

*last night's tv***Does Jamie know best?****Andrew Billen****Jamie's Ministry of Food (C4)**

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Losing It: Griff Rhys Jones on Anger (BBC Two)

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True Stories: Chosen (More4)

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“f,” said Jamie Oliver, “*Jamie’s School Dinners* was like *Star Wars*,” — and, after all, that was the comparison we were all making at the time — “this will be like *The Empire Strikes Back*.” But the cocky chef was not taking on an evil empire but Rotherham, whose working class he was trying to persuade to cook. Oliver believed that “big old slappers” from the town had thwarted his plans to feed the nation’s children healthy pasta by poking unhealthy chips through the school railings.

Having worked in Rotherham, I could have assured him they are not evil. They are merely uneducated, so ignorant, in fact, that they do not even know what the word “ignorant” means, mistaking it for a synonym for rude. In a corner, they display pugnacious but easily bruised egos and hang on jealously to what they have, which exactly is that ignorance, manifested mainly in a blind belief that Rotherham and Rotherham ways are best. My driving instructor was so xenophobic, he would not visit Sheffield.

But they are not stupid, and Julie Critchlow, the “burger mum” Jamie called a slapper, gave the most succinct critique possible of Oliver’s plan to teach ten wholesome dishes to two citizens who would each pass it to two more so that in 15 steps the entire town’s population would be cooking home-made meatballs and basil-fried salmon. “They’ll do it while you’re here to suck up to you but when you go they’ll go, ‘Oh, sod it!’” Critchlow, in fact, turned out to be a quite decent old-fashioned cook and a master of the gravy-soaked Sunday roast dinner.

Because this was television, Oliver opened a shop in the town centre under the banner **Jamie’s Ministry of Food**, reinventing the Man from the Ministry who really did know best except in this case it was the Man from the Mini Series. There was a precedent here, incidentally. Rotherham is run by socialists who have a history of putting their fingers in pies, and I mean that literally. When I was there, the council still ran its own cafés and restaurants. Oliver confessed that he did not understand the problems of a single mother such as Natasha, a woman who showed talent for meatballs but, who, left alone, reverted to feeding her daughter kebabs and chips.

Natasha had debts; she was too worried to cook and too broke to use what was left of her benefit money on bus fares and fresh mince. “But I do care about you,” Oliver said, addressing a woman with an eight-ring gas hob in her kitchen that she had never lit. No doubt, because, again, this is television, by week four, Natasha will be a cordon-bleu cook but Rotherham’s problems will not be solved by Oliver, resilient though his ego is. It’s the economy, stupid.

The difference between extroverts and introverts is that extroverts need to be liked and introverts need people to do as



they say. Oliver manages to be both at once, which I suppose makes him a politician or else a TV presenter. Griff Rhys Jones bestrides the same two stools: show-off and control freak. In the concluding part of **Losing It**, he showed footage of himself shouting at another production crew for failing to do things his way but

also confessed that he was desperate for the vicar, who had privately reduced him to apoplexy by asking him to open his fete, to like him. During his search for a cure for his anger, experts told him that you cannot control things and nor can you expect everyone to like you (and what if they don't?).

Macrobiotic diets, boxing classes, meditation, Californian psycho-babbling were tried. None quite did it for him. He concluded that he needed to change his behaviour (you don't say). Herewith, my own three-point solution: less coffee, more sleep, fewer TV progs starring Griff.

If you really wanted to know what it feels like to have no control over your life, you needed to see **Chosen**, a brave documentary in which three middle-aged men spoke in calm, ghastly detail about being sexually abused by their teachers at Caldicott prep school. All the stuff you

hear parroted about child abuse was here minutely explained: the grooming, the secrecy, the sense of complicity, the guilt and the priority, above all, not to reveal your misery to your parents. Here the abuse was hidden under the façade of the school's "reputation", particularly for sport (healthy body, healthy minds). All, as one of the abused said, "bollocks".

As readers of the recent *times2* article (find it in timesonline.co.uk/men) based on Brian Woods's film will know, one of the alleged abusers was the headmaster Peter Wright, who retired in glory in 1993 with a speech that paid tribute to the boys for having "often brightened my day." A criminal case against Wright was "stayed" on the grounds that it all happened a long time ago.

Not to these men, it didn't. It was brave of the documentary to name him. ●
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Big mouth strikes again Jamie Oliver's culinary campaign in Rotherham might work for the TV cameras, but will it really change anything?

