



Missing People, Missing Voices

Stories of Missing Experience



Hester Parr and Olivia Stevenson

Introduction

This booklet presents a series of stories that are comprised from narrative interviews with people who have been reported as missing and who have returned. The stories are written from verbatim words but most are creatively reassembled from more than one narrative, so as to be representative of the experiences of the 45 people who participated in the ESRC 'Geographies of missing people' research project run by Glasgow and Dundee University in partnership with Grampian Police, The Metropolitan Police Service, the UK Missing People's Bureau and the Missing People Charity. All names and places are pseudonyms.

We hope these stories raise awareness of what we are calling 'missing experience', which includes being reported as missing but not necessarily identifying as a missing person. These stories also provide a resource for all those who work in sectors which support people who may be at risk of being reported as missing. The stories are currently being used as educational resource materials in police officer training and are available for other professionals.

More information about the research, and about how these stories were written, visit:
www.geographiesofmissingpeople.org.uk and
www.geographiesofmissingpeople.org.uk/missingvoices/techappendix.pdf

Acknowledgements

We extend deep and respectful thanks to the 45 people who spoke to us from across the UK and shared with us their stories of being reported as missing.

We also thank our project advisory group and police officers who have assisted, and in particular Joe Apps, Lucy Holmes and David Bullamore.

We also thank our co-investigators Dr Penny Woolnough and Prof Nick Fyfe.

Further information and advice

If you are affected by these stories or need advice, the Missing People charity may be able to help you. You can find out more information at www.missingpeople.org.uk; or for free, confidential 24hr, support call 116000, text 116000 or email 116000@missingpeople.org.uk.

If you have a story of missing experience that you would like to share, you can write it down at a website formally established for this purpose:

www.geographiesofmissingpeople.org.uk/missingstories

The stories exist as audio files read by actors and can be accessed at:

www.missingpeople.org.uk

www.missingpersons.police.uk

www.geographiesofmissingpeople.org.uk

June 2013

Contents	Page
<i>Sophie's story</i> being missing for 24 hours	1
<i>Katie's story</i> being missing for 2-3 days	4
<i>Andrew's story</i> being missing for 4 weeks	7
<i>Johnny's story</i> being reported as missing from hospital	10
<i>Peter's story</i> being missing and being located by the police	13
<i>Jayne's story</i> a woman's experience of being missing	16
<i>Stuart's story</i> a man's experience of being missing	19
<i>Eddie's story</i> intentionally going missing	22
<i>Jenny's story</i> repeatedly being missing	26
<i>Rhona's story</i> a life of missing experience	28
<i>Afterword</i> making sense of missing stories	30



Sophie's story: being missing for 24 hours

I suffer from depression and I was going through a really bad episode, everything was a bit much, things just got pretty over the top and I took a huge overdose and that's what made me go missing. I sent emails out to lots of people while I was under the influence of a lot tablets and some red wine, such as my mum and some of my friends and my sister. When I realised I was still alive, it was a working night, it was in the middle of the week and people were going to start to waken up and get their emails and I thought, "I'm going to disappear", so I just sort of took my iPod and left my phone at home and just like decided I would go. That was really the reason how I ended up being reported missing because I left my phone and everything at home and I didn't show up for work.

I spent a lot of time vomiting, but I was aware by four in the morning that I was still alive, and very much still alive, and people were going to start getting the letters and I had not planned to still be around, so I had to go somewhere until all the tablets did their worst and that was my thinking. I got dressed for the weather, I don't know why because if you think you're going to die why do you bother? It's just a thing you do I guess, I also wanted to be wearing dark things so I wouldn't be easy to spot and I'm blonde. I knew where I was going from when I left.

That would have been about four or five o'clock that morning. I don't know why, but it was kind of like a light bulb came on, I don't know why I thought of that place but it was perfect because it wasn't far away. I didn't think I was going to be a missing person, but I know I didn't want to be found. I wanted to be missing for long enough for the tablets to do their job, after that it didn't matter. I wanted

to be dead so I needed a certain amount of time for the poison to take effect basically, so I knew that I had to be well hidden.

I used to run by the building, that's how I knew it. I don't know what it used to be, it's beside an old mill, like what's left of an old mill on the river. It's kind of in the bank, and there's a path that goes alongside it and then steps upwards. A lot of it is derelict now, it's full of leaves when it gets windy, it's very well hidden and you can't see it from the road or anything.



It was winter so I put extra jumper on and a jacket, something with a hood so I could just put it over my head and sort of hide as well, it's all kind of about hiding. I was listening to Nirvana which is very good when you're in that mess because of, you know, obviously he suffered. So that's why I took the iPod with me and I'm pretty sure the other thing I took was my house key and the bottle of wine.

I could only get there by foot. I remember it was pretty quiet, I walked alongside the parked cars, so if I did stumble I wasn't very obvious. I was aware that if a police car was going past or even a taxi driver, somebody might have spotted me and just sort of "there's something really not right with that girl", and that would have spoiled my plan as well.

It was like being really drunk, I remember my vision, it was like everything was kind of in slow motion, I took a mixture of things, paracetamol and pain killers and sleeping tablets and you know just anything I could get my hands on. I was aware that I was sort of weaving about and I was trying not to trip or fall or anything. My eyes, I was probably closing and opening my eyes a lot, it wouldn't have looked right.

I do remember about two cars passed me because of the headlights. I was trying even harder to sort of stand up straight and not stumble and not to look at them as well. I remember being quite focused on my walking. I was thumping my feet down, it was very deliberate, everything was very deliberate. I remember I was then walking fast, definitely, because I was nearly there and then I sort of hold myself a little bit to stop that, especially as I got to the roundabout because it's more lit up again there.

There are a lot of places I could have stopped if I was struggling, I could have stopped and probably found somewhere to hide, but because a lot of the buildings were being demolished, there were workmen going about during the day and they probably come quite early. I had just thought of this place and I was focused on getting there.

So I cut from where I was, diagonally across the little roundabout to the path along the river. It's only a matter of a few hundred yards to that building and even though I was struggling, I just jumped in it because I didn't really care if I hurt myself. It's about a six foot drop, so I jumped down, but the wind meant that there was a lot of leaves build up on it, so it's quite soft in there, so I just kind of crawled into the space, put my iPod on and sat there. I didn't take my phone

because I watched police programmes and they can track you with your phone, so that was in my mind.

I just went like right in the corner, so you would have to put your head in to see me and the wall is granite, the wall was thick. There was the shelter and seclusion because that's what I wanted, I didn't want to have to face what I'd done in the emails. I just thought I was safe, and then as daylight was coming and I was still alive, that was sort of when I started to panic. I couldn't face drinking anymore but I was trying, so that I could maybe make the whole cocktail work, but I had like a few mouthfuls maximum. I just kept putting my entire collection of Nirvana on repeat, listening to it all the way through and closing my eyes and hoping that they wouldn't find me.

I know I was thinking about my family.

I was sort of curled in a ball, I wasn't lying down but I was sitting like holding my knees with my back against the wall. I had to move a few times because I was sick. I tried to move away from where I was sitting because it was quite a prime spot. I was sick further away and I covered it with leaves but sometimes it was just like too quick. I mean I didn't move very far, mostly I was just sort of curled in a ball, 'cause it was pretty cold. My head felt quite wobbly. The whole point is when it gets to the end you would lose consciousness. I just sort of remember kind of coming out of something, like snapping my head up and then realising that I had probably slept or just been unconscious or something and then sort of checking the light and then just like closing my eyes again, just listening to the music. I didn't think I would become a missing person as such.

My mum goes to work at eight, so she would have been the first one, she starts

at eight, so she would have been the first one to get her email.

I really didn't hope for any of that, that I was going to be a missing person or any of that sort of business or that they would phone the police. When you're in that depressive state you're very self-involved to a point you can't really think about anything outside. I was on a mission that was going to end all that for me.



I wasn't alert when she shouted my name, it was like, "oh Sophie thank god just stay there, just stay there I'm coming down, I'm coming down" and she had like my stepdad with her. She did the jump, like the six foot jump, because she was so worried that I would run away or something. My friend had mentioned my running route and they'd worked it out and just gone looking.

They were at the hospital soon after I arrived there, the police. I was emotional. I felt guilty that I didn't deserve treatment because I did it myself. I remember they stayed with me for ages. They asked me questions about what had happened and why I ended up missing and would I be doing it again?

It was like two months, three months later that I went back there to that place and I went on my own. I was quite emotional at the start. I was really nervous and anxious about going in. I was on quite high levels of antidepressants so I couldn't cry, there wasn't any of that. I didn't stay there long.

I haven't thought about being reported missing that much, I never really considered myself a missing person, even speaking to the police. I never really thought of myself as a missing person, although that's what they classed me as at the time. That just sort of enhanced the sort of severity of it and the waste of resources, because I've done it myself, even though I was ill. I was a depressive who attempted suicide, "a vulnerable adult". That was the label that the police gave me as well I think. I think I'm that more than a missing person.

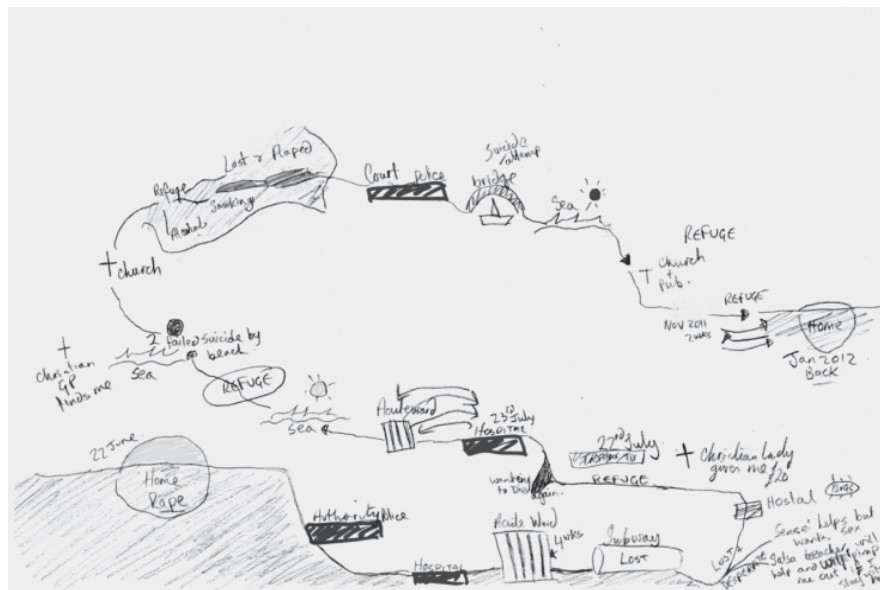


Katie's story: being missing for 2-3 days

My relationship was kind of coming to an end and I wasn't really sure what was happening, and I didn't really have anyone to talk to. I'd had enough, I'd got no money and the kids were arguing. It was just like I've got to get out. I needed to clear my head. About ten o'clock at night I decided to leave. It took two minutes. I left the house and I didn't know where I was going to go.

I didn't really have anything planned, it was like whatever was coming into my head, but I felt like if I cleared off it would be a fresh start and I didn't have to think about all this stuff, and if I disappeared forever, it doesn't matter. I kept thinking

So I'm there at the end of the street and ... is it straight ahead, left or right I'm going? I just went in a straight direction because it was the most well lit area. I carried on waking. It was like I have to keep moving so nobody will find me and I won't have to go back and deal with this or with that. God knows where I walked, I can't really remember, but I know at one point I walked through building sites. There was no way you would normally take this path, behind the buildings, behind the work spaces and stuff like that. It was like a bomb site, I just kept walking through it. I walked for miles just going up and down streets.



if I go on a bus somewhere, half the buses now have CCTV so they'll know where I'm going, so I'll just walk. If I can get to the next town, maybe there I'll find people that can make sense of me or I can make sense of them. You feel completely isolated, I felt that family just didn't get me, they didn't want to understand me. So I thought maybe if I just disappear or go somewhere else it would be better. I never expected they would report me missing.

I was wandering the streets just having this need to keep going forward somewhere but at the same time not having any clue as to where I was going to end up. I can't tell you how many miles I did that night, but nothing was getting sorted out in my head. I didn't feel like a missing person because I had chosen to leave my home. I was just running away from my problems, and I didn't think I was a missing person, but I knew they might be looking for me.

I came round this one corner, I walked past a place that had loads of police cars and that was quite nerve racking. I thought, "someone is going to notice me, they are going to see me". I couldn't let them see me because I thought if they do they'll bring me back and I didn't want to come back. I tried to walk like it wasn't me so I wouldn't be recognised.

I got myself into these side streets and didn't have a clue and then I panicked. I didn't know where I was and I started to get a little bit distressed because it's the middle of the night, the lighting wasn't so good in the side streets and you're on foot and I got a bit nervy of being followed. I was lost and I felt out of control because I didn't know where I was. I figured if I could find my bearings then at least I would have my options again whereas being lost was too frightening. So I decided to head back, to walk in a specific direction, back to somewhere where I did feel a bit safer, a bit more familiar. It was quite late and really cold by that time, and I ended up sheltering in a subway that night.

The next day I needed somewhere to stay. I was needing to sleep, because I'd been awake like forty hours by this stage, so I rang a friend and I went up to his place. He tried to act as nothing was wrong, just like I was visiting, but I did say to him "if anyone asks where I am, you don't know, you haven't seen me". I sat down for quarter of an hour and while I was there my family rang him and they were threatening to send the police up to him to see if I was there. They had no right to ring the police, they should have just left me alone. I knew he would say nothing because he was asked not to, but I knew I couldn't stay, there would be trouble if they found out that I stayed at his. So I said I was going. I wasn't bothered how other people felt at that point. I didn't care anymore. The urge to go was

stronger than the urge to think about what everyone else wanted.

Again I ended up walking aimlessly through the streets. I was exhausted and at the end of my tether, with not much money. Two days being missing and you're exhausted, but I still didn't like the idea of being found. Well I suppose I did and I didn't. I suppose I wanted to be found, but also I wanted to get away. I planned that in the morning I was just going get a bus and go wherever. Just go where the bus was going and get off. I wasn't bothered where and at least I could sleep on the bus.

Well, we never got to the next morning because a friend's son had seen me and rang up my friend and she drove all round looking for me and found me. She told me to get in the car and she took me back. I didn't want to go home but there was no way she was giving me anything, or was dropping me off anywhere apart from home.

I was numb when I got back. I wasn't embarrassed, I didn't feel guilty about what I'd done, it was more, "shit, I haven't done what I wanted to do" and it was almost as if you had been put back into the same position again. So I hadn't achieved anything and everybody wants you to explain yourself and I couldn't because I didn't know how I felt. I just didn't want to be there. I wanted to be somewhere different, somebody different. That's the hardest thing, coming home again. Going away is easy.

The police turned up after that, and I can't remember really what words they used. They asked where I'd been, but I was emotionally shattered by that point as well and I just wanted to go to sleep. I didn't want to hear or see or do anything, just forget about it all, get on with Monday as if nothing had happened. For

days afterwards I was still the same and I was on the verge of "I can still walk out". I have just stopped having those thoughts, and that's because I've kept myself to myself and if I have to deal with anything,

I'll just deal with it myself. I can't hope that anyone is going to be there for me because they're not. Nothing's going to change, and despite being back I still feel trapped and suffocated.



Andrew's story: being missing for 4 weeks

A lot of it is to do with mental illness. That's my personal experience and a lot of people aren't comfortable admitting it, but I have to because it's the only way I'm going to manage not to be reported missing again and be pushed to go running away and living on the streets again. That's what I did. I ran away and I lived in cheap hotels and then on the street when I was reported missing. They had put me on an informal psychiatric section so I could come and go as I wished as long as I was back at nine o'clock at night or something. So in the afternoon I just packed up my things and walked out. I was just trying to go as fast as I could. It was quite a relief to get out of there, to actually be free again.

I don't know at that point if I realised that the police might be looking for me but because I had absconded from the hospital, of course I would have been registered as missing. On reflection, in the time that I had been in there, I had seen quite a few situations where people had disappeared and a process to find them was put in place.

When I calmed down and thought about it, I knew that if I had been reported missing that someone was going to come round my house and my mother would insist that I go back to the hospital. So I decided to go and have a few nights in a cheap hotel. I took out a lot of cash and booked ten nights in different hotels during the time I was away. I gave a false name and paid cash, just in case the police came round and checked. I figured I would be able to make it okay as long as I could get through the first few nights. I went to a place in town where I thought it would be hard to find me. There's a lot of people in that part of town, and you can easily disappear in a crowd. I was pretty secure in the fact that people

wouldn't know me, London is a big place. I'm pretty sure my main focus was not getting caught at the time. It was just making it through for as long as possible. I think if it had been a completely alien environment then it would have been a little bit harder, you know, whereas this was familiar and safe. It was a proximity thing. I was far enough away not to be noticed, but still in a familiar area.

I was missing for twenty six days.



The first ten days I was virtually a permanent resident in the pub around the corner from the hotels and the pub is used by tourists passing through constantly. I just went in there and got talking to people, you know, escaping again I suppose. That is what I did the first ten days. I'd go to the pub for about lunch time and probably stayed till mid evening, but after that I stopped drinking and for the rest of the time I was pretty sober and hanging about on a little square with benches and trees. I would just sit for an hour or so a day in the square and eat something, eat a snack and read the paper. Occasionally I'd go to back into the pub for a drink, and then just get busy trying to get food together I was fairly clear headed. I wasn't sort of wandering about aimlessly not knowing what I was doing. I was escaping I suppose, and what I ended up doing was staying away for a whole month and I

wasn't that far away from where I lived. I was only down the road staying in cheap hotels and then, after the big money ran out, I was staying on a building site nearby, having a crap time really. I kind of expected that I would be found really quickly. I don't know why I thought that, but I thought with a load of friends out there and I was walking around the streets and you become acutely aware of CCTV cameras everywhere and I was drawing money out the bank at first and you think they can trace me that way, but they didn't. It went into a fourth week before anything really happened and I was surprised. Part of me really didn't want to be found and the other part did. I was only about a mile or two from my office and where I live.



I got into routines, I made my way to Tesco at the shopping centre and used that for washing when the hotel nights ran out, and there were some clothes left behind some charity bins, so I had changes of clothes. I spent most of my time trying to find somewhere where I could just sleep or possibly make a shelter after I ran out of money. The building site had a sort of shack at one side, like a derelict building, that I used to sleep in too. Basically my time was spent looking for shelter and looking for food from bins. My mobile just suddenly stopped working and so I couldn't contact anyone even if I had wanted to.

I was sitting in the square one day and this guy came up to me. There was a few

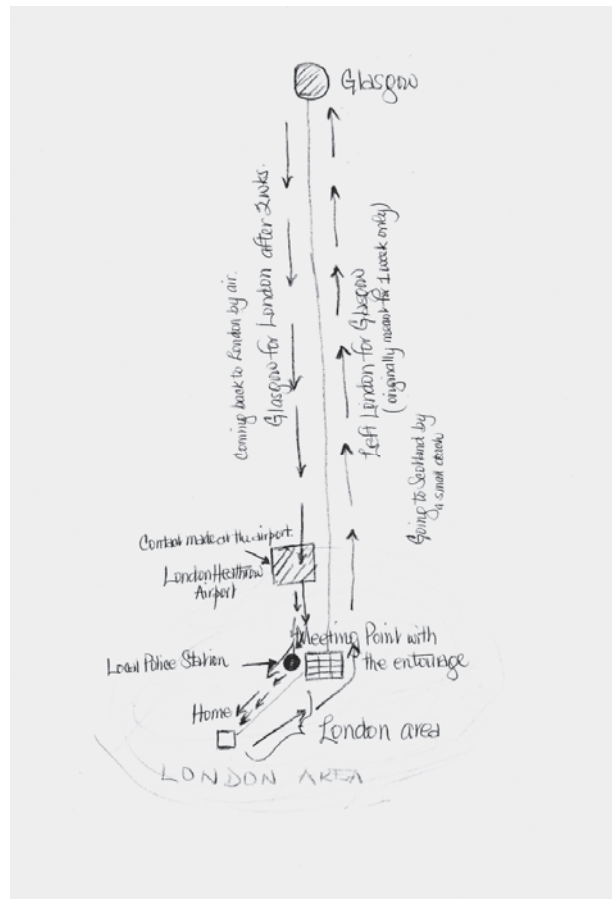
homeless people hanging about in the square, and one comes up to say, "they are looking for you man". This was the first indication I had that anyone had been looking for me. He told me, "two women were here yesterday" and then some other homeless guys turn up and they say 'oh is that the guy?' and they said they were shown a picture of me. That made me jump and really think, you know, they are actually out there looking for me.

The next day I was walking down towards the square and there's a tap on the shoulder and it was two policemen. It turned out it was my boss and my friends who had been looking for me. Up until week four, the bank had not been revealing where I was withdrawing money because of data protection. I don't know what persuaded them to do it in the end, but eventually they did and so they knew roughly what area I was in, hence the reason my boss had been walking around with a poster. Apparently the entire office had been prepared to come out looking for me the following week if they had not found me at the weekend. There was going to be a gang of them taking it street by street, hotel by hotel, but they found me first. Two of them had been walking about that square and had thought they had seen me, but they had been told by the police to call them first and not to go up to me in person, and so they did and the police came looking.

The police wanted my name and details, I think I gave them a false name at first, but they radioed in while I was standing there. They soon knew who I was and took me back. As for my friends, I thought some of them would be quite angry, but if they were they hid it well, because all they ever showed was great relief that they had found me. Not one bad, not one angry word was ever said, which was nice. My friends and colleagues didn't

push it when I did get back to work months later. They didn't ask me lots of difficult questions, they just sat back and talked about normal things. They didn't sort of say, "why did you do it?", "where

did you go", you know, "what were you thinking?". Being listed as a missing person is something I don't think people know how to talk about when you return.



Johnny's story: being reported as missing from psychiatric care

There was an incident at home and they decided to section me. Once I was in the hospital it felt like things were building up over a few days, so when I woke up on that morning, the night before even, I knew that I was going to disappear. These are extreme feelings that start to surface and it means that I really, really want to disappear and go missing. I was getting more and more agitated. I didn't feel safe, which was strange because the ward was a very safe place to be, but for me that day it didn't feel safe.

Leading up to the moment that I disappeared was just this feeling of great helplessness and this real sense of fear. I wasn't in control of it. The fear took over everything else. I couldn't settle and had just this churning in my stomach, my heart was beating faster and my mind was going nineteen to the dozen. I was just really, really distressed. That was the run up to it. My body became uncomfortable. The agitation, the constant nervousness and jumpiness was actually physically painful after a while. I thought I would lose that by disappearing. I would lose those sensations from my body and then it would just be okay. Going missing was a release from the ward and a release of my pent up emotions and frustrations, it did work in a way.

It wasn't the first time I've done this while being in hospital. The first time I walked out I was on what's called a day pass. The second time I was not allowed out of the hospital at all, but I'd somehow managed to walk out straight past six psychiatric nurses in the nurses' room. Some of them were even looking in the direction of the door. This third time, I just walked straight through the hospital and kept on going until I was out. I'd put on my waterproof fleece. I thought what I

needed to put on the night before, and I'd actually organised what I needed to take with me. So I had my bag and I just took what I needed. You don't want to go walking out of a mental health unit with a big bag because they'll go, "excuse me, where are you going sir?" So yeah it was just a small rucksack. I walked past the receptionist, but she didn't check any lists or ask me to sign out. On the way out I saw one of the guys to do with the ambulances and I said, "I'm going for a pint by the way" and he says, "aye it's nothing to do with me". I didn't make a secret of it! He didn't seem that bothered, and he knew I was from the ward!

I have never consciously absconded after five or six o'clock on any of the times I've gone, because I know that catching the night bus would be difficult and that there was a good chance I'd miss the bus. To get a car and be anonymous is very, very hard. As I'm leaving that night, I'm thinking where to go. Home is a place they've looked before, and I know they could check the bus station on the camera. The railway stations are a similar risk, but it's not awfully well lit up to the same degree. I was weighing it up and these were the things I was thinking.

In the end I started walking. I'd been locked up for what felt like a long time, so that actual physical sensation of walking that meant I felt free and all the blood was pumping back to my heart. And that type of walking, where you don't really know where you're going, it's liberating. It's scary, but it's liberating. I was fast walking, you know, like speed walking almost. Looking back, though, I was subconsciously heading to where my grandparents used to live.

You end up thinking that you need to go back to areas that you are familiar with,

where you don't stand out too much. I wanted to go away, to go far enough away from people who might know me, but close enough so that I can feel comfortable within my surroundings. If I know the area, I know what I have to do to get away.



At one point I got myself into these side streets and didn't have a clue where I was and then I started to panic, so I headed back and found the main road again. I felt relief that I could disappear again now, but I would know where I was. It sounds odd, but I felt confident that that I could go missing because I wasn't lost.

It was quite risky to be wandering about on your own in the night time, when obviously I needed some treatment. When I think about it now, the town centre was not the most desirable of places. It was about three o'clock in the morning and I had been walking and walking through the centre with a rucksack on my back, not sure what to do. I couldn't go back to the ward. I walked along roads I knew and at one stage I realised I'd ended up near a friend's house, but I didn't go in. I was aware that people might be looking for me, and so I would go out of sight for a bit and lie down for an hour or half an hour away from visibility. It was just to get my head together and rest until something told me just to move again.

I walked down to the main hospital in the town, and kept walking around it in circles. The thing with the walking was

that it really helped. It helped to take away the anxiety because I was going so fast that it was keeping in time with what was going through my head at the time. It was really cathartic, it was good. Every time I passed the big hospital I had this feeling of it being okay, that people could be expected to be walking around there. Every time I reached there I would stop for five or ten minutes rest and I felt okay about that.

That first night, I eventually tried to find somewhere to sleep, where I could put my stuff down and possibly make a shelter. I went into this back garden and into the shed at the end. I explored the garden, got to know it, got my breath back, and made sure I was safe. I made myself a bed in the shed with a cover off the barbecue and made myself safe and warm. Eventually I fell asleep.

After that, my time was spent looking for shelter and looking for food. I spent some time in the industrial estate around the east of the town centre. That was probably a twenty minute walk to a place where I could find left-over food, outside a supermarket. That lasted 3 days. I remember feeling that I wasn't a part of real life anymore. I was completely detached from what was going on around me, with people just carrying on with their everyday life, shopping or whatever. For me, I remember feeling sort of dead and really very detached from everything.

In terms of coming home, I didn't know how they would react when I eventually knocked on the door. I knew that they would have had the police in touch with them. Actually they just said 'thank goodness you are here' and they were really pleased to see me. I don't really want to talk. I think sometimes when, after you've been missing, the attention you get when you first return is strange.

People won't broach certain subjects and

they sort of leave things alone. There's a lot of attention and happiness and promises of things being different and that they'll help you. It's like you don't want to burst that bubble by actually saying anything. You don't want to burst that bubble, that happy feeling, and muddle the promises. You don't want to spoil it and for it to all end.

When the police came, I thought they treated me like a criminal, like I had done something really wrong. I was quite angry that I was being handcuffed and I didn't feel I was a risk at that point. It was an overreaction and I didn't want my family to see me in handcuffs. But this police sergeant said "I am not taking them off, I'm keeping them on until you get back to the ward".

I was really angry with the doctors and with the police. I didn't want to be back there. If I'm walking about in the middle of the night, I want to be left alone to fucking do it. To be fair, though, the police were genuinely worried about me and thinking I'm crazy and I'm a danger to myself. I think when you're mentally ill, the rules change. Sometimes it's a bigger hunt because you're considered a danger to yourself, so you have a bigger search.

They took me back to the ward and the staff nurse told me it was such a stupid thing to do. That wasn't very helpful. I did have a need to talk to someone about my experience, and although the nurses

spoke briefly to me, it was actually my consultant that really helped. The doctor helped me to see that the journey was positive because I didn't kill myself.

Afterwards, when I was calmer, I had longer conversations with the doctor and the nurses about disappearing, and by sharing that with them the burden lifted, and the need for it lifted. They hadn't realised just how bad the voices had become. So my doctor did a complete change in medication and I went on to Depot, which is an anti-psychotic injection and that took a few weeks to work properly, but it took the voices away.



Talking is really, really important, but it needs time. Just having an initial period of silence was important when I tried to work out what I wanted to say about going missing. Then the doctor asked me questions in such a way that it made it easy to open up to him. For me it's important to talk about being missing with someone who understands.

Peter's story: being missing and located by the police

I took my passport and driving license to keep my options open. In one way, I felt really happy because I thought I'm doing this, but I was also really nervous the whole time that I was going to get stopped by the police. I just needed to keep moving because I was quite worried about being found or apprehended by the police. For some reason I felt like I was being chased almost. Not explicitly, but it's just in the back of my head, I was saying to myself, "I need to hide, to make sure it's all secretive so that no one knows". So initially I was mostly worried about being found and brought back so I thought the best place to go is just as far away as possible. I was trying to conjure up some kind of plan, but I couldn't think straight. The places I hang out are normally to the south of where I stay, so I decided to go north instead.

I think the train was full, but I had a ticket for Nottingham, and I felt that the conductor kind of looked at me funny, and at that point there was a bit of fear, because I thought, "Oh God the police are going to come after me", I was really afraid that they were going to stop the train and say, "is he on the train"? So I kept watching because I thought someone would have reported me missing. I was waiting for the police to arrest me. I was so scared, and then there is also this part of you that really wants them to come after you, because I needed some attention, I needed some help.

I'd looked at my phone and I was getting messages and I was getting a bit freaked out whilst I was looking at it on the train and it was really a case of "I don't want to talk to people". I actually chucked my phone away. The train stopped off at Leicester and I got off because something was just telling me "you have to get off the train now" and it was just like a sort

of instant decision, I was like right I'm getting off now. I wandered about Leicester and thought I needed to book into the hotel, but I was too scared.

I don't know if I was thinking straight, but I was feeling fairly desperate and I wandered into a really big park. I just decided I would stay there, I made it far enough into the park where you couldn't be seen from the road. I was hidden in a cluster of trees. I didn't have a tent or anything like that. Luckily it wasn't raining. It was quite cold, but I had a lighter and I made a little fire and just chose a really concealed spot where I couldn't be spotted from the road. The police at one point went round and round the park and it must have been on a route because they would come round, and they stopped nearby and you could hear their radio going and the window down and stuff and you wondered whether or not they were clocking me.



I don't particularly like the police. I had a bit of a run in with them when I was younger at a drunk and stupid age and they just went way over the top so, yeah, I don't really have any time for the police at all. I certainly didn't want to see them when I was in that state either, but in some ways I was between two worlds. I was really scared they were looking for me and I didn't want them to find me and then I suppose deep down there is this sort of hope that there is someone

looking for you, you know, especially as the night wears on.

The following day I woke up and I knew I had to keep moving. The further I was into this, the harder it was to go back. That's when I started to think about maybe starting a new life somewhere else. I was being really fanciful, just trying to imagine ways to get myself out of this situation. All the time I was thinking of somewhere – another city maybe - where I could go, but I wasn't really doing anything about getting there. I just wandered. Every time I sat down I couldn't relax and then I'd be on the move again. I was getting exhausted travelling around like that, holding the bags and grabbing sleep on benches.

I basically walked around Leicester for two days. The second night I was just walking around hopelessly in the rain. I remember not knowing what to do next. I'd come full circle, I was on a park bench in that same park, and I decided then "enough walking around". Even though I wasn't aware that I was officially a missing person at that point, I just really wanted to be found and knew there was not much point in walking any further. I went back to the station and got on the train back down to my home town. I wanted to be somewhere I recognised, somewhere where I'm really comfortable. I got off the train and I started walking and eventually I got picked up by the police because of course my sister had reported me missing.

I was walking up this side road actually, and next thing I knew this car just about knocked me down and the driver turned his head lights on full beam. The driver came out and asked me if I was alright and I went "yes and no" and he went "put your hands on the bonnet" and that's when I knew it was a policeman. At first I thought they were just looking for like

somebody else and then when they actually said my name, I panicked, I totally panicked. I was crying, "oh my god. You don't have to take me away, I haven't done anything wrong". He said, "you have to come with us, you've been reported missing".

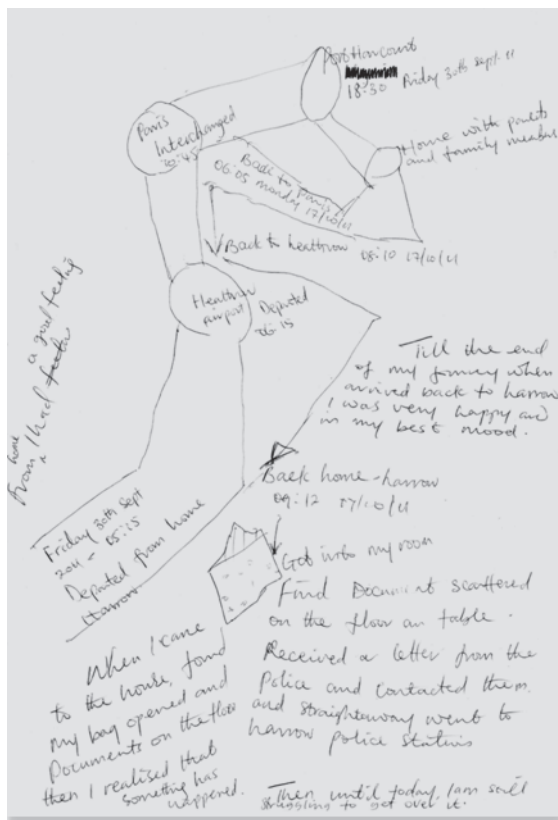
Getting into the police car put the fear of death in me to tell you the truth. I was very nervous, I felt physically sick with nerves. They were making a few jokes, trying to lighten it up a bit because they could see how nervous I was. I was really worried. I didn't know the consequences of being reported missing. They just took me into the car down to the police station and asked me all these questions: "have you ever been suicidal?", "how did you get here?"; "did you use money from your bank?"; "where had I stayed roughly?" and then they surprised me by asking "how did I feel?". I told him I wasn't sure. When he explained that my family had been looking for me, things started sinking in. I realise it wasn't a game, it was real.

I remember apologising for wasting their time and they said "this is what we're here for." They were two young guys. They were very sympathetic and I kept saying how sorry I was, but they really didn't seem to mind and that was really good.

I think once I'd calmed down a bit I was more worried about going home. When I was with the police there was a certain amount of security, you know, when I was with them and one of the policemen was really good with me. I was obviously depressed and out of it. He spoke to me really nicely and put me at my ease basically. The police made me feel quite secure, safe, because there was no, "you bad man, you shouldn't have ran away". It was quite matter of fact, but with kind words. They handled it really well. They

told me I wouldn't hear from them again and I haven't either. I realise I didn't have to have been scared of them. They close the case once somebody's been found and that's it. That's their job done.

Ideally, looking back, I would have like to have stayed away for a month, possibly two, but that was unrealistic. When I came back I didn't feel strong enough to be there. It was really, really hard to come back. You want people to understand and the coming home bit it's quite hard. You need help to get your head round why you went missing in the first place, and there's no one there to give that. I still feel confused about what happened to me.



Jayne's story: A woman's experience of being missing

I hadn't mapped anything out. I just knew I needed some distance between me and them. I was in such a state.

I hadn't had any contact with nature, rabbits or anything for ages, and it is just so idyllic, that walk down by the river. It's just really nice and so I thought of going there. I think the plan was to go for one of my epic walks, and not come back. Even in the winter I like to walk down there, but the weather was horrible and cold that day, and I didn't do the walk in the end. I didn't have the energy. By the time I got there it was too dark. Those foot paths don't have any street lights so you are quite vulnerable. It was a cloudy night and I couldn't see where I was going and I was scared I might get murdered or something. I did want to leave though. I think that, looking back, I was aiming for the week if not longer. I was going to go for this long winter walk, but in the back of my mind I didn't want to come back. I had a week's worth of clothes in my bag and that was going to last me. It was a kind of mad experiment and I just stayed away. I had been feeling so down, so weighed down by the responsibilities.



I'd sort of organised what I needed to take with me that day. So I had my

clothes and my purse, and I made myself a pack up as well. I'm quite good, I'm quite self-sufficient in that way. I suppose I didn't know where I was going, but I was prepared. I was just hoping they wouldn't know where to find me. As I stood at the start of that walk by the river, the one I couldn't do, and I said to myself, "I'm going to have to find myself a bed and breakfast hotel". I think by then it was only about half past eleven at night, but the town was absolutely empty and I couldn't find one. I thought "I'll find a pub", but everywhere was shut down, there was just nothing happening. I wandered into a park, there was just nobody and I didn't know what to do.

I just sat on a bench, and it was freezing, absolutely freezing. I sat on this bench just listening to my heart and looking at the sea thinking, "what if I just walked into it right now?" and I thought, "nobody would probably care anyway". You experience the environment differently, it sounds strange, but I was thinking the sea was somehow conscious of me. I went to look at the sea because there was something really very tranquil and calming about it.

Depression is a very selfish thing and I didn't think about other people. You lose your empathy. I wasn't thinking of my family missing me. If I had been the woman that I am now, I would have been considering other people's feelings, but because I was ill, I didn't. You don't think about what your family are going through. I sort of stopped feeling. I dissociated myself from them and so I didn't think they were missing me, not that first night anyway.

After a while I was tired and cold and I thought, "I can't sleep outside tonight". I walked through the town to the bus

station. It's quite a pleasant bus station, it's warm, and the time passed quickly. I didn't want to go home, didn't want to see anybody, but didn't particularly want to stay there. It was a horrible time, looking back. In the morning I went into the little café and got changed and had a wash and stuff. So I was ill but still aware in that way, and I still kept myself clean and safe. I might have been behaving differently and acting strangely, but I was still perfectly aware that I needed to wash and eat. I stayed there two nights. This security guard eventually said to me, "I've noticed that you are staying overnight here because I saw you before and you changed your clothes".

That scared me, and so I did eventually check into a hotel. I am a creature who likes my comforts. I like warmth, so I did check into this hotel eventually and I just stayed in my room and didn't go out much for a few days. I spent a lot of time crying and sleeping. I was drinking whiskey and drinking whiskey made me forget a lot of things. It was just a way of repressing things. There was a certain amount of embarrassment in that I hadn't managed to actually run away properly, when that is what my intention had been at the start of the walk. I was just too tired and there I was, still in my home town.

After a few days I wanted to do something, go somewhere else. I switched my phone on and there were these hysterical messages from friends and family about me being missing and I needed to contact the police, and that kind of thing does not help at all. When I turned my mobile on I didn't read all of them because there was an awful lot of messages, which all said the same thing. It was like mass hysteria on your mobile and you don't want to be responsible for everyone else's emotions. You can barely cope with your own. I just turned it off. I

knew I had to go further then. I know it sounds stupid, but it was like an excited feeling. Not the fact that I was leaving everybody, but the fact that maybe my head would be all clear and I would be somewhere new and nobody would know me, you know, it would be a fresh start.

I kept thinking if I get on a bus somewhere, half the buses now have CCTV, so they'll know where I'm going. I think I went through all the emotions then, I think I actually wanted someone to find me, I wanted someone to come and help me, and at the same time I wanted to be away. Eventually I went back to the bus station and I got on the bus to Ipswich, and then a coach to London. It was a long journey. It was a long time of worrying on the bus, "where am I going", and wondering whether I would get stopped, because I knew that that they had reported me missing. I was feeling so tense about getting caught, I was worked up and my heart was racing. When I was in London I did pass a policeman and he did look at me for a long time, but he didn't say anything. It's a bit ridiculous to think they are going to be looking for me in every place, but I was just so nervous.

I was a very different person then. I think the illness made me a different person, rather than it being really intentional. If the refuge hadn't put me up that one night, I don't know what would have happened. I would have stayed in the streets or in bus shelters. I do remember looking for somewhere to sleep when I first arrived and then going there. They knew I was ill, it was obvious. They let me stay one night and then helped me get on a ward. It was in there that I met other mums. I had never come across mums that leave their families before, but during my stay in that psychiatric hospital, I met lots of mums that had done the same and some mums never

went back to their children. They never went back and some mums had not seen their children for fifteen years, twenty years. I just remember thinking I don't want to do that. I wanted to try and find my way back. There was a strong part of me that didn't want to go back at the same time. So it was like I was fighting myself.

If I'd have maybe stayed longer on my own in London I might have been able to disappear a bit more. If I had stayed away longer I might have made a bit more of an impact, which sounds daft as well, trying to make an impact by going missing. It was a pretty selfish thing to do, but if I had told anybody "I'm leaving" they would probably have said, "no, you've got to stay here". Ideally, though, I would have liked to have stayed away longer.

Towards the end of that time, I started thinking about my children and pining for them. I was only away for a week and even then the feeling of guilt was enormous, for leaving this place for a week and then coming back to all the mess, all the debris that I had left. I had so much guilt to contend with. When the police did get in touch, I remember he said "look, it's okay, don't worry you are not in trouble or anything". That is the bit that stood out for me because I was really worried when I saw the policemen waiting by my bed. He put me at ease by

saying that straight off, I do remember that made an immediate difference.

I actually think of myself as a strong person, but the reality of it is that I can be fragile like anyone else. I think everybody at some point in their life can't cope with that much responsibility. But while I was



away, I started to think about what my children would be thinking and how they would be feeling, and then picking up the phone to talk to them and just hearing their voice and their anguish and how they were feeling. That was it. Yeah, it was hearing their voices that gave me the strength to try and come back to them.

You want people to understand why you've gone, and the coming home bit, it's quite hard. You have got to talk about it all at some point. Going missing didn't solve anything. If I had just stayed there and talked things through with the relevant people in the first place, it might have been okay.

Stuart's story: a man's experience of going missing

I was really depressed and I didn't know how I was going to get help to sort of overcome it. One day I just snapped and I just went for lunch and never came back. So I just left my desk and I had my valuables in my jacket and I walked out and that's it. I didn't know how long it would last for, if I would be back or not, you know, I just kind of went. It wasn't euphoric, it felt like I shouldn't be doing it, but in my mind I knew I had to. I can remember having suddenly made the impulse decision just to go, feeling instant relief from the hassle and the stress and the nerves. I didn't make a decision to go missing deliberately. I just wanted to get away from my life at the time.

I wasn't sure what to do and so I started walking. I wasn't going to go out of the town because if I had gone somewhere I didn't know it would have been a lot harder to get through the next few days. I could have gone down where my mother's from, where I'm from, but it felt an obvious move really. I walked up onto the main street, then had to join to King Street, and there I could avoid the crowds. I was just walking aimlessly. I don't know how long I was walking for as I had stopped paying attention to where I was and then time had gone by and then all of a sudden it must have been about ten o'clock at night. It was all just one step at a time, one hour at a time I suppose.

Other people might have just wandered, depending on their state of mind, but I did want to put my head down, so the first night it was purely decided by the fact that it was getting dark and I was tired and I wanted to find somewhere that was familiar. I phoned my friend. I just needed somebody to emotionally bounce off a little bit so I phoned him and he was like "come on over". Anyway he

was just sitting and getting wasted, he always does. I didn't tell him about my job or anything. I just got stoned with him and tried to forget about it all. I stayed with him a couple of nights, which he was really happy with. I had done it in the past, just turned up and got wasted, so he didn't consider it anything unusual.

When I was there I know I had nine or ten missed calls from the guy who was my area manager wondering where I was and I had a text message saying, "if you are alright Stuart get in touch". He did sent a text saying, "I'm really worried about you" and stuff like that, but at no stage did he say, "I'm going to phone the police" or "I have phoned the police". I didn't know that I would be missing at that stage. I wasn't really thinking that far ahead, it was like one day at a time.



After a while I couldn't relax at his place and actually it was a bit of a dump. It was hard to shake thoughts of home. That was traumatic after a while. It was awful, I just couldn't relax. I needed to keep myself occupied, so I decided to leave and started wandering the streets again. I started walking in the direction of the canal without making any conscious decision. I followed the canal, thinking if you walk enough you can walk off your troubles.

I was vaguely worried about police. I wondered what they were doing. I didn't

know what my family was doing. It crossed my mind occasionally about whether they had reported me and whether I was being looked for and whether I ought to hide more, that sort of thing crossed my mind. I suppose I was thinking about it because I did take mostly backstreet routes, you know, in terms of avoiding contact with anything and everyone, apart from those I wanted to have contact with.

I didn't have enough funds for a hotel, so at night I sofa surfed for a bit, going from friends to friends in the evening, and walking in the day. I was running out of options for staying with people, though, and I just didn't want to feel I was putting people out. It wasn't great, trying to find somewhere to stay and physically carry on. My legs would get tired from all the walking during the day and all the time I was thinking of somewhere I could go and spend the night because I was out of places to stay, and I didn't want to admit my situation to people. That was the first night I slept rough. I didn't want to be noticed, so I found somewhere in a field, a little wood off the road and bedded down there for the night. I remember that night it rained, it was terrible because I didn't really sleep at all, I kept on getting up because I was getting wet. I had a few more nights like this, sleeping out. Some were better than others.

I had a few drinks each night. The worst thing was the cold. I'm quite a big bloke and I didn't worry too much about other people, I didn't feel vulnerable in that way. At night, all you had to really think about was getting through it until daylight. I didn't fear for my safety, but I was worried about my options. I was feeling like I wasn't getting anywhere, that running away wasn't doing any good and, you know, each day would come and go and it would be exactly the same.

When I was sleeping rough I spent a lot of time in public places like going to Asda because they were the ones that were open latest to go to the loo and to wash, shave and stuff like that, you know, just trying to survive really and keep clean. I hadn't eaten properly for a few days. I was probably hungry but couldn't force myself to eat. I was in a bit of mess by this time, I had slept three nights on the outside and I was beginning to wonder whether or not I could actually get through another night. It was then that it started to dawn on me what I had done.

I thought I better not try and sleep out again because I think I'm really going to get ill or something. I had no idea whether to go to the police or what, but I still didn't particularly want to tell somebody what had happened. To be honest, it was the drink making life bearable. I bought a bottle of vodka and some coke and I went and sat on a bench for a while. It was in a place where a lot of street people congregate and I was sitting there when I struck up conversation with this street person. He was living rough and I think I told him what I was feeling and he didn't seem that surprised by it. I think he was desperate for his next drink and when he realised I had a bottle of vodka, he was my friend for the day. Towards the end of the evening he said he knew a place where I could stay. It was pretty rough and ready. The door had been kicked in, so there was no lock, no proper light. I suspected they were drug addicts by the looks of it, the way the house was, the way they were. I was really nervous at first. I didn't want to fall asleep because I thought they might steal what money I had or worse. But they were friendly enough and I think they saw someone like them, who had it rough. So that night I slept on the settee. I was very grateful for that. I'd had the bottle of vodka, and maybe I even got another one, so I could

sleep, heavily intoxicated, but I got to sleep. The next day I woke up really early and I didn't want to disturb the guys and I just got up and got out and spent the whole of that day and the whole of that night wandering around. Literally just walking and walking and walking again.



I became more aware of the fact that somebody out there must be getting closer. So that became a pretty powerful thought towards the end, you know, someone is going to find me eventually. You worry about that and you don't know what is going to happen when you are found. Although I wasn't sure if I was in trouble with the police or not, I imagined I would get arrested.

I knew I couldn't do keep doing it in the end. I realised again that there is no rainbow at the end of that road. I just had to deal with the issues and I headed back. As I was getting close to home, this person on the street stopped me and said, "I've seen your face, you've been missing, you've been reported missing." I didn't know this person from anyone. I had actually been on the television and she had recognised me. At that point –

bizarrely enough – there was a police officer coming along, just by pure chance, and she said come and chat to the police officer. In a way it was quite a relief, I could finally talk to someone.

I've never been involved with the police before and being reported missing could have felt like a slap on the wrist, but the they never made me feel that way at all, which was good. They did a sterling job with me, they really did. They were concerned for my welfare. They said, "we'll take you to the police station, make you a cup of tea and we'll go from there". They handled the situation in a very supportive and professional way.

It turns out that loads of people go missing every year and loads of them come back and for their own reasons they do what they do. They become a missing person for a while. It felt like I'd been away a lot longer than I actually had but I was emotionally shattered and just wanted to go to bed. When I arrived home I saw the shock in their eyes to see me alive. So in that shock we all kept quiet for a while. For weeks I was sheepish about it. I wanted a very low profile and for no one to make a big deal about it.

I have had therapy, and that's easier to do that than talk to people who are closer to you. I've learnt that the journey was a waste of time in a way. It didn't get anything done or solved or changed. I suppose it taught me that you that you can't escape from real life, and that's what I was trying to do.

Eddie's story: being intentionally missing

Out of the blue my girlfriend told me that she didn't want me anymore and things happened after that. It was quite traumatic for me and it really shook me up because we were both doing well in work, financially we were pretty settled, no worries there. So you think of revenge. I am not that sort of person normally, but I wanted to feel better, and disappearing was it for me. It was totally out of character and I liked that. I knew that she wouldn't expect it and wouldn't know where I was. I thought it would get me time and space.

Two weeks before I disappeared I had looked up on the web how to lose your identity, how to disappear. There are a few things it tells you; you move to a small town, get work locally, establish yourself and then move on, and do that once more you are almost untraceable. You'd be living a happy life in another place or even the other side of the country having changed your name and they would find it very difficult to track you. I now know of people who have had no correspondence with their wife or their children in fifteen years after something like this happened and there is a lot you can do to disappear. I considered that, but it would have been mean on the kids, it would have been tough because they are young, but they could have joined me themselves later, as I would have been established by then.

I've got a friend who was in Canada and then travelling. He was on Facebook, and I'm saying to him, "everything's gone wrong here, I've got to get out. I need some space". Going was really for me to clear my mind and get some space. I had an idea about being in a warm spot, no ties, no getting up in the morning, not doing anything and looking after myself a little bit. What I decided was I would

start to draw money out from the bank, £50 here, £40 there, £100 here, £200 there, bits and bobs. Take a bit out the savings. Pay for my flight without it showing up as a single payment. Anyone looking at my bank statement wouldn't know where I was, they would see a singular flight via Amsterdam or whatever it may have been, "Oh look it looks like he's gone there".

I booked my flight a week beforehand. I didn't speak to anybody at work except to one of my close mates, Mick. I said I was going to go out and see Jake. So he knew where I was going. I booked my car in via his credit card for something like twenty three days, you know, in a long stay car-park at the airport. I felt very guilty, as you do, and it put me quite emotionally on the edge, and you have to concentrate on what you are doing. Everything was quite premeditated. I had packed a few days before hand. I made it as easy for myself as I possibly could. All the tools for my disappearance were there. The flight, the car booked in safely. All the money that I had got for spending money went on another card, a travel card.



So Sunday night came and it was a terrible time, and I ended up getting more and more nervous, but I had only had two drinks. I wasn't sure if I was going or not that night, but I went for a walk around the block with my daughter

and I tried to explain to her without giving anything away. I told her no matter where I am now or in the future I'll be okay and I'll be thinking of her and her sister. She's a smart kid and seemed to understand.

I spoke to my friend from work that night too. I tell him, "if I'm not here in the morning you know where I've gone", and he tells me, "that's no problem". The message I left with my friend was, "if she rings you, texts you, or gets in contact with you don't tell her where I am going. Just tell her that I am fine and having a few days away". I just wanted to disappear and he understood. So I had covered that. It was meant to be a bit of a shock to her.

I still wasn't sure I was going to do it because I've never done anything like that. I did feel guilty but you have to cut yourself off to get on with it. I woke up about a minute before the alarm. I cleaned my teeth and washed my face and got all my gear on. My bag was packed and hidden in the car. Take what you need and nothing more. I had my passport, which she obviously thought was still in one of the cabinets at the house. I'd taken that on the day that I booked my visa and everything. She had no idea. I crept out of the house, locked the door, got into my car and drove round to the airport, found the parking place and got the shuttle. I was wired and it felt very strange.

One person, my friend at work, had my phone number and I left my current phone switched off in the boot of the car at the airport. The old phone is the one I used, with the phone number that I had had from a couple of years previously. My mate topped it up for me while I was away.

The flight felt like I was flying to the moon as if I was detaching from my life in the UK, but it wasn't as simple as that. I tried to sleep on the plane, but I had dreams of home and was wondering if what I'm doing is right and if she has found out yet. Things were going on in my head. I arrived exhausted from the flight and emotionally exhausted too. I called Jake and I made my way to his and we went out for a drink and I was 'shot'. We didn't talk about anything, I was too exhausted. I texted my mate and told him I'd arrived. He told me, "she's contacted me a few times. And I have kept it vague".

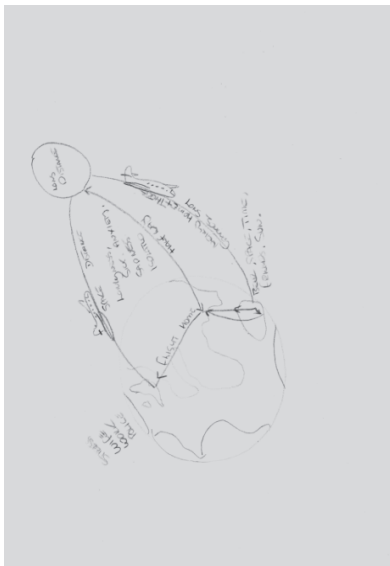
It would have been a completely fresh start. It would have been very sad for my dad and my mum, they'd be sad not to have contact. I would have liked to have just set myself up again in another place as just the guy down the road and just start rebuilding my life. The aim was to live my life without the complications. I hadn't told my parents that I was going to go away, because I didn't want to involve them. They know I'm quite bullet proof and I didn't want to involve them in this.

I know Vancouver really well, so I knew how to get about and over the next few days I went to look at a few places, firms that I know of and I had mild dealings with on a previous trip. I was scoping things out and so that was a possibility. I'd actually flown out with what I needed to become sponsored and stay. I could have changed my visa into a working visa while I was there. I think I could have anyway.

I was beginning to unwind in Vancouver, a place I'm familiar with, but it didn't matter where I was as I couldn't really take it in. I was constantly thinking of home and what was going on there rather than the surroundings. I was getting reports from Mick saying that she

had gone ballistic and reported me missing. He got something like thirty eight texts one day and she wouldn't stop. I decided to go on Facebook to see what was happening. I still had my daughter as a friend and I told her I was going to have to 'unfriend' her because of her mum. I did feel guilty, but I really needed some space to clear my head.

So I've got all that going on and Vancouver was starting to be stressful. It was nice seeing Jake, but it wasn't the time-out I wanted, and I thought about going somewhere else, but I didn't know if that would be a risk, a risk of flying because of your passport and your name and a global identity. So I decided to rent a jeep and I drove out of the city towards Whistler. I was just trying to relax. I went for walks and tried to relax in bars, focus on magazines and having something to eat. I think I needed to keep myself occupied.



On one of the evenings I got back to the hotel and there was a voice mail from my friend saying my brother had been taken into hospital seriously ill. Well, I couldn't ignore that, and so I called to find out and it was serious, so I had to go home. I was in such a daze, but knew I had no choice so I booked a flight.

The journey back wasn't good. It makes you physically ill, I can tell you, being lonely, anxious and angry. "What am I going to say to work"? It felt really sad. I never really got what should have been a good time to clear my head and it never really happened.

When I got back it was very hard to try and put it into a picture that someone might understand. The phone that was in the boot of my car, when I fired that up there was five voice mails on that phone from my sister. Then the phone rang and it was the girlfriend and she went mad. She was swearing at me down the phone. I headed to my parents rather than home, but I don't really remember much else, it was catastrophic really.

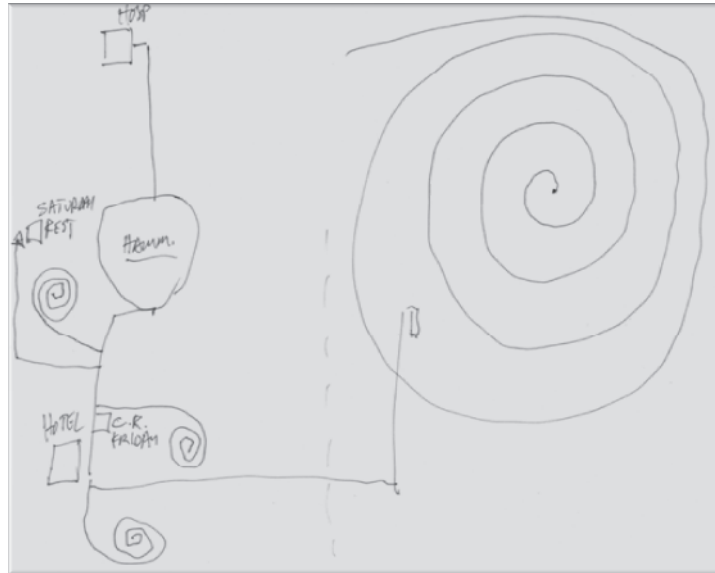
When I was back in UK, because I'd been reported missing, I was told I needed to go to the local police station. I showed them a bill that had my name on it and a driving licence that had my face on it and they were fine. We chatted for a few minutes. There was no interview as such. They just wanted to see a face at the door, some forms of ID. The police were good about it, they weren't annoyed.

What I needed was just my own personal space and yet I ended up with more problems than I would have done if I hadn't gone. Life is just rebuilding itself, but it seems quite odd to have been on a missing persons list.

When you come back you have a load of things that you may not want to face, which could be a good reason not to come back. It's quite daunting. That pressure is not what someone who disappears wants to have when they come back. What they want is not family, but a neutral person, an ear, someone to speak to. I never ever talked to anybody about it, but you need someone who is interested and I think that is quite

important. There are one hundred versions of what might be wrong and why you go, and you may be simply one of

those people who needs some space when things get too much. You don't do this for no good reason.



Jenny's story: repeatedly going missing

I call it 'going on a wander'. Sometimes I just can't handle it, I need to get away. I try to talk to folk about it, but they've not been through it, so they don't know and I would rather be on my own. I have used the car a few times to disappear, but this one time I took the bus. I think the decision came about tea-time and that would have been about five o'clock. My son hadn't been home all day, and he went straight to get his haircut. It was really, really bad of me, but I just took away while he was there. Actually he was walking up the road, and I passed him on the bus. I felt really bad because he had had his hair cut and dyed and he was obviously dying to come home and show me it. He came home and got a note instead. You are very, very selfish when you go missing. I wanted to be away, but there is also this guilt. My son was only seventeen or eighteen at the time.

I know when it's starting, I start to go out a lot and maybe I won't come back for two or three nights at a time. Then about a week later I'll go out and I won't come back for a good while. I feel compelled to take time for myself. It's like being on a merry-go-round and it goes round and around, the pace picks up, the pace of life, and I just need to step out of all the responsibilities.

This time was the fourth time I'd gone. I had taken a lot of money out of my bank account that day, but the first night I slept in a park by the river. I had got the bus into the centre of town, and then got off and walked miles and miles and miles. I walked all over London, I'd walked from Fulham, Battersea, past Richmond, past Kingston, past Hampton, I think I went into parts of Surrey, and came back up through Staines near Heathrow area. I used the river as almost like a navigation tool. I almost did a full circle on myself,

just walking around aimlessly until I got tired, until at last I found a bench in a quiet spot in the small hours and slept until it was light again. I thought about my family a lot, my son, but the situation was so bad in my own mind, I couldn't see it being reconciled easily. I was walking along and imagining I'd find work, find myself somewhere to live, set myself up again and then go from there. I obviously knew what I was doing was wrong, but I needed to hide away. I'd like to be able to say I didn't know what I was doing, but I did, I did know.

I checked into a little hotel on that second day and got a wash and some rest. There was a bar there and a pub next door, and I drank quite a lot. I stayed there for a few days. I gave a false name and address because I paid cash, just in case the police came round and checked, you know. It's one of the things that you think they do.

I remember one time I was missing I got on a train and didn't pay for it. And I think that was when I went to Stansted Airport. I just jumped on and luckily no ticket inspector came on and checked me. You get pretty clued up on how to do it, where to get off and what to do, because at Stansted they didn't seem to check your tickets at the end at that time. It was easy enough to get onto a Stansted express train. I went back to Stansted more than once. I spent a night there because it was warm, and you weren't challenged. Someone with a bag looks like any other traveller.

This time, though, I was running out of money after a few days in the hotel, and so I left there and started moving again. I had enough for the buses, and I arrived in central London at ten in the morning on the Thursday and switched and got a ticket for the coast. Once I was there, I

had a look around, bought some paracetamols and bought a drink and that's when I headed towards the cliffs and sat there. I sat on the cliffs and I was contemplating taking an overdose or just jumping off. I was sitting there wondering "can I really do this?" I was wondering whether I could either kill myself or stay missing. And then, at the end of the afternoon, I knew I couldn't. I had it all planned, and then suddenly this feeling came over me: that I couldn't do it because of my son. I remember saying to myself that "I can't disappear all the way", which meant that I couldn't die. I have a photograph of my son on my phone. The plan was that the last thing I was going to do was to look at him. That photo of him probably saved my life to be honest with you, because when I got to the cliffs and I looked at the picture and I thought "god, I can't do this, I can't leave him, I love him too much and he would never understand". That photograph of him meant that I couldn't go ahead with it so it was a really important thing to have with me.

I stayed there for ages, because even though I didn't do anything, it still felt a safe place to be. Eventually, I ended up just walking aimlessly through the streets, until I ended up back at the bus station late that night. The walk back was, I don't know, like a walking death sort of thing, you know. It was a

realisation that coming back, I was basically coming out of a fantasy world and back to reality.

When I have gone missing before, I've phoned somebody eventually. Or people would phone me. I always had my phone with me. I would ignore it and ignore it and then I would eventually give in. In a way I just run out of steam. The phone rang again as I got to the station and I answered that time, but I still wouldn't tell them where I was. I don't know why. I wanted them to know I'm okay but I couldn't say much. If I do go missing, everybody panics wondering where I am. If I don't answer the phone, it makes them feel worse and they think I've done something bad and that is when they call the police. But for a while I just don't answer, I don't see the point. I need to get away for a while, sort my head out. The police did get involved because I'm classed as vulnerable from the first time I did it, I think I'm still classed as 'vulnerable' in the police computer. That is why they have got to respond.

The one thing I've been told repeatedly to do by every single police officer who has been involved and caught me is, "next time, please can you phone us?" but they always reassure me I've not done anything wrong. In a way I'm exercising my freedom and my right to roam. I'm not missing, I'm exercising my freedom.



Rhona's story: a life of missing experience

I was first reported missing at fifteen when I ran away. Then I turned sixteen that year and I left home and I was living with a pal of mine in Bristol. I was there until the August and then I went missing again, I'd left and nobody knew where I was. I'd just disappeared and was floating about. It turned into this big cycle of I'd be home, then I'd be gone, then I'd be home, then I'd be gone. Then there would be phases where I was really missing and nobody knew where I was. I completely stayed away from everyone that I knew from my whole life. I disenfranchised myself and it came and went in phases and a lot of it is to do with mental illness.

Every time I felt trapped and confined. It felt that way to me but that's not actually the way it was. Inside my own head I felt like everything was closing down on me and the only escape was to run. I didn't want to be the cause of this sorrow in my family. I've messed it all up, and the pattern keeps repeating itself. It feels like the smarter thing for me to go. But going missing is never the smartest thing to do, ever.

I've lived on the street when I have been missing. I have been to hippy communes, peace protests. I was living at Parliament Square at one point. I spent some time in Lancashire, Nottingham, Birmingham, Brighton. I actually lived under the pier at Brighton with a bunch of junkies. It was this big massive journey and exploration. It was all because I just felt crap about myself. I've slept out in the snow, the rain, the sun, all kinds of weather. There have been very high points and very, very low points to the whole experience of me being missing. It's been quite fun in a way, but quite sad at the same time. I think I was looking for something and actually I didn't even need

to look further than my front door. I was looking for myself and she was really just laying in her bed at home. I was too busy trying to find something that wasn't really there. I was just chasing dreams that didn't really exist. I never ever saw myself as missing at the time. But I was missing, I was gone. Nobody knew where I was.

I've been all over the place. I couldn't begin to list the amount of places I've been. I've been to seriously obscure places in England. It's just been this great middle class scummy adventure. A lot of the people that I associated with in this phase in my life have all been middle class white people that have been trying to be scummy. I had a real adventure by going missing. We went all the way round the British countryside and we just camped up, pitched up and just started being little eco villages all along the way. I had a really, really good time at points and I was gone once for seven and a half months. Who was going to find me?

You've got to think smart when you go missing. A lot of people don't. That's why they always get found and brought back. I was canny, like if I saw someone that looked like my mum or dad I would be ducking away in another direction. I got very good at geographically finding my way around as I realised early on that I was young and so I was being reported as missing. I had to navigate my way around places so I didn't get caught by police, and I was fending for myself, and having to shoplift just to get by. I know my way around most cities, like in London. I could tell you all the back streets all the way round Oxford Street, all of those ones. I could get you anywhere from there along the back streets in half the time it would take you to get a bus.

I always know they will be looking for me. I'm sick, I've got a medical condition. I knew every time that people would come looking for me. There's too many people that love and care for me for it not to happen. I feel really bad for people that have gone missing and there's nobody looking for them, because they're not really missing, they're just a disposable person and that's really sad. I'm quite lucky in that I've had people actively coming and looking for me. I might not want them to be looking for me, and I might have lashed out because I didn't want them at that time. Now though, all I really want is for all of those people who were looking to be around me.

I ended up in hospital a few times, and I tried to say what was wrong, but they didn't want to know. I think they should have at least acknowledged me, and acknowledged that there was a problem there. I went from being a nice respectable young woman to a horrible, angry squatter in the space of three months. I've lived in squats that would make your skin crawl. I've lived on the streets among rats and everything. I actually woke up with a fox on me one morning. How do you go from being a polite respectable person to this angry, horrible, dirty, evil piece of crap that I was? That's what going missing did to me.

People who do go missing and people who run away really don't realise the things that it does to the people around them. My mum has dreams about me dying. She doesn't need that. I could have had a stable environment. I could have had everything going for me that I should have going for an average twenty five year old. I shot myself in the foot. I'm living in a hostel now with junkies, alcoholics and prostitutes.



It's only been more recently that I've been willing to listen, that I've been willing to verbalise things. So that's why I started to go to counselling, started to go to therapy, and all that kind of stuff, because it is helping me work it out and understand it better myself. My mother tried, and she couldn't have been any more understanding. When I'm home my mum says, 'sit down, have a cup of tea. Do you want a fag? Sort yourself out. Explain to me, talk to me'. Being calm is a key factor and she's good at that.

By being away so much, I'm only realising now how much I've missed and it shocks me. It really shocks me. It is actually quite sad to think about how much I've missed.

If I had advice to anyone else it would be to go out and see the world. If you want to be missing do it that way. Don't leave people worried about you. Don't leave people sitting there stressing and losing their hair and going grey over you being an arsehole and you not wanting to be at home. For a lot of runaways and missing people, it is a case of them just not wanting to be at home. That's why they run away. If you really want to go, just leave home properly.

It's funny, for the first time, now I've left home properly, I want to go home.

Afterword: making sense of missing stories

In these ten stories of missing experience, we get a glimpse of what has previously been hidden from view. 'Missing people' are often portrayed as a stereotype in the media, or as individuals who meticulously plan their disappearance and reinvent themselves elsewhere. This is not often the case in reality, and we very rarely hear about what this experience is really like, from the inside, and so these stories help us understand something about what it feels like to be a person reported as missing. These voices tell stories of crises and being mobile and missing as one kind of response to these crises.

What can we learn from these stories? We can pay attention to the stressful triggers of everyday life and learn about the factors making people feel so vulnerable that they have to disappear rather than talk. We can learn about how these resourceful people navigated and used urban and rural environments in order to survive away from home. We might also learn about what it feels like to return after being reported as missing. Here the stories tell us that returning is a difficult and confusing emotional event, for which no one has sufficient resources available to tackle properly. After a certain amount of time has passed, we learn that it is important to talk about being missing, but that there are few opportunities to do so.

These lessons are important ones which need to be recognised by everyone who might be involved in missing journeys, from families, to mental health services, to the police, to the Missing People charity, to the media.

We can listen to these voices of experience to complement missing person training for police officers in attempts to develop empathetic service delivery in locating vulnerable people.

We can promote the need for mental health services to anticipate and respond to missing experience.

We can help guide families of people reported as missing in how best to talk about the experience with those that return.

We can open a space for acknowledging missing experience.

To read more about how to understand and respond to missing experience visit:
www.geographiesofmissingpeople.org.uk

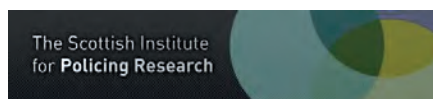
To write a story of missing experience visit:
www.geographiesofmissingpeople.org.uk/missingstories

June 2013

Anonymous illustrations are drawn by interviewees and photographs are by martinmuir.com



University
of Glasgow



POLICE
SCOTLAND

Printed by University of Glasgow Print Unit

© The University of Glasgow, 2013. All rights reserved; no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or be transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior permission of The University of Glasgow, 2013.