

WHEN PYRAMIDS TURNED INTO MOUNTAINS

Ian McNicholl is a male survivor of domestic abuse who was rescued by the police in 2008, his partner Michelle was sentenced to seven years in prison in 2009. During the intervening years, Ian has rebuilt his life. He has gone back to his career as a consultant and also becoming an honorary patron of the ManKind Initiative, a charity supporting male victims. His personal piece below tells the story why in late January he could not face going on a well-deserved holiday with friends to Egypt, the long term effects of what he endured and the continual denial by the NHS for treatment that eminent health consultants have recommended.

At last the holiday was finally booked, my first holiday in almost a decade. At last, a chance to unwind in a country I had never visited before. Egypt was firmly on the horizon! More importantly, I was going to be reacquainted with two valued friends whom I had not seen since the middle of 2007. I was fully prepared for the possibility on their initial reaction and for the potentially difficult questions that I may be asked. My appearance had changed so much since our paths had last crossed.

A couple of day after booking the holiday, just five days to departure, I began to feel increasingly fatigued. I simply put this down to my body and mind unwinding in preparation for my well deserved break. However, the closer the departure date, the more fatigued I felt. Something did not feel quite right.

On Holiday Eve I went to bed early as I knew I needed to be up at 5am, ready for the door to hotel journey that would take approximately thirteen hours, not including potential flight delays. However, I awoke at around 1am, mind racing with questions that would simply not go away.

How would I cope with such a journey given my decreased mobility? I broke this down in my mind into manageable pieces, the longest been the six hour flight which would be overcome, hopefully with the booking of an “Extra Leg Room Seat.” I also felt certain my friends would help carry my luggage. However, if all else fails I would sit on the luggage trolley and they would take it in turns to push!

Would I be safe hobbling along by the side of one of numerous pools on a potentially wet and slippery surface? I told myself, “of course I will as one of the poolside attendants or a hotel staff member would get me to poolside.” In the event that my descent in to the pool proved troublesome, I will just shout “Push!”

Sunbathing, oh, the sunbathing? Here in the UK, my sunglasses sit beautifully on my rebuilt nose (I have had my septum replaced due to the assault with the hammer,) whilst they also cover up the scar on the bridge of my nose and the two scars around my right eye. Each and every one of my T-Shirts covers up the scar in the middle of my shoulder blades and on my

upper right shoulder. The scar on my lower left forearm is the one I have very little choice other than to display and I had become accustomed with the occasional stare as it had been visible from around week three of my escape. These scars were caused from the assault with a steam iron.

In my mind, I was laying poolside, time to remove my T-Shirt. The many scars on my chest caused by the stubbing out of cigarettes would also be visible.

Oh my god! As I tried to relax under the morning sun, I would be highly visible, the scars would be highly visible, each and every one of them, all forming the reminder of fourteen months of torture that took me to the brink of suicide.

People will stare, they *will* stare! If there was no one was around to help me in or out of the Pool, could I handle the question "*Would you like any help*" knowing that the person posing the question would be in very close proximity to me, my scars and all. As I lay awake my mind was racing, the seed of doubt was firmly planted, insecurity was growing, there was no doubt I was emotionally unravelling like a puppy pulling at a toilet roll. At around 3.30am, just 7 hours prior to departure I decided I could no longer travel.

Over the last three and a half days or so, I have re-constructed the jigsaw that is Ian McNicholl. Only this time it *WAS* different, some of the pieces *were* different and they would not fit at the first or even second attempt. I decided it was best to remain in my own surroundings, where I felt most comfortable. The first piece of the jigsaw was to dress at home as I always do. Only this time it was not quite as easy to roll up the sleeve on my left arm knowing what was to be uncovered, to look in the mirror whilst brushing my teeth, to look in the mirror whilst shaving. No matter how many attempts it took, fitting the first two pieces together would be the beginning.

I then began the walk to the fruit market, nodding at people I recognised and them at me. This is something that is part of my day to day activities, my normality.

It is a statement of **fact** that Michelle caused each and every one of the scars (other than the one on my forehead where I slipped over on the ice as a child,) that I am now left with. It is a statement of **fact** that Michelle had beaten me. But believe me when I say "***I will not be beaten!***"

Prior to submitting this document which is the final piece of the jigsaw, I have asked two strangers, one woman and one man to read it in tandem. I had forewarned them both that they may be shocked and/or upset by its content.

Stepping back to observe, (my way of obtaining an insight from the outside in,) it was not too long before the man puffed out his cheeks and blew quite hard. A short while later, I caught a glance between the two of them quickly followed by the man holding out his hand to hold the hand of the woman. It was not clear to me who needed to hold on the firmest or the longest. A further glance up and a glance aimed directly at me from the woman saw the

tears well up in her eyes, her face painted a haunted expression. I shouted "*Stop, please stop,*" they had read enough, I had seen enough. The woman hugged me, the man shook my hand and we went our separate ways.

This "*experiment*" has made me realise that this document is not the final piece of the jigsaw. Two complete strangers can see and feel what I was feeling in a very short space of time. Then why oh why, despite two separate reports from highly qualified Maxillo-Facial Consultants, has the National Health Service continued for a period in excess of five years to ignore my medical needs, my desperate need for my facial scarring to be remediated.

Both Consultants confirm that they can definitely reduce, if not totally remove the scarring around my right eye whilst plastic surgery can remove the scarring on my lower Left Arm. Is it too much to ask that my needs are addressed or simply too much to treat? I thought the National Health Service was supposed to care!

I will continue my journey in survivor mode. I will continue to speak out in order to help others. I will continue to engage in debate within the arena that contains Domestic Abuse Professionals. I will not be silenced until Victims of Domestic Abuse are prioritised on the basis of "**Risk**" and/or "**Need**"

For those that choose to read this, my appeal to you is a simple one, ask yourself:

"What would be the reaction if the Gender were to be reversed?"

For those of you who work within the profession of domestic abuse, my appeal to you is also a routine task:

Assess **my** "*Risk,*" assess **my** "*Need*" and walk the journey to recovery in the shoes of both a Female Victim and a Male Victim.

"Which shoe will blister first, be the cause of the most pain because it does not fit or feel the same as the other shoe?"

Ian McNicholl

Male Survivor of Domestic Abuse