

**Reading Time: 7 minutes**

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## **Dear Mum.**

We've never really met. Of course you carried me around for 9 months, but after you gave birth, I was placed into the care of Camden Council, London within a few days. I know that I was born in Royal Free Hospital, not only making me a proud Londoner, but an even prouder Camden Lad. You can take the person from Camden, but you can't take Camden from the person.

We've never had the chance to speak. Maybe we never will. We don't need to. Many people expect me to be angry, upset, and seeking answers, but I don't need any. Giving up a child must be one of the hardest things in the world, and I know that whatever the reason, it was justified. Through the power of the internet and the General Register Office, I know that there was no birth father listed on my birth certificate. To even ask you the reason why could bring back 38 years and 9 months of trauma; trauma that you may have had to live with for decades, and it's just not the right thing to do. Instead, I just wanted to let you know that I'm sat here 38 years after you gave birth to me, and despite the highest of highs and some of the lowest of lows, I'm sat here typing this. And you know what? I'm OK.

You almost certainly have not met people who adopted me. My adopted father is one of the hardest working men that I've ever met, often leaving the house before the crack of dawn, and returning late into the evening. He didn't have the widest range of hobbies but is a proud Liverpool fan, and a keen archer. Even though I didn't realise it at the time, he taught me a lot. He taught me what a real work ethic is, working until the job is done, not just clocking off because it's 5PM. He taught me how to be humble, quietly proud, and to internalise anger rather than flipping a switch at every opportunity. I respect him enormously, and even though we only talked infrequently prior to 2022 and not at all since due to him leaving the job he had worked at for over 25 years (Only because the hotel where he was Financial Controller at closed and was redeveloped), his legacy does remain in part through me.

Over the years I've learned not to slander. Therefore the comments about my adopted mother are succinct: She most likely was doing the job of raising a child the right way, based on her own experiences, but it wasn't the right way. But it taught me it's own set of lessons, as you need to understand both the rights and wrongs of life to inform yourself.

Me? I entered and left the RAF, had a chaotic couple of years, and was gifted the opportunity to go to university in 2009. I graduated in 2012, then again with a Masters in 2014, then two PG Certificates in 2017 and 2019. A Ph.D is in progress, but on hold. One day, when the time is right, I'll return to it. Now just isn't the best time to do the best work I possibly can, and I've slowly learned to come to terms with that fact.

I've worked in service industry jobs, as a chef, a barman, a receptionist, then after graduation a Town Planning consultant; one of the most boring jobs in the world on paper! Then I decided to repay the favour to my university by heading up a new student experience department. Once that was in safe hands, I moved into lecturing, realising that teaching was one of the most rewarding jobs in the world. I was good at it. REALLY good at it, but there's more to life than your work, I eventually learned.

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Dear Mum

I've been married, but I'm now divorced. Most of the reason for the divorce rested on my shoulders. Becoming untrusting led me down my own dark paths, whilst pushing others away from me, including my now ex-wife. There were some great memories, but also bad ones; ones of disappointment towards me, and me frankly needing to hit the hard reset button. We had no children, but two cats and two dogs, each with their own stories. I still see them, and it reminds me of the fact that animals show the truest form of love. Even if you don't see them for a year, they're just as excited to see you as if you'd just nipped out to the shops.

I've had the chance to pretty much see the world; ironically the only place missing in my passport is a trip to your parent's home of Nigeria. One day I'll visit, but I'll do so when the time is right and I can fully appreciate it. You may be proud of the fact that I've never done the club 18 - 30 style holidays, but instead trips to Germany, Bulgaria, Hong Kong, Canada, The United States of America, Brazil, and my personal favourite, Vietnam. Each country has its own story, own history, and apparently I've become an 'Adopted Hoosier' along the way. That refers to the great folks of Indiana US, where Hoosier Hospitality is more than a catchphrase but a way of life.

I've had to face and battle my own demons along the way. I have a hyperactive mind that runs at about 4000 MPH, and whilst that's great for ideas or delivering miracles in project management, leaves you constantly awake and alert, with no power down button. I've my own set of mental health circumstances, as well as Autism and ADHD. These are not disabilities, but a long term part of my character. I also have neuropathy in my feet from diabetes and cracks in my spine by going to too many gigs in my twenties. I also have an addictive personality, which manifests itself in good ways and bad. The good can be cooking or writing, the bad smoking and drinking to the point I end up in a coma; the latter starting as a way of trying to slow my brain down, then over the years almost destroying my life both physically and metaphorically. Life is a learning curve, and whilst I've been able to put the drinking behind me, I keep smoking as my one vice, else I try to do something else and that becomes my addictive behaviour.

The thing you'll be most proud of is the friends that I've met along the way. In a world of social media, we like to look at how many 'Friends' we have on Facebook, or 'Followers' on X and so on. Sure, it's great to have those friends and followers. It's not too dissimilar to the people you get along with at work, in the pub and so on. But there's a few people who have become absolute rocks to me whom if I could magic a dinner party with you as the guest of honour you would love to meet and hear their stories. They are from all walks of life, many religions, some better off, others going pay check to pay check. Each of them however have left an intangible but infinite legacy in my life. Without them? I wouldn't be sat here on my sofa, writing this to you today.

What have I learned? Treat people well. The phrase 'treat how you want to be treated' is transactional, and you needn't be looking for a thank you for holding open a door, or a smile back if you offer one to them. Just treat people well. End of story. From there? As one of my best friends taught me; be humble. Always be humble. It takes a minute for life to come crashing down, and if you're showing off one day, that piece of humble pie becomes far bigger when the tables turn. Then? Be a friend. You may be having a bad day, but if someone's having a worse day, just picking up the phone, listening and letting them say or do what they need to could well change a life for the better. But remember, don't expect anything back. Finally, remember that laughing, crying and just sitting with your own thoughts are all OK. Real men do cry.

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Dear Mum

Mum, we live in a crazy world right now. I could spend my entire next year on this earth disagreeing with anyone or I could spend it just doing the best I can to be a decent human being. When I said you can't take the Camden from the person, I mean it. We are punk rockers at heart as a borough, and everyone expects us to be the ones spitting, kicking down bins and causing chaos. They're wrong. We're the ones who pick up the bin, put everything into recycling, then helping some cross the road if they need to. The component parts of what it means to be a Camden Lad may have taken a while to master, but finally, I think it makes sense. It doesn't matter if my neighbour doesn't like me (Thankfully mine do), but that wouldn't stop me from lending them a ladder. Even if I have no change to give to a homeless person, five minutes sat next to them listening to their story will teach me more than anything I watch on TV. If I see someone being harassed because of who they are? I can walk by or stop and talk to both of them. I hope you know which option you take there.

I'm 38 today, but I wouldn't be on this planet if it wasn't for you. For that, I am forever grateful. Thank you. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

**Mark Anthony Brimah, now Wil Schreyer Vincent**