



Stuart Petty Senior Hospital Chaplain

If my sixteen-year-old self could see me now, he would say, "How did you get away with it? With just a Geography CSE and typing, how have you fooled so many people!?" I did used to be in the church choir, but I was thrown out for

bad singing. I used to have various jobs after school, but I was mostly interested in funding my motorbikes and listening to music. I tried various jobs: postman, hospital porter, cleaner...I tried student nursing but I couldn't handle the

theory. So I went to live with a friend who lived in Wales, my former scoutmaster, and his family. During this time living in Montgomery I returned to church.

"I got my first tattoo far too late in life and I've been making up for it ever since."

I got involved with the Church Army - an organisation that's focused on social action - and ended up working on homelessness projects. I was assisting a priest in Central London and the two of us just wandered around, him in his cassock, talking to homeless people. After our rounds we would end



up in a pub in Charing Cross (it was just opposite a club called 'Heaven', as it happens!), him still in his cassock, and got talking to all sorts of other people there. Some of them were there to avoid being at home, or to forget their worries. I told him I felt called to train as a priest, and he said he had thought that the minute he first set eyes on me!

I still have a Harley and I

still go to lots of gigs. This picture is of me meeting Steve Earle - a singer with a social conscience - whose gigs I still go to with my daughter. I got my first tattoo far too late in life and I've been making up for it ever since.

I've always got on better with people outside the church. I don't foist myself on people, but people know we're here. This is the community in which I work, and I love it. I just come and walk alongside people who are in a vulnerable situation - often I come away having been encouraged by what they have said, rather than the other way around. There's lots of

laughter on the wards. Sometimes you go into a bay with four patients to talk to one person, and you end up talking to four guys at once. Sometimes people just don't want to talk, and that's fine - I fully respect that. I can't pretend to be anyone except myself and I don't have all the answers. I like the idea that a chaplain's job is 'fanning the rumour of God'.

The other thing about the hospital is that you hear people's stories much more than you do in the outside world. There's the space and the opportunity, and because of what they're going through, people just want to get stuff out there. We

have a 'prayer tree' in the chapel, and every week dozens of people add their stories in miniature to it, it's amazing to read. Telling and listening to stories is so important, it makes people feel valued.

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In the setting of a hospital you can get to know them very quickly, because stories get shared around the bedside - some people have had amazing lives! We shouldn't wait until we're in hospital to tell stories. Steve Earle's got a line: "Songs to sing, and tales to tell" - that's

what life's about. For me, the image of a campfire symbolises some of my best times, when the whole family and their friends are around and talking to each other. We need to 'reclaim the campfire', I think.

