound waves to create images of organs and structures inside the body. Fortunately, they couldn't detect anything of concern and I was allowed to return home the same day.

We all know our own bodies. A sixth sense tells us when something isn't right, and I just knew that despite the results of the scan something in my chest or stomach needed attention. I mentioned this to Dr Danson, so, to be on the safe side, he sent me to the Spire Hospital in Whalley Range, Manchester, for a colonoscopy. It is a pain-free procedure that involves a fibre optic camera being inserted into the anus so that the large bowel and distal part of the small bowel (the final two feet of the colon) can be checked for diseases such as cancer. The procedure might not have caused pain, but it certainly made up for that by creating embarrassment. I genuinely didn't know where to look as the hospital staff went about their work. I was pleased when it was over and even more pleased when I was informed that nothing of significance had been found.

The only problem was that my physical condition had not changed. I wasn't bedridden or unable to leave my home - on the contrary I attended numerous parties over Christmas and New Year - but I still had to drink Gaviscon by the bottle to prevent me from being sick or suffering horrendous indigestion. I returned to Dr Danson and explained that my

condition was not improving. He assured me that the tests had indicated that I was fit and healthy, but I just knew something was not quite right and told him so. To allay my fears and be 100 per cent sure that I was well, Dr Danson picked up the telephone and booked me into the Spire Hospital for an endoscopy on Monday, 8 February 2010. An endoscope is a flexible telescope about the thickness of a little finger. The endoscope is passed through the mouth, into the oesophagus and down towards the stomach. A small camera at the end of the endoscope allows medical staff to check for diseases or other health issues. I don't mind admitting I was terrified and my courage had completely diminished. I wasn't concerned about any possible outcome; I just did not fancy having anything shoved down my throat that I wasn't in control of.

Two days before my appointment was due to take place, there was to be a wedding reception at my club. Prior to going into work that morning I had visited the Café Rouge on Deansgate in Manchester to meet a few friends. I can be found there most mornings having breakfast. I am a creature of habit. I always order eggs Hemingway (poached eggs and salmon) and have usually left by 11.30 a.m. When I arrived at my club just before lunchtime that day, I was my usual self, ordering the staff to get their act together and chasing people up so that everything would be perfect for the happy couple's reception that night. By late afternoon, everything was in place and so I sent the staff home to freshen up and get changed in preparation for the evening. I am very old school. I insist upon the staff wearing bow ties, greeting guests with a smile, champagne - and courtesy, of course, is paramount. Three hundred guests attended the event and it was a real success.

Towards the end of the night, I was in my office checking the takings and doing a bit of necessary paperwork. I felt hungry, so I telephoned a Chinese restaurant in Ashton-under-Lyne that I used regularly and ordered some food. By

the time the food had arrived, the guests had all gone home, so some of the staff joined me in the office to eat. I had a bit of duck and chicken chow mein, but for some reason it didn't taste right to me. I asked the staff if they thought the food was off, but they all said it was delicious. Sitting at the table, I began to feel nauseated, so I asked somebody to fetch me a drink. 'That's ropey, that food. It's given me food poisoning,' I said. The staff were adamant that the food tasted fine, so I just sat in silence watching them eat. I began to feel increasingly unwell, and when they had finished eating I told them to go home and return the following day to clean up. This news was met with whoops of joy, because normal practice after an event is for everybody to stay behind, clean up, stock the bar and then head home at four or five in the morning. When the staff had left, I drove straight home and got into bed, hoping that by the time I woke up my stomach would have settled.

At approximately 8.30 a.m., I awoke to find that I looked like an expectant mother. My stomach was three times its normal size and felt like a lump of rock. As quickly as possible, I made my way to the bathroom, where I began to be violently sick. I drank a glass of water, but the moment it touched my stomach I threw it back up. My wife, Sharon, must have heard me vomiting because she ran to my aid and asked if everything was OK. I explained that I had eaten a Chinese takeaway that had tasted off and reassured her that I would be fine. I asked my wife to fetch me another pint of water, but when I drank it I was sick. I did this five or six times, thinking that I was flushing out any contaminated food from my stomach. I was really sweating, and thinking, 'I have never had food poisoning as bad as this.' When I drank the next pint of water, the eggs Hemingway that I had eaten for breakfast the previous day came up totally undigested. As soon as I saw the food bobbing about in the toilet, I said to my wife, 'Phone me an ambulance now. I'm in trouble.' My breakfast had been in my stomach for

approximately 30 hours and had not been digested, so I knew something serious was wrong.

A few minutes later, the ambulance arrived and I was whisked away to the Royal Oldham Hospital, where I was given morphine to ease the extreme pain that I was experiencing. I was X-rayed and then put into a private room, where I remained for two days. I had no idea what was going on around me because of the effects of the morphine.

I do recall that a surgeon named Dr Rate came in to see me. He seemed very abrupt, which annoyed me at the time. He said that the X-rays did not show any kind of problem and so they were going to carry out an exploratory operation. I formed the impression that Dr Rate was insinuating that there was nothing wrong with me and I was somehow overreacting to a little food poisoning. It's fair to say that the atmosphere my mood created between Dr Rate and me wasn't great.

The following morning, I was awoken around seven, washed and then wheeled down to an operating theatre on a trolley. I can recall that there were two other patients awaiting surgery. An elderly lady to my left was having something done to her hip and a man to my right was having his shoulder sorted out. I felt relaxed, happy almost. As far as I was concerned, a surgeon was going to open me up and sort out whatever it was that had been giving me a bad stomach.

When I did eventually awake, I was on a ward and the curtains were drawn around me. I don't know the medical term for my condition, but I self-diagnosed that I was off my fucking trolley because of the morphine that had and was still being pumped into me. As I slowly began to focus, I could see that three doctors were standing at the foot of my bed. 'Mr Barker? Mr Barker, can you hear me?' one of them said. When I eventually acknowledged the doctor, he explained that they had removed two tumours from my

colon, one of which had been perforated. 'You are very fortunate to have survived, Mr Barker, very fortunate,' the doctor said.

At that time, I genuinely believed that I was one of the fittest men on the planet. I had trained hard and fought all of my life, yet here was a doctor telling me that I was lucky to be alive. I was, to say the least, extremely shocked. 'Tumours? What kind of tumours?' I enquired. Before turning and walking away, one of the doctors nonchalantly replied, 'Cancerous tumours, Mr Barker.'

I don't know how long I lay in bed staring into space, but it was some time before I was able to pick up a telephone and call my wife. I cannot tell you when I had last cried before that day, but at that moment I couldn't help myself. I considered crying a weakness, so my reaction shocked not only me but my wife, too. She knew something was seriously wrong when I broke down, so she demanded to know what it was, but I could only say, 'I've got cancer,' before hanging up the phone.

Thirty minutes later, my wife was at my bedside, and I did my best to explain to her all that had happened and what I had been told. I was in a morphine-created haze and confused, so it's unlikely that I made much sense. I can remember us holding each other and sobbing, but little else. I cannot even recall my wife leaving.

I have vague memories of friends being at my bedside at different stages of that evening, but what was said I really cannot recall. At around midnight, a very dear friend of mine named Julie Perry came to see me, having flown in from New York. It was an emotional meeting. Julie gave me a set of rosary beads that had been blessed by the Pope and sat next to me for several hours talking about old times. Little of it registered; her voice was like a pleasant background noise. I was in emotional turmoil and unable to say much, but I was comforted by the simple fact that she was there.

When Julie finally left and I was alone, I was engulfed by feelings of immense anger. How could this happen to me? Why was this happening to me? Wayne Barker had too much to live for. I summoned the hospital staff and told them that I wanted moving off the ward and into a private room, that I needed to be alone. My request was denied, so the following morning I asked to be taken from the hospital to a private facility. On reflection, I should not have been so abrasive and abrupt towards the hospital staff, but I was understandably upset. Thankfully they understood that I was in shock and distressed. After the doctors had completed their rounds, I was taken by private ambulance to the Highfield Hospital in Rochdale. I was put in a private room and left alone with my thoughts.

I don't mind admitting that I was absolutely terrified as I relived the events of the previous two days. How many more days would I get to spend with my loved ones? Was it years, months or days before I would die? I panicked and began ringing people to sell personal items such as my car and jewellery. I called in debts and tied up as many loose business ends as possible. As it was a private hospital, family and friends could visit 24 hours a day, every day. Soon my room resembled a busy office as car dealers, con men, crooks and businessmen arrived to buy, sell or sort out ongoing matters with me. The noise we made as we sought agreement soon attracted complaints from other patients and their families, so a doctor was dispatched to speak to me.

My first encounter with Dr Rate at the Royal Oldham had not been very pleasant, so I prepared myself for an acrimonious exchange when I saw that it was him striding towards my bed.

'You're too loud, Mr Barker, and you're having too many visitors,' he said when he reached me.

'Who the fuck are you, mate? Who are you? I pay for private health care. I am a popular person and a lot of

people depend on me. I cannot afford to fucking die. What is your problem regarding my visitors?' I shouted.

Dr Rate did not answer; he just turned and walked away. Two days later, he came to see me and we resolved our differences amicably. We have since become good friends.

Ten days after being admitted to the Highfield Hospital I was discharged weighing just 10½ stone. I had 18 staples in my stomach and £90,000 in a bag (the proceeds of selling some of my personal possessions). As I climbed into my wife's car, I could feel the red mist descending. I wasn't ready to fucking die. How and why had this terrible disease invaded my body? The first person I rang owed me only ten pounds, but I still managed to shout, scream and threaten him with violence if it was not repaid. I rang several other people who owed me money and subjected them to the same treatment. There I was with £90,000 in a bag ringing people up and threatening them over little more than loose change. It wasn't about the money; it was just me being angry about having to die before my time.

The plan had always been to retire at fifty and enjoy the rest of my life, not retire at fifty and die a year or two later. I couldn't let it happen. I didn't care what the doctors told me; however grim the diagnosis, Wayne Barker was not going to be beaten. I might go down on one knee, I might even kiss the canvas, but rest assured I will get back onto my feet, dust myself down and continue the fight. I won't be beaten by this cancer. I have to keep on believing that, because at this moment in time that belief is my only hope of survival.

## **ROUND TWO**

### **Born Fighter**

**I WAS BORN** in a two-bedroom flat on Peru Street in Higher Broughton, Salford. My father, Eric, wasn't present at my birth. He was otherwise engaged, serving an eight-month prison sentence for various driving offences. My mother, Mary, started to give birth to me at approximately 5.30 a.m., alone in the flat. Aged just 20, she was petrified at the thought of delivering me. But, as usual, my mother just got on with the task in hand. I entered the world via the kitchen floor and to the sound of my mother hammering on the wall of a neighbour with a poker as she begged for assistance.

My mother was used to adversity. Born in north Manchester, she had eight brothers and sisters, but her mother had deserted them when she was very young. Their father was away fighting for his country during the Second World War, so he was unable to care for them. My mother, who was the eldest girl in the family, took on the role of her absent mother. The parentless children couldn't afford rent and so they lived in bombed-out houses and off the charitable kindness of their community. When the war ended, my grandfather returned to Manchester and took over as the head of his family. My mother's education had suffered as a result of her having to look after her siblings. However, when her father was given a council house she was able to attend school and enjoyed two or three years of

normal childhood. When my mother was 15, she left school and worked in factories making shoes and handbags. A year later she met my father.

They say opposites attract, and so it was with my parents. My father had nothing whatsoever in common with my mother. He and his family were villains. His father, Potty Barker, had served an eight-year prison sentence during the war. When he was released, he earned a living running taxis, prostitutes and pretty much anything else that would fund his insatiable gambling habit. At the end of the war, Salford docks became a hive of activity as raw materials and other goods were imported and exported to replenish countries that had suffered heavy bombing raids and land battles. My grandfather and many other men would steal lorryloads of blankets, food and clothing from the docks and sell them to shopkeepers and warehouses in the Salford area. My father tried to emulate his father, but he never did quite have the same energy and wilful attitude. Don't get me wrong, my father was no fool; he just wasn't as keen or as astute as my grandfather.

Life at home with my parents was far from idyllic. There were two children during our time at Peru Street, me and my sister Lorraine, who was fifteen months my junior. Being male and the elder sibling, I bore the brunt of my father's unwarranted, mindless violence, although my mother also suffered at his hands. When my father wasn't in prison, he was buying and selling cars and contraband to fund his social life. During one of my father's many prison sentences, I can recall my mother and I going to what used to be called the Unemployed Assistance Benefits Office. This was housed in a prefab building directly opposite HMP Strangeways. I was about five years old and vividly remember sitting amongst people who were clearly desperate and morally defeated. I have no idea if my mother got the cash handout that she went there for, but the experience, the dire atmosphere of that dreadful place, has never left me. I

would rather starve than put my hand out and beg for charity.

One of my earliest memories is of my mother fighting with a prostitute named Helen and my father taking on three men at the same time in the street where we lived. I don't know why it happened. I just know that the police arrived and kept all parties apart until order was restored. A few weeks later, my parents bought a house, 59 Stowell Street in Salford, and we moved in shortly afterwards.

Within a year, my youngest sister, Tracy, was born. I have a vivid memory of my mother going into labour in the middle of the night. The house soon filled with people as grandparents, cousins, uncles, aunts and a midwife arrived to greet the new addition to our family. Lorraine and I sat on the stairs together listening for signs of our sibling who was being born in the front room.

Tracy's arrival made my life somewhat more difficult. My father seemed to hold me responsible for everything that any of his children did. I was the eldest and therefore I should have known better than to allow my sisters to hurt themselves when playing or do anything wrong. Lorraine was the classic middle child; she had an elder in me to blame and a minion below her to blame. Tracy was an infant and therefore could not be held responsible for anything. While she was still a toddler, Tracy pulled the sawdust stuffing from a doll; it got into her eyes and caused permanent damage. This disability meant that the level of blame I shouldered for her misdemeanours was greatly increased.

At the age of five, I was sent to St Ambrose Church of England School on Liverpool Street but I knew from the outset that an orthodox education was not for me. The domineering, power-crazy teachers and their ultimatums reminded me of my bullying father. I hated them and they hated me. In fact, hate was the only thing we had in common. My disruptive behaviour regularly resulted in me

being subjected to corporal punishment. I would be shaken, slapped hard around the face and head or my legs would be thrashed, but I never did feel any pain. All I felt was a seething resentment for my tormentors.

At home, things were slightly different. I resented my father's violence because I felt pain, extreme pain in fact, and as I was growing his ferocity intensified. I received my first severe beating one Sunday morning during an Easter weekend. My mother used to bake cakes and, like all children, I would pick at whatever she was making as I walked by. On this particular occasion, my sister Lorraine saw me and made an insulting remark. Lorraine had really long hair, and in retaliation I decided to test out my hairdressing skills and cut all of her flowing locks off. Lorraine began shouting and crying, and moments later my father appeared. He stormed into the lounge and called for me to go to him. When I entered the room, he was sitting in the corner in his chair. 'Come over here, you,' my father bellowed. As I walked towards him, he leaned back slightly and then kicked me as hard as he could in the face. I literally flew across the room before landing in a heap. My nose was pouring with blood and both my eyes swelled up badly. As my father got to his feet, my mother got between us in order to protect me, but he just began punching her instead.

It was becoming increasingly obvious to me that my mother was growing tired of my father's violent behaviour, and I think he knew it too. In an effort to save his marriage, my father did his best to appear apologetic and civil. He even went so far as to secure legitimate employment, driving lorries for a local company called Ordsall Haulage.

On the surface, things appeared to be improving for our family, but, unbeknown to my sisters and me, the damage had already been done and our parents were preparing to separate. One day we were all living under the same roof and the next my parents had parted and my sisters and I