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Aidan Martin, Justice Disrupted interview

SPEAKERS

Byron Vincent, Aidan Martin

Introduction 00:01

Before we get going, we advise listener discretion for Justice Disrupted. This podcast discusses social justice, and will touch on many areas including but not exclusive to crime, trauma, and abuse in all their various forms. Some listeners may find such content distressing. In this episode, specific topics include sexual grooming, drugs, porn addiction. If you are affected by anything in this podcast, there's a list of websites on the Community Justice Scotland website, from which you can seek support, and or guidance. Thanks loads for joining us. Shall we get started?

Byron Vincent 00:54

Welcome, welcome one and all. On this episode of Justice Disrupted, I chat to a very thoughtful Scottish working class writer about the issues he explores in his memoir, Euphoric Recall, which you can order now from his website or pick up wherever you buy your books. There's a little bit of what people in telly land, bizarrely call strong language in this episode, so if that kind of thing bothers you, I don't know steel yourself, do some press ups and have a stern word with yourself in front of a mirror. I'm sure you can handle it. I'm not going to bang on too much here because Aidan is a very thoughtful and eloquent speaker. And I believe, well I hope, that you'll find this a very interesting and edifying chat. Thanks bundles for choosing to listen to us in what is becoming an ever more densely populated ocean of podcasts. You get all this for free. And if you'd like us to continue having what I believe are quite important conversations, then give us a like, on whatever platform you listen to us on, better still give us a comment, a share, tell a mate, you know how all this stuff works. That's enough waffle from me. Let's get cracking.

Byron Vincent 02:24

Aidan Martin, thanks so much for talking to me. I read your book. And it was very relatable to me. Can you tell me a bit about where you grew up and what the general vibe was.

Aidan Martin 02:37

So I grew up in an area called Ladywell, in the town of Livingston. I was born in 1986. Livingston was a new town in between Glasgow and Edinburgh, to deal with the overspill of Glasgow. So, there wasn't a lot here. Today, you will see a big shopping centre, a football team, lots of restaurants. There wasn't any of that stuff, you know? And I was born into, I would say, a lad culture, certainly when I was growing up. The school I went to was bottom of the league tables for educational attainment and violence, behaviour, all that stuff. There was a mixture, because some of it was brilliant, you know, we had a lot of social community, people knew each other in first name terms. We had, you know, gala days. Because it was a new town, a lot of the people that moved there could pick where they wanted to live. So you had a lot of family members living close to each other: grandparents, aunts and uncles,

cousins. So those things were amazing. It was before social media, so kids played outside, we played football, we built goals, you had a childhood. But the older I got, the more it became about the violence, being territorial; tribalism. You know, substance abuse. There was, it was rife with mental health issues before terminology like mental health and trauma and addiction was ever used. For lads like me, we all had to look the same, we all had to behave the same. We all had to have a French crop and a gold hoop in the ear and wear the tracksuit top and bottoms and the Rockport boots and have a chain and, you know, speak the same way and think the same way and it was very uniformed. And we all grew up with the wrong rules, you know? So as much as there were some beautiful things about growing up working class, there was a lot of harsh realities and there was social deprivation, as a part of that reality.

Byron Vincent 04:29
One of the questions that's levelled at me a lot is like, 'You're a smart kid. How did you end up getting in so much trouble?' Can you take a bit of the pressure off me for once and explain how that happens?

Aidan Martin 04:39
Yeah, because there was nothing else. There was no other outlets. There was no creative outlets back then. Like if I'd have said back then I want to be a writer, or an author, or, and my best friend on my front cover as well, he's a painter and musician. If we'd have said those things back then you'd get beat up for it. There was no concept of being better. We grew up with an inferiority complex. No one improved themselves, no one thought anything grand. Where I came from no one talked about college or uni, or that. It was kind of like, you knew you were leaving school without qualifications, you knew you were going straight into a factory job. There was no hope or aspiration, it was quite a hopeless, powerless feeling. And so the thing I always say is, it's not why would you turn into an addict, or why would you end up in a life of violence a lot of the time; it's why wouldn't you when you grew up in that kind of environment? You know, there's a term called self fulfilling prophecy; and a lot of us, you know, were self fulfilling prophecies. We grew up to be the kind of people we were expected to be. There was no hopes or dreams or aspirations for us where we came from.

Byron Vincent 05:42
Those environments are very insular, they're like, microcosms that are logistically, culturally, economically isolated from the rest of society. And it doesn't matter how intelligent you are, or how creative you are, you're still framing your universe based on the data and input that you get from that world. So like, when I started taking drugs, I was a smart kid, and I was a creative kid. But I was still very much a council estate kid, a scheme kid. And so like, when I started taking drugs, I knew who Tim Leary was I knew who all these kind of psychedelic explorers was, so it was very easy for me to build a little persona within the shell of my external persona. And I think that's the thing that a lot of lads, through necessity, on council estates do, is have like almost an internal world and an external projection. Can you relate to that? Was that an experience that you felt?

Aidan Martin 06:33
Yeah, I mean, we were terrified to be different, you know? I mean I give an example of being in high school, and at the time, me and my best friend were given braces for our teeth, through the NHS, and we didn't wear them, because you would get beat up at school for wearing them. And so we broke our

braces, and our mums just stopped trying to go get us to wear them. And so we had squint teeth in which we had to pay 1000s in adulthood to get fixed. And that is a very, very early lesson in life that you cannot be different. You have to be within this pack mentality. It was a very small world, we didn't even have the knowledge to think outwith that. Yeah, I can certainly identify what you're saying what it was. I describe it now as a very bizarre way to grow up, but it was kind of all we knew, at that time.

Byron Vincent 07:19
I'm a decade older than you, but I think things only really started to change, and I'm not even sure how much they've changed on estates like we grew up on, relatively recently, there was really nothing you know, there might have been a rusty old swing set somewhere, that was probably vandalised, but all we had was the community of our friends, I guess. And that's both a great thing and also a terrible thing. So what kind of kid were you, what kind of student were you? What would your teachers say about you?

Aidan Martin 07:45
So this is the thing, right? I loved writing, right, I loved, I loved writing poetry. Now, that to me, was an outlet for a lot of feelings but I didn't realise I was nurturing a talent. Now, nobody in my school recognised that I liked writing and I was more commonly, like a lot of kids in my high school, told the kind of jobs we weren't going to get, so I wasn't engaging in classes. Now looking back, a lot of kids didn't engage because of the environment. It wasn't because they lacked talent, or ability, but we weren't nurtured. As far as when it went really sideways, I would say leaving high school and realising, you know, without actually been able to articulate at the time, realising that I had no future that there was nothing to aspire to, that you're, you're already, you've already got mental health issues, and you've already got addiction issues, and you've gone headfirst into that lifestyle. I mean, I went to become a sales assistant, in the shop that I used to be a paperboy in. On minimum wage. And there's no shame in working as a sales assistant. But I didn't believe that I could do anything more with my life. And I wasn't earning a great deal of money. And there was no social mobility for me. And then everyone in my environment, and my culture was the same. And drug use was rife. And so it was such a social norm that if you were one of the ones who wasn't participating, then you were excluded. And you were the outcast.

Byron Vincent 09:06
I got expelled when I was around 15. But before that happened, there used to be a thing called work experience where they'd send you away for two weeks to like focus on a job that you might be interested in a career in. And I remember going to the interview and saying, 'I'm interested in a career in the arts', and he literally laughed in my face. Like he laughed at me...

Aidan Martin 09:24
Wow.

Byron Vincent 09:24
...and he sent me to a building site. Incrementally, those kinds of things happen throughout our lives when we grow up in that environment, don't they, and they can chip away at our sense of self, our self esteem, they project onto us what we're supposed to be. I was also told by teachers that I would end up

as a drug addict and a criminal. They were right [laughter]. But, it's that self fulfilling prophecy kind of thing, isn't it?

Aidan Martin 09:46
Well it is, because I talk about in my book how when I started college and I was at entry level at college. I was a broken human being still, and there was a lecturer that says to me, 'Aidan, you're going to go far, I can feel it in my bones', and she meant it when she said it. And what she did was she projected that belief into me. Now, if that kind of attitude had been there from the very beginning, then a lot of kids might have been nurtured differently, to realise their talents because I think a lot of the talents we have are already within us, they're just waiting to be realised and nurtured, and I wish I'd have discovered the writing sooner. I wish at high school someone was like you know what you're great at this, you can be an author. And nobody would have ever said that.

Byron Vincent 10:26
One of the biggest failings that we have, culturally or as a society, is the lack of nurture in environments that have been stressful for generations because of poverty, and have been isolated in that stress. And they've been dominated by a certain kind of aggressive culture, generally, that has been born of prison culture. And that has been reflected back into these communities that feed prisons and then are fed back to, I feel that there is a lack of nurturing that happens. And that is fundamentally the most destructive thing about growing up in those environments is economics. And there's a lack of opportunity, but being poorly nurtured, and not through anybody's fault is incredibly disruptive and keeps people within a limited space.

Aidan Martin 11:13
Yeah, I agree, 100%. Lads were killing each other where I grew up, and it's because, because we all thought we were enemies with each other. And we thought that, because again, none of us were nurtured to develop our own individual and collective identities. And we tore each other down rather than bigged each other up because we thought that's what we were supposed to do, it was territorial. Had there been a culture of nurture, perhaps we would have looked at each other as, you know, someone that can help each other develop in life rather than looking at someone and going, 'That person is a threat to me', and then feeling that way for years and years and then you see people that are institutionalised and never get out of that cycle of thinking.

Byron Vincent 11:52
Can I talk trajectory of drugs with you?

Aidan Martin 11:56
Sure.

Byron Vincent 11:56
You know, I see myself as a primary school kid as a, as a good kid, as a well behaved kid. I didn't want to you know, I didn't want to do anything to upset my mum. You know, I didn't want to misbehave. Still, I was 11 when I started doing solvents, because they're free. They're shop-liftable. Then, I guess booze and weed came next. Mushrooms, because they're also free, magic mushrooms. When I'm, when I was

around, sort of maybe 13, LSD. And then it goes sort of rave culture, with all the rave culture drugs, and then harder drugs. What was your trajectory?

Aidan Martin 12:32
So, it's funny, because we talk about, obviously drugs, but my first drug was hardcore porn. And it was discovering it accidentally, at the age of 10. And it was at the extreme end of hardcore, and within the boundaries of what's legal porn. Looking back, I can see I was using it to change how I felt, I was trying to get a high out of it. As far as substance, it was certainly alcohol. We had a friend whose dad owned a corner shop and the friend come in; now I don't know if the dad was sending the friend in or if the friend was nicking it and coming in with it, but he was bringing it to drama class and it was half bottles of whiskey, half bottles of vodka. And we were buying them, and if we could get alcopops and stuff we were there, we were 14, 13, 14. We were meeting up outside, in a place called Cedarbank in Ladywell, and there was this meeting point. And we would meet up and huddle up on a Friday night, and were downing straight whiskey and straight vodka, and from a very, very young age, we were taking extreme spirits. And then it's like yourself that have moved on. Weed became the next thing; I never liked weed, but everyone was doing it. And I liked being out my own head. And then ecstasy was the next, you know eccies came along. Speed, space, all the different versions of that drug. And then, for me, it was discovering cocaine when I was about 18 or 19. And when I discovered cocaine, the way I describe it was like I fell in love, you know, that was the drug I married myself to. I know there are people, friends of mine that went beyond that, end up going into opiate based drugs, and whether it's prescription, or heroin, or street versions. But for me, cocaine was where I found myself. And after all these years and addiction and then recovery, I realised that, you know, my consequences were the same, my root causes were the same. So I learned that the drug of choice isn't really what addiction is. Certainly, cocaine was the drug for me. More than anything else.

Byron Vincent 14:28
It's a complicated thing, addiction. By the way, I had a very similar experience with porn around the same age. And I think it's a very, very common story for young men. It's now more prevalent than ever. I mean, it'd almost be impossible to reach adulthood or to reach puberty even without having seen pornography. So have you got any thoughts about how we interrupt that?

Aidan Martin 14:49
I don't know, I think it's almost impossible to stop it now, it's a click away whereas it was almost more difficult for me to have developed that back then than it would be now. Back then, tapes and magazines were quite common. You know, everyone's uncle had porn mags, everyone's dad had porn mags and tapes. But today, you don't even need to be stealing them off a family member, you've got access to technology, wherever you are, don't even need to be in your own house to access it. So I don't know if there's a way to interrupt it. Perhaps it's more about education on the impacts of how that can desensitise someone's ideas of intimacy and sex and what that means.

Byron Vincent 15:27
I think, really, that's all we can do, isn't it? And that's all we can do with most addictions. And it's all about formative education and understanding why certain behaviours happen and why we're compelled to do certain things. You said that you didn't like weed, and neither did I actually, but I smoked a lot of it

as a young teenager because I thought that's what I was supposed to do. I've been collecting mental health diagnoses like Pokemon since I was 11. You know, that didn't help. I took psychedelic and I smoked weed even though I knew I could feel the deleterious effect it was having on me. My true love when I found the drug for me, other than ecstasy maybe, which is a different thing altogether, was opiates and opioids, barbiturates originally, again, because I could get them for free off the doctor at the time. It was a simpler time [laughter]. And the reason for that is my brain is very busy. It's very active, and I'm very neurotic. And I've got all these other diagnoses like ADHD and autism that I'm only finding out about as an adult. Opiates just calmed all of that; I was self medicating. Can you talk a little bit about your experience around drugs in terms of like, what you thought you were doing, and in retrospect, what you believe you were doing?

Aidan Martin 16:35
Yeah, probably easier to start with retrospect, because I can see, I can see retrospectively that I had no self-esteem and no self worth and no sense of purpose or identity or direction. I had a lot of trauma, and suffering badly with mental health. Everything from depression, anxiety, body dysmorphia, I was 100% self medicating, but I was part of a culture of people who were all doing it. You know in the beginning, it was exciting, and it was a buzz, and it was fun. And that disguised the other sort of downsides or potential reasons for using it. The consequences started to pile up. But again, it was so normalised in that society and then I didn't know I was an addict, you know, there's a saying in the recovery scene, 'I didn't know, I didn't know'. I didn't know I was an addict. I didn't know that I didn't know I was an addict, do you know what I mean? There was many layers to not having a clue as to what was wrong. I didn't know, and if we don't, we didn't use terms like trauma and mental health or addiction. And certainly men men didn't express their feelings. At the time, for a long time, I thought I was having a good time until it got really sore. And then, then I started thinking I was just confusing. I remember thinking for a while that it was just me. There'd be times I was making faces at myself in the mirror, and not knowing what was wrong with me. And thinking I had, my mind had just flipped. Looking back, it's much easier to join the dots up. I've had a lot of therapy, I've been in the recovery scene for a while, I've had education about psychological and sociological reasons for what happens, and society in Scotland has a really unique problem with drugs. But I didn't know any of that stuff then.

Byron Vincent 18:07
For lads as well. I'm speaking from my personal experience here, but you tell me if it's relatable. We value recklessness, or we celebrate recklessness - working class or underclass or whatever you want to call us boys. I was a skinny lad. I did my best. But I wasn't great at fighting. I just wasn't. I just didn't have the scale to fight some of the lads. And so the only other option I had was self-destruction through drugs. I mean, it sounds insane to anybody outside of that culture. But that is like value. If I hospitalised myself through drug taking, which I did frequently, it wasn't frowned upon in my community of friends, it was lauded. Where all we have is our physical selves, right? We either have power and dominance over other people or we have a capacity to show that we don't give a fuck. And that's what I had, I had the latter. What do you think that's about? And was it the same in your, on your scheme?

Aidan Martin 19:01
Well 100% it's a substitute for, 'I can't get positive attention, so I'll get negative attention'. You know, I was never brave enough to be a drug dealer, or to commit serious crimes to keep my substance use

going. Me and my friend Colin, who I can name because he gave consent for his name to be in the book. Well we lived together for three years, we were well known for having party houses. Now, the houses were a shit tip. But we, we were well known for that, as a place you go for a wild party. And it gave us a sense of status and a sense of worth and we mattered in some kind of way within that community. Because we had this drug-using pad. I agree as well, I think that everything's about instant gratification so it takes a long time and a lot of hard work and effort to get to a place where you can achieve anything in life. And a lot of us growing up felt like we could never achieve things so you can get instant gratification through the drug use. That doing negative things like you say you're like, 'Oh, one of the lads, one of the boys, all this, fucking mental that guy', and gives you a sense of status amongst your peers. And it feeds into self worth; it's not a healthy self worth, but it's your version of self worth. That's my thought on it.

Byron Vincent 20:09
What has your recovery journey been like?

Aidan Martin 20:12
I couldn't have predicted it, let's put it that way. It's not been straightforward. It has included a lot of relapsing, and a lot of lapsing, but then the later part of it's much more steady. Like, for example, for the last three and a bit years, I've not touched a substance and I'm in a much healthier, calm and stable place. Recovery for me is made up of many different pillars. There's a recovery fellowship, which is something that's personal to me, it's not everyone's idea of recovery. But education was huge, a huge part. Because I learned about myself and I learned about society. A big part of addiction for me is guilt and shame, because I've done a lot of selfish things, I hurt a lot of people. Now I think there are two sides to addiction, there's a selfish part of it where I've done things wrong. But there's the part where society has also failed me, and set me up for that failure. So recovery taught me more about me and my side of things, and education taught me about society, and how society has played its role, and volunteering as well, because I had no real skill sets; I couldn't really see where my life was going. So I started to volunteer. Volunteering gave me self worth and self respect, because it was a selfless act. And it gave me positive connections and set me up for future stuff, which I've gone on to do in my life. So yeah, recovery is made up of a lot of different things. And I think it's unique to the individual. Because I used to think that abstinence based recovery was the only, you know, you had to go straight from drug using to abstinence. I've come to learn in my education and my activism that harm reduction is a very important part of someone's journey. And so we continuously learn about what recovery means to different people.

Byron Vincent 21:52
Could anything have been done at a more formative stage to intervene or interrupt the behaviours that led to addiction?

Aidan Martin 22:00
Yeah, 100%. I could have had a high school that was better tooled to educate us and to catch people in the net, you know, if people are struggling. It wasn't set up for that at all. When I sought out help, it was a GP in a third sector organisation. There were no state funded facilities, you know, and West Lothian, where I'm from, we have no rehab. We have no detox facility. We have no recovery houses. And that's

in 2021 we're talking about this. So when I was coming about, Aspire Recovery meetings as well, which are just self supporting, and there was only two of those, it was unheard of, I didn't really have any knowledge about what was wrong with me. And there was nothing there to intervene to get help with. What people need is, quick access to mental health services, therapeutic services, harm reduction facilities, abstinence-based recovery, rehab, detoxes, we need to deal with the problem. And then we need the prevention methods in place so that we don't have the problem again, you know, I think we can look at the Portuguese model as being a good blueprint for that.

Byron Vincent 23:06
How many addicts do you meet that haven't experienced a degree of trauma?

Aidan Martin 23:12
Oh yeah.

Byron Vincent 23:12
I believe that education around those things should start formatively. At school, at primary school even, that we understand that if we experience a thing, and we don't process it in a emotionally healthy way, then we're probably gonna have some negative outcomes as an adult. I mean, we know this. It's like it's not fluffy, it's science. It seems that we'd not just save a lot of people a lot of difficulties, but also it makes economic sense, and I don't really understand why that kind of education isn't more prevalent.

Aidan Martin 23:45
Me as well. I mean, I believe it makes economic sense to keep people out of prisons and put them into rehabs. I believe it's economically viable to give people treatment, early in their life so they can become more productive in later life. But we don't, we don't seem to invest that way.

Byron Vincent 24:03
What are your thoughts about the various services that are available to drug users at the moment? And how have they changed since you were interacting with them?

Aidan Martin 24:11
I think we're so far behind where we need to be that it's frightening. UK-wide it's a problem but obviously in Scotland, in Scotland, we have the worst figures in Europe, potentially the world, per head of population. We're going to get the next lot of figures out on Friday and nobody's expecting them to be better, we're expecting them to be worse. I mean, where do you begin, eh, housing, education, we need treatment facilities, we need harm reduction, we need safe consumption rooms. We need the mental health and addiction services to be joined up. The waiting list for mental health services right now are two years in Scotland. If someone presents for treatment, they can't get help the same day. If someone gets initiated for treatment that usually takes three weeks, sorry the assessment takes a few weeks, and then the initiation takes another 18 weeks, on average, and that's what the data's showing. We are so far behind treating this problem and we've only just started to hear terms like 'trauma informed'. So it's, it's in its infancy as well. But I feel like we are just we've got a hell of a long, long way to go, before we're tooled up for this.

Byron Vincent 25:10
Everyone's talking about class all of a sudden, I find, so let's jump on that bandwagon. How do you describe yourself class wise?

Aidan Martin 25:19
Working class.

Byron Vincent 25:20
You're from a scheme with all that that entails. What are your, I mean, you're an author, now, and you're a professional. What are your experiences transitioning into a more middle class lifestyle?

Aidan Martin 25:32
Like eh, similar to a survivor's guilt, as I've just bought a house, I live in a... it's strange right, because I love where I came from, for all its flaws. I love where I came from. I go back to Ladywell often, and feel like I'm coming home. Yet, I want to provide my kids a different upbringing, to parts of my upbringing, and it makes me feel like a fraud and a hypocrite, and it's strange; it is, it's as a strange paradox to be in. I guess I'm striving to make a difference in the world so that people in working class areas have equal opportunities, regardless of what else is out there for people from middle class and other areas. Like for example, I'm in the, and you'll I guess have lots experience in this too, being in the artistic industry, it's not really an open arms industry for working class folk. Yet, I would argue that some working class folk bring some of the best contributions to the industry.

Byron Vincent 26:29
Absolutely. I mean, the smartest people talking about class these days are from the rap world you know, people I'm thinking of like Akala, Darren McGarvey...

Aidan Martin 26:39
Akala's... I love him, and Darren McGarvey, both of them.

Byron Vincent 26:42
These are great minds, talking about things incredibly eloquently. I think it shows the value of lived experience, actually, people who are living through a given issue, they're often the last people to be asked about it. How has your life experience informed your work?

Aidan Martin 26:58
My life, and I mean this without sounding cliche, my life experience is the biggest asset and qualification that I've got. For example, I went on to study criminology and sociology, because of my life experience. I'm just finishing a master's degree in social work because of my experience. Everything I'm doing stems from where I came from. I'm in the early stages of doing some local community based projects, and it's all back in my community, where I grew up. Life experience is invaluable, it's about, do we provide opportunities for people to turn it into an asset, because in the past, that life experience was the detriment of my life. But now it's the very thing that has become the biggest asset to everything I'm doing.

Byron Vincent 27:42
One of the step changes in terms of how we can help people in difficult circumstances is to value that lived experience way more than we do currently. I mean, I think there is a change in that actually, in especially in terms of that sort of mental health support work. One of the things I think that we didn't have growing up, maybe, that is around now as well is peer support, and, people who have lived experience coming back to the environments that they grew up in, in order to help people within those environments. And why that's important, I think, is because those people have a level of understanding, a level of empathy, and possibly, most importantly, a level of gravitas within that community. Do you think a positive role model could have intervened with you? And what do you think of schemes like the violence reduction unit where they use navigators who have maybe done a bit of time to work with lads who were just leaving prison?

Aidan Martin 28:37
I think it's vital, I think it's a very important way forward because identification is such an important tool for taking away guilt and shame and feeling alone with a problem. I think that's why recovery fellowships can have success, because you identify with someone else's journey. If I'd have been growing up when there was someone else 10 years older than me or whatever had been where I had been and showed, both that they'd been there, but that they'd turned their life around and went a different way and you'd be looking to that person to say, 'How have you done that?' Not even just for my generation. Like, my biological father was in and out of prison, in and out of violence, started off working on the oil rigs and was making good money, and was a good looking man and was well built, had all the attributes to be whoever he wanted to be. All of the inside stuff destroyed him and he lived and died as an addict. And his generation, they didn't even talk about addiction or mental health. And men certainly couldn't talk about how they feel. So even that change now is a positive one. But if someone like my biological father had had role models, then it might have ended with him. He might have been in my life and his generation might have not have been as socially deprived. And the next generation might have benefited from that. So like, for example, right now in West Lothian we've got a whole bunch of artistic movements from authors to artists, to musicians to, all sorts of things. And even 10 years ago, there wasn't anything like that. So now younger people growing up in West Lothian are like, oh you could be something else. And as far as doing that in a way where, like people who used to be in prison to go into prisons, I think stuff like that it's very important. It makes me think of a guy called Kevin Neary, I don't know if you know of him...

Byron Vincent 30:20
Yeah I'm aware of him.

Aidan Martin 30:21
So he does similar things. He works now with the police. You know, he used to be an armed robber. And I think that lends credibility to someone who's still in, I don't want to call it the problem, but they're still in that part of their life, where they're struggling or they've made choices they regret, and things have happened. If they can see someone else has been where they're at, but is now doing something else, it gives credibility to change, no?

Byron Vincent 30:46

And a lot of those guys bring, I mean an incredible breadth of knowledge to the table and not just from their own lived experience either. One of the people I find a huge inspiration is a VRU [Violence Reduction Unit] navigator called James Dougherty. He's like a sage to me, like you know, I could listen to him all day and learn stuff, you know. You broached an interesting point there, which is that I think a lot of these, a lot of the behaviours that we see as innate, maybe, are very much cultural. There's the violence, for example, maybe some proof about that is the early rave scene. This is just a bit of a digression, sorry, but like, and I'm not, don't get me wrong, I'm not advocating for 1000s of people to storm warehouses and take ecstasy. When I was growing up, there was a huge football violence problem or football violence scene that was the culturally dominant pastime on my estate growing up, and then rave culture hit, and that all changed. And all of a sudden, within a space of a year, it was alright for blokes on my estate to hug each other. And people were swapping the terraces for the, for the rave clubs, which sort of proves that these things are cultural, and they can be changed. I mean, it didn't last obviously. And it was, it was problematic and chemically induced often. But my overriding point is that if it can be changed by a youth culture, then surely it can be changed by some other cultural impetus. I wonder how we would go about doing that in a healthier way? [Laughter]

Aidan Martin 32:20
What I'm doing now, we're writing and we're making documentaries, and like I'm writing my second book and doing TV stuff and all that. It's exciting, it's more exciting than the drugs were. And so if there were opportunities for people to do things that excited them and that they were passionate about, and then they could wake up in the morning and go, 'I can't wait to do that', you know, and instead of this idea of zero contract jobs and no, no future and bouncing around from one situation to the next. And not having a lot of options and a lot of choice and a lot of social mobility, if there was an opportunity for people to have a life that fulfilled them. Maybe that would be a cultural change. You know? Like I'm saying the now, there's a lot of people now in West Lothian, where I'm from, looking to do artistic things, because it's visible now, because people are like, we have authors, we have bands, we have lots of different people. And I say there that I've used creative methods. Now that's only one avenue, of course. But that's the example I'm in the middle of right now. I'm part of this creative movement in West Lothian. And it's inspiring other people to take that view as well. So if you're growing up, and you're seeing there's a whole bunch of people in my area that are artistically expressing themselves, then you might be drawn to that. But if you're growing up in an area where there's nothing else going on, but everyone's taking heroin or everyone's taking cocaine. And perhaps you'll go in that direction. The next book I'm writing is about the rave scene, more the dying rave scene, the kind of 2000s when it was kinda at its last hurrah. And the attraction to a lot of the characters was that, there was a void, there was nothing else. And that filled the void, and what came with it were the uppers, and dysfunctional relationships and, you know, jobs that never lasted. And you kind of lived for your friendships. And when you thought you were going to be forever young and evidently, you weren't. [Laughter]

Byron Vincent 34:12
Turns out... [Laughter] You disclose a lot in your book. And somewhere towards the end of the book, you were saying that you were only just getting therapy to deal with some of the issues that you faced as a younger person. And that worried me. My life is also an open book and people can be very casual with our trauma once it becomes public property. How are you coping with your trauma being public property and have you had to deal with any dickheads yet?

Aidan Martin 34:44
This is a strange one because I'm in the most calm, serene, healthiest place I've ever been. The only negativity I have ever faced, is from people that struggle with the positivity, if that makes sense. So there's been a few trolls that, like, for example, I was doing cold water therapy. And someone took it upon themselves to take an exception with me and slated me on my Facebook page, but they're still in the lad culture mindset, right? So. So it's really, it's never really been a response to over, over exposing myself, as far as what I shared in my book. It's more been, there's been people that have taken an exception to how good I feel and positive I feel, but that's very, very rare. Very rare. So I've not had any backlash from oversharing. I think it comes from being in recovery and being used to sharing and haven't had a lot of therapy, and, yeah, I'm actually still waiting to see a psychologist just to deal with some of the final parts of what I was going through. No man, honestly, I feel totally free. There's nothing weighing me down.

Byron Vincent 35:49
I obviously don't expect you to get into any specifics here. One of the main narrative themes in your book is about being groomed, which I personally have had some experience with as well. And actually, a shocking number of the people that I grew up around have as well. Not so many of the middle class people I knock around with now have had that experience, although I'm not saying that it doesn't happen, of course it does. What do you think it is about growing up in a, I never know how to phrase it, disenfranchised environment that makes us so vulnerable?

Aidan Martin 36:21
I mean, I was, I was desperate for love. I was desperate for a father figure, I had a warped view, because, not through my own fault, but this person, the grooming techniques that they used, I had the warped view of that being someone trustworthy and safe, and loving and caring. And why I was able to express with this person what I thought I was, were the things I couldn't express on my scheme, you know, and like, for example, telling the person I was suicidal, and that person, know, telling them I was crying as I was talking to them and that person replying that 'I'm crying as well'. You feel like you're bonding with someone and not realising as a young person you're being groomed, and being taken advantage of. It's only years later, through all the stuff like recovery, therapy, education, I can look back and identify the things they done to take advantage of you and can identify how vulnerable and young you actually were. And again, it was when the internet first came about. So there was no real knowledge about the dangers of that stuff. So it was a brand new phenomena. So that was again against me as well. And obviously grooming still happens and still grooming abuse is still relentless so, being aware of it I don't think has negated it. But at the time the lack of knowledge about it just fed into even more of the vulnerability and how naive I was. But certainly, what you couldn't get in the schemes was I couldn't tell anyone how I felt. And this person, I thought was a confidante, I thought was someone I could trust, you know?

Byron Vincent 38:05
Such a big part of it is the sort of toxic culture of silence and, you know, working class hyper masculinity is a very specific kind of masculinity. In my case, it was somebody with, you know, high status within the sort of criminal community that I was involved in as a younger person. It turned out that everybody

knew. And so this guy had this sort of M.O of doing this. And despite the classic council estate dogma, you know, you go to any flat top council estate boozer with an angry Rottweiler on the roof, that kind of place and all you hear about is that, ah, string them up, blah, blah, blah, you know, and there's all this vocal hyperbole about what people would do. But in reality, people are vulnerable in those situations because of the hierarchy within those cultures, and also how isolated they are because you, you know, like, you're not supposed to go to the police for anything. Anything. So culturally, we need to sort of protect people and change an ideology that services incredibly dangerous people.

Aidan Martin 39:09
Yeah, no I agree. Certainly the culture of, I mean, stripping it so far back that you can have issues with anything in that generation. And you wouldn't really express your feelings about it.

Byron Vincent 39:22
What have your interactions with mental health services been like over the years, positives, negatives?

Aidan Martin 39:29
I've never had a lot of interaction with services because there wasn't really many services available, but there were, there were services that I came into contact with, for good and for bad and I'll explain a couple. One was when I worked for this organisation. When I was going through my addiction, it was the same time as my brother had died. And that probably saved me losing my job, right, and I had private healthcare with this organisation. They sent me a guy from the Priory, a Polish psychologist. And he saved my life, like, he was one of many people that intervened in my life at different points and kept me alive and he was one of the first people that really helped me understand about grief and grieving, and we spoke a lot about my little brother's death and he made me realise I was grieving, and that was part of the problem of what I was going through, so I'm forever grateful to people like him who helped keep me alive. As far as downsides, when I tried to kill myself, one of the many times, and I know it sounds really blase when I say that, but I guess I'm just used to talking about it now, but I tried to kill myself: one of my more serious attempts I ended up at Accident and Emergency, you see a psychiatrist, and then they send you out this triage team of people that are all linked in, and they come out and see you at your, your home, and you're supposed to get linked in to mental health services, and then I never heard back for a year and a half. And by the time I heard back, they had sent it to the wrong address and, it was just a whole mix up and ultimately from a point of being suicidal and trying to kill myself, to getting help, would have been a minimum a year and a half long. And even then, that wasn't when they tried to contact me it wasn't to say we've got an appointment for you; it was to say, you're now on the waiting list for appointments. So that was detrimental because what I needed was that night, that night I needed help. I mean, they didn't keep me in or anything either, they sent me right back out, so it was like an assessment and actually in the Accident and Emergency as well, they had a psychiatrist come and sit, talk to me in the A&E, they didn't take me to a private room or anything, under assessment, said they would send people out, the people came out, I think the following Monday or something, and they sent me back into the community again, we had no real services linked then, no through care, no after care, no nothing, and then it was like waiting like a year and a half before you get a letter and you're on the waiting list and ultimately I am back in the chaos by that point. And I've never, I've never got on to the level of getting any support. So there just wasn't anything, and, there wasn't. And I've gone for help in my recovery as well, related to mental health. And I remember, sitting

speaking to a GP and trying to get referred to a service, because I'm a student at the time and don't have a lot of money. And I remember the GP looking at me with wide eyes and saying, 'Is this a medical problem?' And I'm like, 'Well, you should fucking know', whoops, sorry for swearing. Sorry for letting that swear word slip in! But yeah I was like, 'You should, you should know that this is a medical problem'. And I was looking for a referral and ultimately I got referred to a third sector organisation. And again, it was like two years on the waiting list. So they're heavily reliant on these third sector organisations to support all these fragile people in the community and the waiting lists are extortionate.

Byron Vincent 42:41
Again, sadly, it's an all too common story: services are overwhelmed. I mean, I've been in mental health services since I was 11, in and out. My first residential stay in a psychiatric ward was in the early 90s. And the walls were nicotine stained, and nobody had their own room. It was always just separated by curtains. So you could hear all the screams throughout the night and stuff. And it looked a bit grim. But it was actually way better. If you have a residential stay in a psychiatric ward now, you probably get your own room, everything's clean. Well, that's all there is. Back then we had a piano. [laughter] There was like a, there was arts therapy, you could sit around the table and talk to staff. Now you can't talk to staff because of the sort of litigiousness; everything's got to be noted, so you can't have a conversation with anybody. So you can, there are people in in residential psychiatric care, who don't have a conversation for months and months and months with another human being because they're getting no visitors and staff won't talk to them, because they've got to notarize it and that's like the best case scenario because most people don't get a bed. I despair at the state of mental health services. We're sort of being forced to look after ourselves, which isn't always possible. You are flourishing, obviously, at the moment, which is brilliant to see. Do you have any routines or processes that kind of keep you maintaining, keep you sober, keep you together?

Aidan Martin 44:01
Honestly, it's a mixture of things. Being part of the recovery scene, I still do meetings in the recovery scene and I think I always will now. But I think it's having something that I'm passionate about, so writing and creating is my drug now, you know? That's my drug. And it's more appealing than any other drug ever has been. But, you know, it took time to realise that and to, I get a lot of my self-worth now from my creative methods, having family life, having down time. Doing things like going out and doing a hill walk or a munro or getting a bit of nature, just a bit of time to switch off from the world. But certainly being involved in the recovery scene has been paramount for me; getting educated has been paramount for me, having things to wake up for, you know, having reasons to wake up. If I stop doing the creative stuff, there's going to be a void. And if I don't find something I care about, to fill the void, and I don't maintain my mental health through my recovery and stuff, and of course I've done a lot of therapy, then I will navigate back to the unhealthy things because I've had relapses and that shows that I'm not taking care of my mental health or not doing things I care about. I'll feel that hopeless way again. And I'll revert back to type.

Byron Vincent 45:15
Isolation and a lack of purpose is a deadly combination, isn't it?

Aidan Martin 45:19

Oh, yeah.

Byron Vincent 45:19
Especially for people with busy brains. Listen, it's been amazing to talk to you. Have you got any projects on the bubble that you want to give a little plug to or have a little chat about?

Aidan Martin 45:29
Yeah, we're doing something called The Chair. First episode is now on my YouTube page, which is @aidanmartinauthor. It's also my Facebook page, same handle. And it's a local documentary where we're taking a Chesterfield chair and we're putting it in the estate and we're getting someone to sit on it and we're just basically hearing their story. The first one's up now, we've got another three coming out, and we're recording them. It's a local project, I'm meeting the government next week to see about possibly getting funding towards it. Contacted Creative Scotland and all they folk, and I'm just about finished my second book, which as I say, is about the sort of rave, trance, drugs scene of the early 2000s in West Lothian, but it'll probably not be out until next year now.

Byron Vincent 46:09
I'm really looking forward to that. I enjoyed the first book, which is Euphoric Recall, by the way. And, can, is there a link to purchase on your Twitter?

Aidan Martin 46:17
Yeah, you can get it from, my publisher's called Guts Publishing and you can get it on gutspublishing.com or you can get it from Amazon or Waterstones, or pretty much Google it and it'll show up all the different places. It's available on paperback, ebook and audiobook.

Byron Vincent 46:30
All good bookstores, eh?

Aidan Martin 46:32
All good bookstores, that's right.

Byron Vincent 46:34
Thanks so much for talking to me, mate. It's been an absolute pleasure.

Aidan Martin 46:35
Thank you.