

Review of Aidan Martin's Euphoric recall by Tich

"I felt like a drunk sitting on the pub steps before opening time. I couldn't resist. Still too young to understand why I sought out such self-harming treatment, that first phone call led to many, many more".

Euphoric Recall begins with Aidan's stepfather having to pick up the bill after £500 worth of calls are made. Whilst his memoir is very much about his journey, the impact upon the family is there all the way through and I wondered how it was for his family? I am sure many families can relate to having to pay bills to avoid phones being cut off. As Aidan's book is as much about his family as it is him, it made perfect sense to be the second feature of our Bound Together project.

After reading Euphoric recall I am left in awe at how honest Aidan Martin is. "The truth will set you free" is a common term heard amongst recovery communities. In his debut memoir Euphoric Recall Aidan recalls growing up in Livingston, how he became immersed in the drug scene and how it nearly killed him, and how, importantly, it all began with trauma.

Right at the start of the book the level of self-disclosure is clear when Aidan talks about his introduction to pornography and how that leads him down a dangerous path where he suffers at the hands of a paedophile. Hitting the reader with the uncomfortable topic of online grooming of minors as well as some matter of fact description of the types of porn Aidan had access to, serves several purposes. It may allow anyone who finds the subject matter challenging to stop before you start. I don't imagine that many however picked up or ordered this book by accident. It certainly sets the tone and lets us prepare to face a tough reality.

But for me the greater purpose is twofold. It shows how we tackle stigmatised subject matter - We shine a light on it with simple matter-of-fact honesty. We normalise the subject. As we go through the book Aidan talks about many subjects that are taboo. Sex, Porn, Drugs, Faith.

I particularly appreciate that he talks about where he let people down in relationships. It is hard to talk about this when our culture in the UK and across the world has spun what we now recognise as toxic-masculinity - a warped sense of what a man should be. Despite huge shifts in how we perceive gender and campaigns such as 'Me Too', how men are brought up believing they ought to act in certain situations needs books like this to show a better way for some of us.

I also think that looking at Aidan's behaviour pattern as he becomes more and more hooked on porn and how he seeks the next level is mirrored when he starts to experiment with drugs.

We need this message that patterns of behaviour and our often sub-conscious motivations are what gets individuals and families trapped in addiction, not a specific substance and not a lifestyle choice. We hear all the time that everyone has a book in them, but would you have the guts to be as honest as Aidan is and make it public? Hats off.

Another tough subject the author takes on is Spirituality and Faith. They are maybe harder to talk about than drugs these days. I know a load of people who will happily admit that they have a history of drug or alcohol use but find it harder to talk about their faith. "I can't deny there were times I questioned if a loving *Higher Power* truly existed. In a children's cancer ward you see and hear things that torture your soul."

Aidan tells us about his friends, enemies, and family with just enough information to picture them and make them prominent but not steal the show with the exception of his brother. It is a skill not to let Declan's story become over dominant, because it is so powerful and emotional.

The journey the whole family goes on with this rare cancer and the stress they are under also lets us understand that people often turn to substances, especially alcohol, to cope with all the emotional challenges life brings. "At this point I only knew one way to cope and that was self-medication."

His other brother also comes to Aidan's rescue several times in the book and we get and real feel for where Aidan fits in the family. We see all his influences. His AWOL biological father plays a huge part by his very absence but also by reputation. This theme of reputation comes up a few times and most of us will be able to relate to the pressure to live up to reputation can play. Just like introducing the reader to the behaviour pattern attained from watching porn, the impact of ego and what you believe others think of you is another lesson in addiction and recovery. The violence that Aidan gets caught up in all stems from reputation.

Aidan's mother and stepfather are also well rounded in this and their motivation to give him the best upbringing so a lot of families will relate to the helplessness and frustration as Aidan drifts away from them and is in more and more danger.

It also touches on where some people need to walk away. "Immune to my bullshit, Rachel stormed off in a taxi and left me there. I chose to stay with my precious cocaine rather than chase after her. She knew as well as I did that "one last time" simply meant *one more time*."

The book is a simple, fairly short read and largely a chronological journey through his life and this helps us go with him as challenges stack up. I'm trying to write this without giving away too much so that others will enjoy it because as you read you want to know what happens next. I can say that the book touched me because it looks closely at how people cope with bereavement, particularly slow drawn out illness. I related to this and specifically the guilt and shame of being wasted when the expectation is to be respectful. But getting wasted is sometimes people's way of coping, and often they just don't realise until it's too late.

I also relate to way he partied and the comradery that comes with being a part of a scene and he describes some of the good times, the hilarious laughter and the bonds that form when you are a part of a sub-culture that largely gravitates around acquiring and taking drugs. It is important to recognise that drugs do have an appeal and that's why they are so common. This book doesn't in any way glamorise substance use, it simply explains how Aidan got caught up in a culture and how it nearly killed him.

It spends a decent amount of time explaining his recovery process too. This is as helpful for families as it is those themselves seeking help.

A great debut book but Aidan as a person offers more. This memoir is a great read but by following him on social media, listening to podcasts and hearing him speak, Aidan's authenticity and generosity with his personal life allows us a further insight into growing up in Scotland in a landscape scared by communities malfunctioning, as call-centres, lad culture and turning to drugs were the reality for many. There is exciting things ahead for Aidan with book number two awaiting publishing and book three underway.