

THREE MEN

Self Portraits

I was born in Germany in 1968. My dad was in the **British Army**. My mother went to live with him. We all moved back to Wales when I was 2 years old.

My dad was medically discharged from the army with **multiple sclerosis**. He opened a butcher's shop with my brother. My dad was a **strong** man before the illness took hold.

I had 2 brothers. We were a **handful** for my mother. She had to take over the role as **breadwinner** because my dad had to give up his part of the shop. It was a hard time for us. My mum started **taking it out on me**. I didn't think she liked me very much. Her **bitterness** towards me continued into my youth. I started stealing things from the local shops. I was **good at it** and had lots of **friends**.

At 11 years old, we moved to the same street as my Nan and Gramp in a rough area of Cardiff. My mother did **her best** by sending me to school **dressed smart**. But I was a **target** for bullies from day one.

When I started at my new school it seemed that the kids were **divided** into two groups: the kids that **had** and the kids that **didn't have**. The kids that didn't have were outrageous. They followed **youth cults** like Mods and Rockers and Skinheads. It was time for me to don a **mask** and I soon became a

SKINHEAD

This is an image of the mask I wore. I was a clown with a nasty streak. His tears symbolise my reluctance to be the angry person I was.

This is an image taken out of a magazine. Turpentine brushed onto the picture then placed face down onto a clean piece of paper and rubbed with the end of a pencil, transferring the image.

Masks are worn by everybody in some sense. The man with his shades and moustache or the girl in make-up: all masks. Opposite is a collage of me as a skinhead using torn pieces of various magazines.

Family: my mates were **like brothers**. We all came from homes that had problems. We would **protect** each other. We lived in three houses in the same street, boys and girls. All the lads had **tattoos** on their heads: Nuneaton Company. That was the name of our gang, or **firm** as we called it. Here are a few bits and pieces to give you a feel of what we were about. The **egg in the hand** is a comical image, like my life in the hands of others.

FUCK -ISM

Although I was a skinhead I was never a racist, communist or any kind of **-ist**. This page looked nice in a magazine, showing many **different hands** from many kinds of races. **Strong words** are needed when dealing with an issue like race-ism.

At 16 years old I went to prison for the first time. I cried for the first time in years and it was the last time I cried till my dad's death. The bad little **Apple** behind bars.

NO WORDS

EMOTIONAL CRIPPLE

I couldn't express myself in words. Violence was a way for me to express my anger. To inflict pain was easy for me to do. I would bury my guilt inside.

Using gouache, this is an expressive look at a kick. I've been kicked in the face once or twice and this is an image of the speed at which the kick is delivered! The colours are jeans and a red leather boot with yellow laces.

The discovery of drugs had a profound effect on my life. I would use hallucinogenics and amphetamine, valium and other pills. This would make my anger worse. I felt like nobody could hurt me.

A naked male figure in shadow of a corner. Bricks all round him. In his stomach is a fetus.

A beautiful sky and a huge tattooed male stomach right in the forefront. A full grown man rises out of the belly, covered in blood.

I was 19 years old. It was time to reflect on where I'd been and where I was going. But the anger was still there. What was it all about? I turned my back on skinhead, and teenage things and set my sights on money. The easy life. It was time to put my street-

learned **skills** to the test. I would get money the easy way, with **guts and a gun**. Armed robbery was the way forward.

I spent six years out of jail and in that time met a lovely girl and had a son. It lasted seven years, but I was to end up in jail again and dumped. Rightly so! She was only **looking out** for our son.

I was caught for the first time for armed robbery and got a four-year sentence. I lost my girl and son during this sentence.

In the years I'd been out, prison had changed a lot. The new prison service was flooded with heroin. A year into my sentence I **met** heroin. I believe I really lost my identity. It felt like I'd **shaken hands** with the devil. I didn't have to **face it** with heroin. I was released on parole a heroin addict.

A painting using acrylic to illustrate my release from prison. The road I travelled wasn't a straight one. So I would end up in prison again.

The red describes my anger and the blue my heart. The black is the prison and the oppression of prison, and the yellow is the light of freedom. An expressive piece.

Heroin addiction was the lowest point of my life. I hated it, I couldn't get my girl back. My father was ill with M.S. and I was his carer, but my strength wasn't there. I was looking for a way out. **Anything possible**. 10 years was my next sentence. The charge was robbery with firearms.

My dad died 18 months into my sentence. Being at his funeral and feeling the love my family had for me was overwhelming.

There isn't a lot in this book. I haven't had a very **good** life, nothing to get expressive about. My dad dying seemed to **drain** my anger away. My ex still won't let me see my boy. I don't blame her, but I hope to change that in **time**.

*

Bird

A little bird is scuffling at the chapel window. Somewhere there's a big grey sky, a nice cold sky. A high-pitched peep, like a bosun's whistle, over and over again.

A sparrow in the flower-bed. The sky, so big, is his. A lorry changes gear and rumbles on, outside the wall. A grumbling plane heads south across woods and fields.

Paul says: *When I get out they'll take me to the bus-stop – "Right," they'll say, "get outta town!"*

To where? There's a landlady down in Newport. Birds know better than me where they're going – they know where the crumbs are."

*

(All appeared new and strange at first, inexpressibly rare and delightful and beautiful. My knowledge was Divine. My very ignorance was advantageous. I knew not that there were any sins, or complaints or laws. I dreamed not of poverties, contentions or vices. Boys and girls tumbling in the street, and playing, were moving jewels. I knew not that they were born or should die. The city seemed to stand in Eden, or to be built in Heaven. The streets were mine, the temple was mine, the people were mine, their clothes and gold and silver were mine, as much as their sparkling eyes, fair skins and ruddy faces. The skies were mine, and so were the sun and moon and stars, and all the World was mine.

Our misery proceedeth ten thousand times more from the outward bondage of opinion and custom, than from any inward corruption or depravation of Nature: And it is not our parents' loins, so much as our parents' lives, that enthral and blinds us.

from Thomas Traherne – 3rd Century of Meditations)

*

The Palace

I will be rich

and I will not be here

I'll be where you only dream of

everything

will be bright

there are girls

and there are men who

do what I want

It will be light

it always will be

the women will be

as pretty as money

it'll be hot

and hilly

as bright as coke, my power

will be

easy

there'll be more

*