

## Phil B's story

*Phil was never fully homeless. He lived at O'Hanlon House for about eighteen months, and has been living at Julian Housing for eighteen months. Phil walks with a limp.*



As a child, I loved going to school, playing football, mixing with my friends, and being with my mum and dad and sister and brother. We had Betsy the whippet and Patch the Jack Russell, then they died and we got Betsy and George the greyhounds, and a budgie and a ferret. We used to take turns running the greyhounds and whippets, taking them for big long walks through the University Parks, up to Summertown and back along Marston Ferry Road. I love animals. My favourite animals are pigs. I've got between 150 and 200 pigs in my room: my room is covered in them.

I went to Oxford Boy's School. I loved it, loved learning. I loved geography and chemistry. I loved playing football and cricket and rugby, went to after school training.

I left school in 1979. My first job was washing up in the Wolfson College kitchen, then I worked at Don Miller's bakery which is now British Home Stores, then on building sites, also at Kentucky Fried Chicken cutting up and serving chicken. I enjoyed that: we got freebies – chicken and spare ribs. I've also done a bit of shop work, at Sainsbury's on Heyford Hill, at the B&Q in the John Allen Centre in Cowley, in the Tesco's in the retail park by Blackbird Leys. I moved between jobs a lot. At the time, you could finish one job on a Friday and have another one on the Monday. You can't do that nowadays.

My first girlfriend from Cutteslowe and I had a kid together, K, born in 1982. Then I had a girlfriend from Barton. Then I got married in... I can't remember... 1982 I think. It was so long ago. Her name was D, but that's all I can remember really. That didn't work out so I got back together with the girl from Barton and we had my second daughter S in 1983.

I got run over in 1983 when I was twenty. I was walking across the road. Somebody told me that I went about 100 foot up in the air, bungee jumping without a rope. The guy got out of his car, stopped to see what he had done, and sped off. They caught him but he claimed immunity because he was from a different country. It's life, isn't it? I'll be on his conscience for the rest of his life. He'll be wondering whether I regained consciousness or whether he killed me; and if I regained consciousness, what condition I would be in. I haven't met him – I'd like to, but it's the past.

I received brain damage: the part of my brain that controls my right leg is damaged. I don't know how long I was unconscious for. I spent the next four years at Rivermead rehab, getting physiotherapy twice a day. I'm on mobility and disability allowance. I loved working, but all good things come to an end.

I got married to P in 1996. We would have been married 18 years this year, but that's life. The only good thing from my marriage is my four lovely children: D, J, T and L. D is seventeen now, J is fifteen, T is nine and L is seven. When I was drinking, I kept having girls - K, S and D - and when I stopped drinking I had boys. That's it. I'm not having any more.

All six of my kids live in Oxford. I see K and S now and again. K had two kids herself, and S had two. I see S's kids, but K doesn't keep in touch with me. She has her own life, though if we see each other in town we'll stop and speak to each other for an hour. I see the four younger ones once or twice a week, when I feel like it, just to keep in touch. The trouble is, whenever I go to see them it's "Dad I want some money, Dad I want some money". I'm the sort of person that can't say no. I'm going to see them tomorrow, and I'll give them a fiver each. That'll keep them quiet for five minutes. My little boy L, he's got his head screwed on. He's got a little money box, and he whenever I give him money he puts it in there. I'll be paying for D to have her hair done on her birthday, that'll be £18. I get on with the kids, just not my ex-wife.

When I was married to P, I had my own mobile home at Sandford. I did all the decorating, got central heating put in, brickwork, fencing. Then we got a council place in Rose Hill, and then things started to go downhill.

My ex-wife was talking to someone on Facebook and they met up, and it went from there. They got together. Somebody else told me. I took an overdose of ibuprofen. Someone found me and got me to Warneford Hospital, and they gave me this chalk stuff to drink. When I got out, I took another overdose, and again I got brought to hospital. When they let me out, I went to see my doctor, and he got me put in O'Hanlon House so that they could keep an eye on me. I left my wife and kids at the house. When I was down at O'Hanlon House, the other guy moved in, but the kids gave him so much hassle that he moved out again.

I was at O'Hanlon House for eighteen months, about three years ago. It was OK. A lot of the time I was on the computer, sitting watching telly, sleeping, doing a bit of drawing now and again. Sometimes I'd go to the paper shop at quarter to six in the morning, take the papers back, sit and read the papers for half an hour. Breakfast was from half past seven to half past eight, and then I'd do the activities during the day, or walk downtown or walk along the river, do a bit of sleeping. Nighttime I'd be in the wet room from about seven o'clock to about ten o'clock. I got in a rut there, got in a hole with no rope to pull me out again.

Then I got put into Julian Housing where there's no wet room. I share a house with five other people. It was difficult for the first few days, but I thought to myself that I wouldn't go down that road again: I wouldn't have alcohol every night. So I just stopped it. Nowadays I get plenty of food, I have my tea and coffee, my telly, my Gameboy, my hi-fi. I come to Scrabble on the Tuesday, computer class on the Friday, we have meetings now and again, they do trips and talks, visits to the museum. That does me. I'm happy.

The way I look at it, the bad stuff is in the past. I've got my own life now. I've got my independence, I've got to look after myself. I take each day as it comes now. I love being on my own. When visitors come by, it's like "OK, you've had your cup of tea now, tada".

Focus. When people say to me "I can't do this" or "I can't do that", I say to them "You can't be bothered, you're not focusing on what you can and can't do". People ask me if I want anything from the shop, and I say to them that I'd rather go by myself. I'm so independent. Every morning I walk from Divinity Road where I live to the Tesco to get the papers, and my milk, and a bit of shopping now and again.

Because I'm on mobility and disability allowance, if I went back to work, I'd be worse off. Plus, if you work, you have to pay Julian Housing £150 per week. So I'd basically be working a week for nothing, and I'm not prepared to do that. I've done a bit of volunteering, and that was OK to start with, but then I got bored doing the same thing and just thought "ah, why go there today?".

I've got a lot of tattoos, all over the place, on my arms, chest, back. I got the first one done when I was seventeen: a dagger with my name on it. That cost me £10. I've got a Man City one, a flying pig on my chest, some girlfriends' names, two or three each of my children's names and lots of my name. In case I forget my name, I can just look at my hands. I had my ex-wife's name as well but it's been blacked out. They've all been done in Oxford, and a couple in London. Some are home-made, what I done myself.

I like watching football and wrestling. I like playing with the computer and my Gameboy. I like being my own boss, being on my own. I like talking to people, meeting different people. I like to smoke roll-ups. I have a nice baccy tin that I bought at the market. I'd like to win the lottery. I dislike ignorant people, people who take the mickey out of people who aren't as important as they are, and some of the youth of today. I hate people who don't have any manners – what does please and thank you cost? I dislike being disabled: if I could change one thing, I'd get rid of my disability and my brain damage. But that's life.

One day I went to a second-hand shop on the Cowley Road and I saw a pig. And I thought "People collect cats and dogs. I'm going to be different. I'll start collecting pigs." Since then I've accumulated pigs upon pigs upon pigs from second-hand shops. There's two or three second-hand shops on Cowley Road, five in Cowley Centre, there's some downtown. I pop

in there once or twice a week. On Sunday I'm going to go to the car boot sale at the Kassam Stadium. I haven't been there yet.

I've got one pig on my telly, it jumps around and goes chgr chgr chgr chgr [*pig grunting noises, very funny*] as it jumps. That's my biggest pig. My smallest one is about one and a half inches long. I've got six shelves full of pigs, some on my telly, some where my tea and coffee is, some on my unit. Someone was saying that I'd better stop or else I'd have no room left.

I don't eat bacon any more. I've never seen a live pig, but I know that there's a farm place in Oxford that has pigs, and I have a friend from school who I think has pigs. If I won the lottery, I'd buy myself a large bungalow – I need to have a bungalow for my disability – build a little sty out the back, and get myself a pig. It would be the little pot-bellied kind. I'd get my brother to do the brickwork for me. I'd call my pig Porky and walk it along the road on a lead, take it into the pub with me. I'd settle it down in the corner and give it some pork scratchings.

One night when I couldn't sleep, I drew a rough sketch of my dream bungalow. I'll have a fireplace, and I'll panel board the wall above it. Then I'll paper the rest of it. I'll build some shelves for the pigs. Some of the pigs can go around the living room on units. When I lived in the mobile home, I did the papering and then had a board around the middle and one around the bottom. I might do the same again when I get my own place.

