**Interviewer:** *OK, so shall we start with your personal item then? Do you want to tell me about your firefighter?*

OK, so this is a lighter and ehm...you know, when I first started smoking heroin, we used to use matches. And then the lighter became a valuable tool of like everywhere I went...I'd always have the lighter because that was the most important thing of using, because without it you couldn't use basically. So, it was always been in my possession.

**Interviewer:** *Right. So, I guess then you injected heroin, is that right?*

No, I, I used to smoke heroin, but I have injected...I have I have been intravenous too...but primarily I'd smoke heroin yeah.

**Interviewer:** *OK, so it kind of almost is a necessity that without this thing you couldn't use.*

Yes. Yes. It was just it was it was a vital, vital part of of using, you know, and it's always been clever because it was refillable. So rather than running to the shops or running out, you know, you'd have a bottle of gas and you just fill it up and you're off and running again. So, it was vital, you know, even in wherever wherever I went, you know what I mean, the lighter is important.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. Yeah. Would you say that or how do you think it was during relapse. Would you say that if you wouldn't have had...like how, how do you think about it now about having the lighter with you?*

Well, you know, it's...we blame a lot of attention on triggers, you know what I mean, but, you know, today I feel as triggers...you are always gonna come across triggers you know what I mean, you're always going to come across kitchen foil...you're always gonna come across lighters. If someone strikes a match, you get that smell of sulfur and it reminds you to using...but it's just an excuse to go and use...but today triggers...ah it's just cultural for me triggers you know what I mean. Even money...can be a trigger. Walking into people or ex-users in the street can be a trigger. I've got to, you know, stop blaming and look up, you know, my behavior. And I take it myself, you know what I mean? I'm not, it's not other things that are triggering me. It's me that triggers me. You know what I mean? It's my thought pattern that triggers me. You know what I mean. And, you know, I don't I don't associate triggers today with my relapse because it's me that makes me relapse, it's not the triggers. It's it's me.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. Very good. Yes, I like that. That's a really good attitude to have actually.*

You know, for for years I used to go like, you know, ehm where there's a bad day and, you know, I felt miserable and relapsed and, you know what?, it was me, it's down to me. It's all it's all me. You know I was always blaming...if it wasn't for this person, what if it wasn't for that building or if it wasn't for that drug dealer...always blaming and people can say there are triggers but...I'm just blaming...It's me. I'm the biggest trigger...myself.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. Yeah. No, I that's really interesting. I think that's a really, really good attitude to have. So, I actually was wondering, would you like to maybe just walk me through some of your maybe the history of you using you said already you've you've you've been through prison and you've got probably rich experiences and maybe you just want to give me a little bit of a background of, you know, when did you start etc?*

Ok ehm we talk about deceit, dishonesty and self-will. I had all them traits before I even picked up a drink or drugs. I had all them traits, you know, and so I had an addictive personality, even from a child. You know, we grew up in poverty and I was the youngest of 11 children. My father died, a five-year-old, and my mother worked two jobs. So, my mother wasn't around as a child from the age of five onwards. So, I was like left to me own devices. I had siblings bringing me up. And so, me mother was out of me life because she had to put food on the table and a roof over our heads. So, she was hard working woman, you know what I mean? She had two jobs and she went from one job to the other and we didn't see. She was out from 7:00 in the morning till 10:00 at night. And, you know, I was left to my own devices and I was running on self-will from a very young age, committing petty crime and things like that. And because I didn't get what I wanted, I'd go out and steal. I had that lifestyle growing up. I used to go to the football a lot and watch watch [football team]. We just beat ehm [competitor football team]. In [date] and we won the [championship] and then [date] I started going to football games and I was about 12-13 years old and that was an addiction, you know, I loved it, I obsessed about it and ehm we got to Wembley and I went to Wembley and me mother wouldn't let me go because I was only like 14 years of age, wouldn't let me go to CE on my own. And I was terrible for running away from home as a young child, you know, I probably put mom through a lot of worry. And I run away from home and went to Wembley, watched the match, and after that I lost me friend coming out of the crowds, you know, with the crowds and things like that. So I knew my sister lived in CE and I turned up at her door in CE, and she was surprised to see me. She welcomed me in. And that night she introduced me to Cannabis, you know, and I was like 14 years of age. And she introduced me to speed and tablets too...and so...cut a long story short, I ended up going home after two weeks. Me mother and me other sister said it was their fault that she sent me away. I was supposed to be at school and that was the start of it. So, I started smoking cannabis after she left and I got to about 1980, I was still at school. And I was 16 years of age and we'd go, we had this mentality of life. We thought heroin you put it in a syringe and it's up your arm and we said we'd never touch heroin as a little fame of mates, you know, we were smoking cannabis and things like that experiment...we were just experimenting. And we thought we could put it down and experiment, put it down. And this 14-year-old introduced us to a drug called Skag (heroin). It was called...I mean, we were like, what's going on? We were confused. We were naive. And he was like, showing us how to put it on the foil and smoking it. And this powder turned to oil and we were all amazed and we all had a go and we all loved it. It was like it was really a powerful drug. We we thought we could experiment and put it down...once we tried heroin, we loved it and we couldn't put it down. And and then about three months down the line, we found out that Skag was heroin, and we were all devastated. We were we were we were devastated because we thought, heroin you'd have to put it in a syringe and up your arm...we didn't know you could smoke heroin, that's how naive we were around drugs. So, we had no education on addiction or substance misuse or anything, you know what I mean? It was just so it went from there and then.

And that was me. That was me, life, fairly up until like...going out, committing crime, using, committing crime, and then at the age of 20, I ended up going to prison for the first time and that was about 1986. I got a two-year sentence for a burglary on a commercial premise and down south. And we ended up in that prison. And I was there for a year and then I came home and then me daughter...I met up with me girlfriend, she was a heroin user too...so I relapsed then. You know, I didn't use in prison for that year. And then when I got out, I ended up straight back where, where I left off, you know, straight back on morphine...ehm met a girl she was on heroin, so I ended up using with her. So, I relapsed and then she got...we we tried to run away from our addiction. And we ran to CE and and then me daughter was conceived there in CE. And ehm me girfriend stopped using because of pregnancy. And I carried on using. And, you know, I bumped into a CE guy. I was doing well. I got about three months clean from the prison experience that I'd done before in SE and there were a lot of CE guys in there...so I bumped into this guy just by chance on the on the off on the street. I asked him where he was going and he said he was going to score and before I knew it, I was with him and I was scoring with him. So, I used I, me, my girlfriend stayed clean. And then she got to about seven months, I carried on using...She got about seven months pregnant and then she wanted to come back home to NE and have the baby in NE. So, we came home...ehm I was carry on using. My daughter was born. I was still using ehm I was present, but I wasn't vacant if you know what I mean. I was I was under the influence and then. Yeah. And then it was just a matter of providing then for me daughter. Me girlfriend had her baby after about three or four weeks I was using in front of her...and she she ended up relapsing again. She, she ended up saying years ago when I was trying to say no and it was she always told me to shut up and just like took the foil off me and she relapsed too...so the pair of us were in co-dependency. We were coming out shoplifting and things like that and to provide. I was doing burglaries on commercial premises and then I got arrested again for, for a shopping center that I was burglaring in the shop and I got caught and I got a three-year sentence when me daughter was eight months, so I was in that cycle erm for about twenty years. I went away when me daughter was like eight months old and I was in and out in and out in her life for a couple of months and then I was back in prison and it was like I was prolific offending and ehm...I ended up coming home and she was like 14 when I finished my prison sentence. I was an absent father. Through all this you know, I feel a lot of shame and guilt around that ehm...then erm so while I come near the end I was doing a six year prison sentence in NE, I'd had a four year prison sentence in NE for supply and I had - when I say supply, it's charged with supplying. I got four years for a gram, one gram of heroin and I've got a four-year sentence that I think I got slammed harshly done by, I should say, for one gram...then I got out and then I was back in NE and I had a ounce of crack cocaine and I got arrested again with the ounce of crack cocaine. And I got a six-year sentence for that, for the crack cocaine. So all these sentences, I thought the only way out of addiction was by going to prison out on which I because my addiction still carried on when I was in prison.

I was still running around. I, I ended up with [illness] through injecting in prison in NE, which, you know, I count me lucky stars really because [illness] was quite strong in NE and like [city in NE] is like the capital of [illness] victims, so I was pretty lucky that I didn't catch [illness] and it was only [illness], I say only. That's bad enough. You know what I mean? It could have been worse. So ehm I was phoning my mother constantly and you know, and she phoned me one day and she called me. She was effing and blinding at me and obviously over the phone that I was home and I didn't say goodbye with the fellow. And I thought 'mom I was being away for two years what are you on about?' And then I said, 'I'll phone you back in a minute' and then I phoned me sister and I said to her 'me mum is talking a bit strange she was saying I was home and I've been away for the past two years'. And she said she thinks she's got dementia. So, you know that was like another guilt, you know what I mean? Have I caused this dementia over the worry and shame and guilt that I've caused this woman, you know, because she was a strong woman, she didn't bring me up to be a heroin addict. You know, I broke her heart when she found me with a needle in my arms. So, I came out of prison and I looked after my mother for two years. I was still in addiction. I was still using heroin. When I say I was looking after, she was still looking after me, you know, in my addiction. Then when she died, I made amends to her. I sat there for like two hours just held her hand and poured my heart out to her. And from that day on, 2002, that was from that day on, I thought, you know, I owe that woman a lot and it's about time I got my head together. So I was trying to get my head together for (emphasis) my mother. For (emphasis) my children. But never for me (emphasis), you know what I mean? It was never for me. Always for someone else. And I tried to go into rehab...ehm I lasted about six weeks in rehab and I couldn't take it..this was like...22 years, I've never tried any rehabilitation or anything you know what I mean, I was like 22 years addicted to heroin. And I could never...I've never been into rehab. And this was my first time in 2002, and it was too hard for me. I couldn't get it. I couldn't get the boundaries. I couldn't because I still has that jail mentality about me. You know that ego, you know what I mean? I still I have that, you know what I mean? And so I walked out and then I used and and then I went into many, many detox centers, came home and last about...and be like a bereavement. Like something had died in me because I loved it, you know what I mean? But that love turned to hate because of like the way it turns out, you know what I mean? And so, like, I started hating it and I kept on trying, I kept on going to fellowshipping once I got about six months abstinence and and I'd be relapsing. But I was still. Even though I was. Had stopped using heroin or drink, me behaviour was still the same and I'd still be committing crime and still be chasing money, chasing girls...you know that addicted behaviour, I had that addictive behavior. I still had them traits of deceit, dishonesty and self-will. Even though I put the drink and drugs down, I thought I could carry on regardless.

Today I realize I can't do that. I've got to change my whole life, not just...the drink and drugs are just the symptom. You know, it's me. I'm the problem. You know what I mean? It's not the drink. It's not the drugs. It's me, I'm the problem. So I kept on going into detox, coming out lasting a few weeks, and then. That, you know, that obsession of I go to bed thinking of drugs, I wake up in the morning and I think of drugs and it'd be all over me, like, constantly torture of the mind. And then I come to a point where I think, you know what I can't handle this no more. And then I'd use...I never stop obsessing. That was all over me all the time. And then. As I say, I was still committing crime and I was in I was in [Country in Europe], up to no good...and I was with two friends, these two friends were uncle and nephew, these two friends. And we'd been out drinking. We got intoxicated. We were going to the crime and we were going to do the crime there on the on the Monday. On the Friday, we went out drinking. We got drunk. I got kicked out of the nightclub in [Country in Europe]. We were right on the border to [Country in Europe]. Ehm and basically they came out of the club and they would argue this is uncle and nephew. So we drove back to our hotel and he was driving erratic, still arguing. And I was trying to say to him, 'you know what he is your family, stop arguing' and trying to be the negotiator to keep the peace. We got back to the hotel and the uncle says to the nephew, 'you're the one with the perverse mind'. And he says, 'one minute you look up to me and the next minute you want to punch my face in'. And the nephew went, 'I know yeah', picked up the gun and just shot himself in the head and this was right in front of us ehm...I didn't know I had PTSD. But it troubled me for a lot of years, you know, and he ended up in a hospital in [Country in Europe]. And the inevitable died yah he died. And so that troubled me for a lot of years. And I was put on antidepressants. It was about ten years ago. I was about forty-six. And then and so it troubled me, you know, I got put on olanzapine, mirtazapine and pregabalin. It was like antipsychotics; you know it was like a blow to about 17 stone in weight. And for many years I was trying to get me head together, try to detox. I realized that these drugs will keep me in addiction, you know, so ehm fast forward to...I got a few more detoxes and I was on the antidepressant and I was on heroin.

And me nephew came to stay with me and this is the first time really and I come to the decision where 'I've got a young boy to look after now' he's only 14. Erm 'I can't carry on spending my money on heroin and I have to look after this young boy'. So I went to a drug clinic and I asked for the subutex detox prescription so I got put on 60 mil because it had a blocker in it. I didn't want methadone because methadone I used on top of methadone. I think a lot of people, a lot of addicts use on top of methadone but with Subutex I knew there was a blocker in it and it wasn't worth using because it just be like burning your money, you know what I mean? You get nothing out of it. So I went on the Subutex and I was still on the antipsychotics and things like that. I just stopped. I wouldn't recommend it to anyone. I just stopped taking the antidepressants and antipsychotics. I just stopped taking them, and it was horrendous. It was the worst withdrawal I've ever done in me life. For six weeks I didn't eat a thing, I was vomiting, I didn't sleep, I was suicidal, I was climbing the walls. I mean, me mind was just gone. Much harder than heroin, mentally, psychologically, physically. And then I was sitting there depressed one day, was a lovely day, it was about 28 degrees outside and I had my curtains drawn and me mate knocked on the door. He'd been coming round every day. And he said, 'what are you up to?' I said, 'you know what, I'm depressed' and he said 'come for a game of Golf'. I looked at him 'Golf? You want me to play freaking Golf? I'm sitting here depressed and you want to play, I have never played Golf in me life!' Golf with me life.' and he said 'come for the walk' and I said 'get out of the house!'. He said, 'I'll play golf. You just come on the walk with me down the golf course'. I had done that on four occasions with him, walking on the golf course. Got me out myself, you know what I mean and then my nephew and me dad gave me a set of golf clubs. And I thought, I've never played golf in me life.' But that concentration of trying to hit the ball straight and the exercise of walking round the golf course and just picking up a new hobby. You know, it got me head together and it got me out of me self. It got me out of depression. And I got my life back together. I got me family back. I'm a grandparent now. I've got a lovely grandchild. Golf got me head back together you know it got me conversing a lot better. I started interacting with people. I started, you know, communicating with people. Tell them what's going on for me. Yeah. So, I thought it was time to come off the Subutex now after 30 months. And I haven't drunk for 5 years and I haven't touched heroin for 2 years. And I'm 11 months clean of Subutex. So, my keyworker said I should go to rehab. So, I thought I got to go...you know that ego of like that shame, that embarrassment of going back to a place where I've been before and you know that. But, you know, it wasn't like that, you know, I had to drop that ego, that doubt of like you know, of going back to this place. So, I went back to treatment facility and they agreed they said 'yeah, we'll accept you again'. So I connected with the treatment facility cafe on a daily basis to show me commitment. Then I went into rehab in SWE and stayed there for six weeks and then when I got out, which was a great experience, you know, I got there and I thought, 'these people are not like me, they haven't lived the life I've led' and I was in a fight or flight mode, you know, because they were all like career minded people. They were like psychiatrist, doctors, musicians, teachers. They were everything but a criminal, you know. But, you know, we were all the same in that aspect of addiction. And then I came home on the 20th of December last year.

**Interviewer:** *So I actually I'm really interested in this because because you've got you have such a rich experience. If you can remember back to maybe a couple of relapse experiences you had, what exactly did it feel like? What like what does relapse feel like?*

Of course. Ehm thoughts, there's a lot of thoughts in the buildup to relapse. It's like a torture of the mind; it's constant. You know, but it's like mine was constant. It was like a bereavement. It was like that was the feeling, as if like something was lost. I'd lost...see once I put drugs and drink down, I'm left with me. And all these feelings and emotions that I've suppressed over the years come surfacing. It's something new to you, you don't want to feel this stuff...like you feel an anxiety, you're feeling as if like when you relapse you feel like you feel like you've let yourself down, you've let your family down, you've let so many people down, like counselors and detox centres down. But most of all, you've let yourself down, you know, and if so, when you get a bit of recovery in you, it interferes with your using. You know there's a way out. You know, so it's it's it's like the torture to the mind. It's it's torture the mind, lack of sleep ehm like that sleep deprivation, you know, you feel weak - you're weak minded you're weak at the heart. You know, and I go through a lot of feelings and emotions.

**Interviewer:** *Would you say that has changed from from having, like, your first couple of relapses to your last couple of relapses, or was that always kind of the similar feeling or thoughts?*

It's it's it's it's like it's always the shame. It's like the torture of the mind, your mind is constantly racing. And, you know, it's that blaming all the time blaming people, places things...you know, but I'm going to come across these things. Today is different. Back then, I used to use any excuse, any excuse whatsoever to use. 'Oh, you made me feel like this. I'm going to go use'. And so it was that love of just being out of it. Being in a coma, I've been in a coma for like 40 years, 40 years as a heroin user. I'm lucky to still be alive.

**Interviewer:** *So that will be one of my next questions - how do you feel about having relapsed so many times?*

I feel as if like I just wasn't ready. I feel I feel as if like it wasn't my time. I feel blessed that I got really, you know what I mean? I'm lucky to still be alive, you know, it's it's someone who's looking over me. I accept it, you know what I mean, today I accept it. I've got to accept it because if I beat myself up about it I'm just gonna maybe relapse again. I took me that long to get...you know I wish I did get it years ago, but I just wasn't ready. I wasn't listening. You know, isolation was a big part. I could be in a crowded room and still isolated me own head. My head was the biggest prison I've been in. But now I'm total abstinence. I have a new way of thinking. I don't even get an aspirin. It's the freedom of the mind. That obsession has gone on. I didn't think I'd ever get to this point. I wish I did get it years ago, but I didn't. So I can't beat myself up about I didn't get it because I wasn't ready.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. So has going through those, you know, 10, 13 times of relapse changed the way that you view yourself? How would you say you've changed, I guess, from going through all of these relapse experiences?*

You know, I used to always feel myself as no good and nasty and ugly. I used to all have these negative ehm my self-esteem was low. I'd always feel self-pity. But today I realize, you know, I have a lot of shame and guilt around putting me daughter through it all.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. So how would you say you've changed since your relapse experiences? It seems like you are a bit more clear in your head. You're a bit more supportive of your grandkids. You're there. You're showing them unconditional love. So it seems like there's there's been a shift in how you know from all of your relapse experience?*

Well, I'd say it's like, you know, my daughter was born and the responsibility I had no responsibility, even though I had responsibility around my daughter. Because she was a girl, I had the attitude of like a girl for a girl, a mother to look after her, you know, she'll do the girly things. And then when my grandson was born. It was a little boy, you know what I mean? It was like. It's like the Stevie Wonder song, for once in my life, I have somebody who needs me, even though me daughter and me granddaughter needs me...that little boy. I thought now's the time to be a father. So me attitude changed.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. And also from you said because you said earlier that the first couple of times you relapsed you mentioned you weren't in the right mindset or headspace for how you are now. Can you kind of talk a little bit more about that?*

I was just, you know. I was just running on my self-will, you know what I mean. I was like, I didn't care about law. I didn't care about I didn't care about myself. I didn't care about anyone. I didn't care about my kids. Maybe I just wanted to die, you know, I was just self-destructive every time and I just couldn't fight my way out, and then I was in Scotland in prison and a group of lads came in from Narcotics Anonymous. And I went on this group and I listened to a lad's story similar to mine, in and out of prison running on self-will, and using, committing crime, violence. And he turned his life around. And I thought, wow, he turned his life around by going to fellowship and it must have planted the seeds in me because I started like saying, OK, so when I got out I relapsed, but I never even relapsed, I was still using in prison. So like it was like when I got out, I was carrying on using. Then I'd meet people that I was using with and they were going to fellowship and they were clean. I was just looking at them, thinking 'well he can do it, then I can do it'.

**Interviewer:** *Yes. Yeah, absolutely. So this is more about your experience of relapse. You can just pick maybe one or two that come to mind. Can you tell me how you felt when you were about to relapse? Like, were there any kind of particular thoughts you had or sensations in your body?*

So I'll give an example of like I went through treatment previously on another time, say about five, six years ago. This is this is our I done treatment, I graduated ehm I was going to fellowship and then further down the line I got complacent. I started thinking, you know, ' I go to meetings and then I let someone share and I wouldn't share back', I think, it made me feel worse. And then I get judgmental. I start labeling people. Then I start skipping meetings and then further down the line it'll be like in. So you know, my relapses start well before I've picked up. I get is on the line, it'll be like, you know, what are you doing so well, you know what I mean, I. You think you can control your addiction? I feel like I've just gonna have that one and then I'll put it down again. Bullshit! That obsession kicks in again in the brain.

**Interviewer:** *OK, so that with obsession. What do you mean? Is it is it like voices you hearing or what exactly describe that obsession?*

So the obsession would be like that ambivience (ambivalence) of the brain. I would be like, one part of your brain saying 'that was alright that last one' and the other part saying 'no that's wrong, don't do that.' So it's like that argument going. It's like an argument going on in your head.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, I see. Yeah. So if you had to describe what relapse means to you, what would you say? What does it mean to you?*

Relapse in a word is failure. You fail to comply. That argument of the brain again saying, 'you know what, you're not alcoholic. You can have a drink'. And that obsession will be like 'it's OK to go and have a drink because you're not touching heroin'. So, you know, that's like distorted thinking, you know what I mean? So that cross addiction as well.

**Interviewer:** *So do you have like do you have a definition of relapse? Because it's interesting that you say it's just when you think about heroin or crack, but not so much about drinking, so what exactly would you define as a relapse?*

Usually any any mind-altering substance. Anything I can't even take a codeine tablet because to me that would be a relapse. Codeine will take me back to my drug of choice. So a relapse is to take anything that's opiate based, anything that's alcohol based, anything that's cannabis based, any drug, any mind altering. It doesn't have to be heroin; it could be anything and that for me. Anything is a relapse. So I have to bring total abstinence into my life. When I'm in that abstinence, anything that I touch that is mind-altering, is a relapse. It's all relapse. You know, I heard people say, 'oh, I had a lapse not a relapse'. You know, because people some people might use for one day and then get back into recovery. They say it's a lapse. But to me it's a relapse for one day.

**Interviewer:** *How did it make you feel then going back to treatment because you tried detox and certain programs. How did you feel when you then went back into treatment?*

A lot of shame, guilt, embarrassment. You know, that that ego of like well, I went back to treatment centre and I had been there three times before. And that negativity was kicking in like 'you don't need this...all the shame of walking back and seeing the same faces, the same stuff. Knowing that you were a failure last time. It didn't work for you last time'. Had to drop all that ego and just face that fear. And that's what it was, it's a fear, fear based on this. It's like I have to face that fear and all the negativity of like, he'll start laughing at me. You know, all that stuff. You'll start judging you all that negativity. It wasn't like that, that was just my thinking. It wasn't like that. They embraced me with open arms and were glad to see me. You know what I mean? So facing the fear was the best thing I ever done.

**Interviewer:** *That's awesome. Yeah. How did you get motivated for recovery? Like what was there the kind of change for you to say, you know, you've had you've relapsed so many times. How did you motivate yourself for recovery?*

Well, you know, my nephew coming to stay with me. Given me the responsibility of looking after someone in my own home, because for years I've been on my own. Left on my own. Even though I have a daughter, I never really have that responsibility of her living with me. I wasn't like a family. It didn't feel like a family. So my nephew coming to stay with me. I have a responsibility to look after and that gave me the kick up he backside that I needed. I couldn't afford to be spending all my money. I could I could starve myself. I had no perfusing to cope with myself. I use all my money on heroin and let heroin feed me. But once that 14-year-old boy come walking into my life. I thought, I've got to feed this lad. I've got I've got to look after him.

**Interviewer:** *And there was this other kind of experience you had when somebody from an NA came in prison and and shared and planted a seed in you. Right. So those are kind of those are kind of some key moments for you.*

Yeah. So I'm like, yeah, it's like a dilemma once once you got a taste of recovery, even if it's only two weeks, three weeks, maybe a month, maybe six weeks, once you've got that taste of recovery, you see how much you enjoy your life in that six weeks, how much things changed. So when you get that taste of recovery, you see the little sparkle and they're all saying, oh, well, you laugh and you relapse and then it's like, oh I've let everyone down again. It's like I've let myself down and I'm back out there I'm doing the things that I'm doing. Harming people and committing crime. You know, but you've got that little seed in the back of your head saying 'there's a way out of this.'

**Interviewer:** *So if you had to describe what recovery means to you, having, you know, having had all of these relapses, would you say, yeah. What does recovery mean to you now? And has that changed with the number of times that you have relapsed?*

Recovery means to me ehm in a way love. You know, you start loving people because I could never love myself. You got a lot of love in recovery ehm people love your humor, people love your, you know, experience, people love your character your persona. Recovery you gotta work, you gotta work on recovery because recovery is not going to come and knock on your door. You've got to get up and go and look for recovery. You've got to get out of the isolation, get out of your own head and start exploring. You've got to you've got to connect, connect with your family and you've got to find a balance in recovery. First and foremost, I've got to help myself. If I can't help myself, how can I help with people and then I burn myself out and then a relapse is in the pipeline. So I've got to find a balance to find balance and recovery. Playing golf is recovery. Yeah, right. Yeah. You know being with my grandson is recovery. Drinking orange juice in the morning is recovery. You know it's not all about step work and fellowship and counselors and sponsors, that's part of it, but I've got to find the recovery. I've got to find the balance in the recovery.

**Interviewer:** *Is that how you first thought about recovery when you first started?*

It was all them things...fellowship ehm counseling and volunteering work and then you find out there's not enough hours in the day to do it all. Most of my experience comes from relapse. Awareness, acceptance is all key. Because if I carry that shame and guilt with me, relapse is in a relapse is in the pipeline because I can't handle that shame and guilt no more that I'm going to. I don't want to feel shame and guilt. I'm going to relapse on it. I've got to forgive myself. I forgive others.

**Interviewer:** *Yes. Yes, that's right. So how do you protect yourself from a relapse on a day to day basis? But how do you manage not relapsing?*

I have a higher power in my life and a higher power, first and foremost is a God. A higher power could be in many things for me, you know, sitting here and talking to you is higher power, you being put in my path today. I I believe my higher power works through other people to help me through my journey. If my house was on fire, I would hand it over to a higher power, if my house got burgled I'd hand it over to a higher power and phone the police. You know, and rather than trying to do it on me own, you know what I mean? I'm not alone today. I have a lot of good people around me, people in fellowship, family, friends and I just pray for guidance and strength to carry on. And that's what saves me from relapse. I connect.

**Interviewer:** *Awesome. Yeah, that's amazing. Did you say would you say that that has kind of changed with the number of times you will reach your relapse so that let's say if you think about the first couple of times you've relapsed and you were in treatment, did did you do anything different then than you do now to protect yourself from using again?*

Yeah, I isolated. Even when I was in treatment. I isolated in my own head. I'd be sitting in a room. I wasn't in the here and now I was in presence in the room. I wasn't interacting with people. I was just isolated. I was locked in my own thoughts. And you know I could still be in denial today, even though 11 months clean I can still have that stinking thinking of being in denial. I'm willing, open and honest today you know what I mean. You've got to change the whole persona of your life. You know, it's like. It's not just it's not what you say, it's how you say it. And you can you can hurt people's feelings by, your mouth. So I'm trying to change, but there's a lot of things that I have to. It's a process that's ongoing. I might relapse in the future but I don't know. But I'm not in that relapse frame of mind today.

**Interviewer:** *Is there anything that you think you have missed telling me about your experience?*

You know, it's it's it's it's simple, it's no time like the present, and when people come into treatments that's the time when you should engage. You have that opportunity to change the life around, take that opportunity with both hands. Because if you are like me in the past, just sat there and just went through the process and not listening. Listening is a big key. And identifying with people's problems with your own problems exposed. As I said, there's no time like the here and now, an opportunity to take, you know, our past is my past is my past, I don't dwell on the past. I can't I can't change the past, but I can change my future.

**Interviewer** [01:28:04] That's right.