

Peter's story

Peter told me his story when he had been living at O'Hanlon House for two days. He expected to move to more settled accommodation shortly.

As a child, I loved football. I played for my primary school – Caldicott School in Abingdon - a couple of times. My friend picked me, we went up to Carlswell School, and I gave six goals away. Instead of stopping the ball and passing it, I just kept kicking it out. Then I played for my secondary modern. My teacher played for Wallingford Town. He said that you've got to work hard to get onto a team and I became a defender. We played in Didcot, and I played against someone with my [unusual] surname.



I gave up football after six months or a year because my dad was a milkman and I used to help him on weekends. I did that from the age of eight to 13. We used to play football on Saturdays. My teacher said you can play football or do the milk round. So I said to him, I love football, but I also love meeting the customers on the Saturday. So I gave up the football. I played again for a little while when I was fourteen, a few games. The last time I kicked a ball was at my cousin's.

I used to yodel as well. My dad learned me to yodel when I was eight years old. Two Swiss girls learned him to yodel in the air raid shelter. You just sing a little song: "Oh down in the valley the children will sing, oh up in the mountain the bells they will ring". My dad said you've got to sing from the diaphragm. I'd be delivering milk with him, from Abingdon to Radley, and we used to yodel on the way back some days. We'd try to yodel as long as we could, coming back from Radley. In secondary school, when I was eleven, my mate would scare me. He'd say "Petey yodels and I'll beat him up". But he was only joking. A girl in class said "why is his nostrils moving?" when I was yodelling.

I've been singing since I was young to all the records on the radio. When I was 20, I learned all these Slim Whitman songs, used to bring the needle back on my dad's LPs. I learned 25-30 Slim Whitman songs, two lines at a time. I went to see Slim Whitman at the Apollo Theatre four times. The last time was 1987. He's dead now. He's really good. He can hold his yodel for a long time. I can't do that.

I went into the pub when I was 20 and my mate had a party. It was packed in there. He said "can you start singing?" and I ended up on a chair, singing. They had a collection for me, £7. I was in the Royal Albert Hall once, and my mate says "Start yodelling", so I start yodelling and by the end they're all clapping. My mate asks if they can book me in, and the man there says that they have a space free for the week after Frank Sinatra. He was joking.

Then I learned to play the guitar. A school teacher at Lower Radley learned me to play. I said "how long do I have to play to become good?" and he said an hour a day. I learned to play Elvis songs, played at the Seacourt. I went to the talent contest 'Search for a Star' in Oxford in 1982. I was singing an Elvis song, but I didn't win anything, neither did my sister or brother. Then I entered into a talent contest, but I went and sang the wrong song. I should have yodelled. Then I entered into another talent contest in front of the Magdalen Street cinema in Oxford in the eighties. I accidentally turned the mic off halfway through. In High Wycombe I entered another one and I didn't win it. Then I entered in Great Yarmouth, Caistor Holiday Camp. That was the best one. I had a good backing, they got used to me after a few minutes. There was 12 acts that night, so I goes on, lovely backing with Elvis, and I turns the mic off again. So I just carried on. I got 62 points out of 90, came joint fifth out of 12. At the end I got the scoresheet out of the bin. The judge had ripped it up and thrown it out, but I pieced it all together again, with the names of all the singers.

When I used to sing, I'd put my collar up like Elvis. There was about eight girls and boys, they used to call me Elvis. They ripped the buttons off my shirt, grabbed me legs, called "Elvis, Elvis". But I like to be modest.

I'm the oldest of nine. I have five sisters and three brothers. My mother had three sets of twins, in 1957, 1959 and 1965. She lost the third set. They was born at seven months, lovely blue eyes they had. Sad, isn't it? I'll be 57 in May.

My favourite job was the milk rounds. I did that after I left school, in Abingdon. Then I went to Oxford where they gave me a job as a yardboy assistant groundsman. But when my dad got the sack I lost all my confidence. He and I are both Taurus, get upset easily. Suddenly in 1976 I was picking up four pints of milk, and counting them on the doorstep. And then two years later, doing a round in Kidlington, I ended up rubbing a 50 pence piece in my finger. I phoned up Abingdon Coop and said "can you send my brother Joey out". He's three years younger than me. He came all the way from Abingdon to Oxford to help me. I went back on the milk round four times, and it was taking me six hours instead of four.

Then I couldn't go back to the milk rounds. I went to see a hypnotherapist. She got me listening to these tapes. Three years later, in 1979, I went to High Wycombe. I told Express Dairies the truth, but they let me work for them. But then one day I was £26 short, this bloke must have taken it. They sent me home to check if I had it, and on the way home I saw this bad accident in town. And I just thought that I wanted to go back home to Abingdon. So I left the bedsit and went home.

I've had a lot of different milk rounds over the years, but my work record is bad. I've only done 12 years of work out of 37. If I was working I was alright, but when it gets to winter and I'm not working, I lay in bed for 18 hours a day.

Now I'm on tablets that even out my mood swings, two a day, a sedative. They help me. I'm stable. Once a man came towards me and I told him to stay away from me. I nearly got in trouble for that, nearly got put on a behaviour warning. I said "I'll tell you what, I'm going to commit suicide now". But the tablets help me.

I was in O'Hanlon House a few years ago, got to the resettlement floor, but got depressed and didn't clean my room. They sent me to Simon House to get help. I was there for six months, and then got into sheltered accommodation in Cowley Road. But I lost that after eight months.

I came back to O'Hanlon House two days ago. I don't have a room. I'm sleeping on the floor. They let me in because of the cold weather: the council decides when it's cold enough to allow people in. If the council decides that tonight isn't cold enough, I'll have to go on the street. I went to see my doctor today, and he said because I'm under the Mental Health, he didn't want me being on the street. Normally you've got to be on the street for one night, they've got to see you sleeping, lying down, and then they try to get you in here. I've got an interview coming up with Mind housing, and hopefully I'll move in there. Everyone's trying to help me.