**Interviewer:** *OK, well I'm actually really excited to see your personal items. So would you be OK with starting with that.*

With my poem. Yes sure [connection buffered] that is called Out of the shadows, want me to read it?

**Interviewer:** *Yes, that would be lovely.*

OK [reads poem]

**Interviewer:** *Oh wow. Thank you so much. That's beautiful.*

I've got loads of poems about addiction that I've written before. I don't know if you want to hear any more?

**Interviewer:** *I would be super interested in how how this kind of connects with your experience of relapse. So it's super deep. I feel like it's super personal to you. And I wonder maybe you could tell me a little bit about how did this poem come about? Like how did you when did you start writing it?*

I wrote that poem on the 13th of the fifth this year. And I write poetry a lot and especially in rehabilitation. Ehm we used to have to fill in daily diary sheets. Well, I struggled with those, so my head counsellor allowed me to write a poem every day. And I don't know, I just used to go to my room and it just flow. You know, I wrote Out of the Shadows in a couple of minutes.

**Interviewer:** *Oh, that's so amazing. It's almost like it's it's already there and it's just waiting for you to be put on paper.*

Yeah. And it helped me a lot because with using for so long, you know, I picked up when I was twelve and I didn't put down until ten months ago ehm you know, in and out, in and out relapsing, getting clean, relapsing, getting clean. I am very emotionally immature. So my poetry helped me to grow emotionally, you know.

**Interviewer:** *Yes. To express yourself. Would you say to like express your emotions? That's amazing. So tell me about in particular when you relapse - would you say that kind of the poem is a product of everything that you go through in relapse?*

Definitely. I mean, it's like addiction is the only disease that tells you you don't have that disease. So it's very hard..for me [emphasis] it's not getting clean, it's staying [emphasis] clean. You know, there's a big difference. Ehm, I've managed to get sort of like two weeks here, three weeks there but long term I've always relapsed because my head will tell me that I can just have the one crack pipe. I can just have the one injection of heroin. But past experience has proved to me that there's no such thing as just the one...you know once I pick up, I'm off and running again. All bets are off.

**Interviewer:** *Yes. Yes. So, yeah, it sounds like you've had quite the journey. Quite the experience.*

Yeah. Well I mean I've done everything... I've done geographicals: I mean I came out of one treatment centre early and ended up going to live in Israel. Ehm I was in Israel, in (city) for twelve months. The second night we were there, me and this other girl that I left rehab with we were walking down the promenade and there was a lad sitting and he looked up and it was my friend from CE and he was using over there so straight away I got back onto the heroin over there. And yeah, it took me twelve months to save up enough money to get a ticket home. Because all my money was just going on gear and heroin and crack.

**Interviewer:** *OK. Wow. So is that sounds like it's almost like you kind of took you right back like you were you were ready to be, you know, you just got off treatment and rehab and then you were ready for something new and fresh and you went to Tel Aviv, which is a long way off. And then and it's almost like like it found you back or something like that.*

Yeah like I have to be really careful because my head will tell me that I'm looking through rose-tinted glasses and how wonderful it would be to have that first pipe again after being clean for so long. Or the first injection again after being clean for so long, you know, it sort of like put it through rose tinted glasses. And instead of seeing how it would really take me, which is back to absolute desperation and no family, no friends, no money, no nothing. And, you know, sat in the bedroom on my own with the sharp needle in my groin, you know, that's the reality of it. But my head also like focuses on, 'oh, you've been clean for so long now, [name], it'd be like having the first pipe all over again, you know? And it's ehm, that's not...I have to really question myself and fast forward situations, you know.

**Interviewer:** *Yes. Yeah. So it's an internal battle.*

It is, very much so. I don't know if you're interested, but I wrote a letter to say about goodbye to addiction. Do you want to hear it?

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, I'd love to.*

[reads her poem] 'Goodbye to Addiction. As I write this letter, I'm slowly managing to suffocate you. You've crushed me for nearly 30 years, although in the early days you convinced me you were my friend, in some instances my lover. In the beginning we had some good times. You made me feel confident. You supported me when I was feeling lonely. You gave the courage that I lacked, especially when I was in groups of people. You promised me the world and helped me out of having to live with reality. Together we really are double trouble, a dangerous combination. At first you enabled me to be a part of but by the end you have me ostracized from all my friends and loved ones. You had put me in an emotional prison. You went from providing me with everything, taking away all that I have spiritually, mentally and emotionally. The morals and values such as empathy, honesty and consideration you stole from me. You turned me into a monster. Your self-centeredness and hedonistic approach to life destroyed everything in its path. You crept into my life from all angles and tried to destroy me. For many years you consumed all my thoughts in the form of anorexia and self-harm. You were never satisfied, always wanting more. No matter how much money I had or how many drugs I fed you, it was never enough. These days I'm so aware of how committed you are. Perhaps a hard pill to swallow is that you are me and you will always be a part of me. But nowadays I'm in control. It's up to me how much headspace I give you. In the past you've enabled me to justify things that were so wrong. Sticking needles in myself, stealing of loved ones and taking advantage of the vulnerable. I never realised you were out to kill me and so our love affair continued. But now I see you for what you are and I'm building a defence against you. You are part of me but you no longer define me. I'm gaining knowledge and therefore power to defeat you. Treatment is really tough and has revealed some ugly truths about you. It's almost too painful to put into words. I've gained strength slowly to start challenging the stinking thinking that you put into my head and I now question your motives and have the tools to fast-forward dangerous situations that you would love me to indulge in. You want me to see through rose-tinted glasses, but I see clearly now I know where you would take me back to: A life of misery, not just for me, but for all those who love and care about me. I don't need you anymore because I'm learning to like me and grow in confidence. For so many years. I truly believe I couldn't live without you. I can't live with you either, and I now know otherwise. I have the skill I've learnt in me to put you firmly in your place. I have a future plan with me based firmly in recovery. I have the support of other recovering addicts who will see you in me even when I don't and will support me with keeping you at bay. My future plans do not involve you. You are not invited. [connection buffered] But now I firmly believe that I am a survivor. Just one day at a time, 10 minutes at a time. You can't hurt me. But I have to keep vigilant. I'm starting to enjoy my life surrounded by people who love and cherish me. I see beauty all around me now within my friends and also in nature. The further I get away from you, the clearer my thinking becomes. The more I appreciate everything I have in my life today. Freedom from the obsession to use. Sometimes I still have amusing thoughts. That's all they are, thoughts. Today I have the strength not to act on them. And so this letter to you, the departing addict, is a letter of letting go. You are no longer my identity, just for today. I am clean and sometimes serene. Goodbye addiction.

**Interviewer:** *Wow. I'm interested in, you know, how what does it feel like? What does relapse feel like?*

At first, relapse is very exciting for me constantly. And also my relapse is the using part of my relapse is right at the end because it's my my head relapses well before I pick up the drugs.

**Interviewer:** *OK, in what way is it a thought?*

Yeah it can be, it can be little things like stopping doing meeting - AA meetings. Stopping connecting with other addicts ehm lack of structure and routine. You know, these things all start to dissipate and at the end it leads to picking up. And it can be very exciting, the thought of relapse. You know, you get the racing heart and anxiety and you know, that first first substance that you put in is quite pleasurable. But very quickly, when you realise what you've done, especially when you got a head that's full of recovery - and how to stay clean, your using is never the same again because you know that there's an answer and you don't have to be doing it.

**Interviewer:** *OK, yeah. So that's interesting to me. So would you say the way you relapse then feels differently after you've been in treatment? So for example, your first two relapses in your life are probably felt differently than now. You're fifteenth, sixteenth relapse because you've got you had already full recovery and you've learnt so much.*

Yeah, definitely.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. So tell me about kind of maybe you know what, what do you how do you feel about having relapsed twenty, twenty times?*

It's pretty devastating, you know. And you think why people around me getting it and I'm not...you know why can these other people stay clean and live Life on life's terms, and I just can't seem to stay clean for any substantial amount of time. So then all the the self-loathing and disappointment and regret and sadness, that all comes into it. But with me as well, I've learned some people have a relapse and it may last a week or two weeks. When I relapse, I'm back out there for months. You know, I honestly don't believe that if I relapse again now, I don't think I'd get back. It will kill me.

**Interviewer:** *So when did you when was kind of like your first relapse? And how can you maybe walk me through a little bit of your experiences?*

My first relapse was when I was 19. Ehm I've gone to a detox centre and ended up like with this guy as well and we left together and we scored on the way back to his house. But in all honesty, I wasn't doing detox for myself. I was doing it to placate family and stuff. My heart wasn't in it. I knew I knew deep down in my soul that I hadn't had enough. So I went out and did more research and that took me back out for about three years.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. So when you relapsed, did it take you longer to get back into recovery? Or how did you get introduced to recovery or anything?*

Well, the first treatment centre, not detox, the first rehab that I went into was in 1999 and they introduced me to Narcotics Anonymous meetings. We have to do a meeting every night in treatment. And I'll be honest, at first, I thought, 'oh, my God, what are they all talking about?', you know, a bunch of lunatics talking about God, how's that going to get me clean? And instead of looking for the similarities in group, I look for the differences to separate myself from these people. So I could tell myself that I wasn't an addict. And I was very resistant to it, you know, ehm nowadays I fully accept that I'm an addict. And, you know, using substances is just one area of addiction, you know, it runs right through my life on all different levels. You know, I'm a self-harmer. I've been anorexic. I've been obsessed with things very easily and tried to fix constantly trying to fix that internal void with external stuff, which doesn't work. You know, it's an internal job. It's about finding my higher power and filling myself with that.

**Interviewer:** *Mm hmm. So I'm wondering, um has going through so many relapses changed the way that you see yourself when you compare it to back in the first couple of times?*

I did see myself as a failure and a disappointment. Ehm I didn't believe that I'd ever get recovery. I didn't think I was worth recovery, to be honest. You know, I resigned myself to the fact that I was gonna be a heroin addict for the rest of my life...But things are very different today, you know, very different. Ten and a half months...I've been clean...yeah, ten and a half months. And I've done nine months altogether in treatment last year. And I believe I can't do enough for my recovery. You know, my using was twenty-four seven. So my recovery needs to be twenty four seven.

**Interviewer:** *That's interesting. I've never heard that before. Yeah. That's a good way of looking at it isn't it.*

Oh yeah. When you're in active addiction you don't get a day off. You don't wake up one morning and say, right today, I'm not going to use. So it's like every morning when I get up, you know my recovery has got to come first.

**Interviewer:** *Yes. Yeah. So I'm assuming that now you're kind of looking at yourself more with confidence of of like it's really interesting to me that you said you didn't believe it's possible. And I wonder how you made that shift. Like, was that just another kind of experience?*

Well, no. I just think, like, today, I've got so much in my life and I've realised I can either have crack and heroin in my life and nothing else or I can put the crack and heroin down and everything I've ever wanted.

**Interviewer:** *Oh yeah. So you're actually it's an it's a choosing like you are actively every day you're choosing.*

Well over the past, in the past when I've been clean I've had many reservations which were taking me back to using ehm and I couldn't see life without drugs being involved. But today, very, very different. You know, I mean, I don't I don't want anymore. I want a life. I want to live and experience everything that it comes with. No, because when you're using or drinking ehm life just passes you by, you don't notice anything. You don't feel anything.

**Interviewer:** *There's this song, I don't know if it's Macklemore, but something like everybody dies, but not everybody lives. Just like you actually choosing life, you choosing to live fully like rather than letting it pass you by.*

Relapse actually fills me with fear today. I've got a very healthy respect for the disease of addiction, you know what I mean? And I'm under no illusions where I, I haven't got another recovery in me, you know, I really haven't. I have to do this this time. Ehm one thing I do every day is just live for the day, you know, because if I look in the past, the past is painful. If I look into the future too far, it's frightening. But keeping it in the day and being present in the moment, you know, days turn to weeks - weeks turn to months - months hopefully turn to years. You know, but like my parents will say, 'oh, promise me you're never going to use again'. And I can't make that kind of promise, but I can promise them that for today I'm not gonna use.

**Interviewer:** *Yes. Yes. Yeah, that's right. You're not setting yourself up for failure. And has anybody else, like maybe around you, your family, your friends, have they noticed a change in how they view yourself after your relapses?*

Oh, massively. Massively, yeah. My mum and dad can put the head on pillow at night and go to sleep without fear of police ringing them to say I'm dead or something. Ehm people have said that the light is back on in my eyes, you know, and yeah, generally I'm a really, really positive person. You know, obviously I have my dark days, but I live in a recovery home with three other addicts who are absolutely amazing people. We've become really, really close, like a little family, and we support each other. When one of us is having a wobble, we support each other. And that's what it's about, you know, because for me personally, I need to be around people who understand the disease of addiction. I need to connect with people on a daily basis, who understand how my head works.

**Interviewer:** *Yes, that is so that is good. OK, so um can you tell me a little bit about how, how you felt. Maybe you can just think about a few relapse experiences, but how you felt before you relapsed or right after so kind of walk me through what it feels like to go through relapse?*

Well, I felt initially I felt really good, and that was the time that was my problem. I kind of got a bit complacent and I thought I didn't need Narcotics Anonymous fellowship meetings anymore. And I stopped ringing my sponsor and for a while I was fine without doing any of that. But slowly but surely, you know, it came back 'oh I just I won't use heroin and crack' but I'll use pregabalin and Xanax and OxyContin and morphine and stuff. You know, I'm not I'm not 'I'm not an addict anymore, you know, I can control it, I'm not using class A's'. And then and then within a few weeks, you know, I was back to square one using class A's, injecting again and, you know, neglecting all my responsibilities, you know, I've got trouble because I didn't pay the council tax doing because I could spend all the money on drugs ehm and end you know, very sick and in a very bad place very quickly.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. So it sounds like a little bit of a there's a part of you that's a bit overconfident, kind of leading you into it.*

That's why I need to check myself all the time, you know, because when you do get overconfident that's and you start thinking, 'I don't need meetings anymore', you know, I know my own head when my head tells me not to do a meeting I know I need to do a meeting [laughs].

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. That's yeah, that's right. That's amazing that you kind of put that into place. You've learnt that about yourself. You're like checking yourself. Yeah. So in terms of when you, you know, if you had to describe what relapse means to you, what would you say.*

Wow. Ehm for me, it's giving in. It's giving in. You know, and that's what the addict inside of me wants, it wants me to give in, it wants me to isolate it wants me to be in self-pity mode. Yeah. It wants me to harm myself, you know, it wants me to be isolated from all the people that care for me. Ehm just a crappy existence basically. Because that's what it is, it's an existence, it is not a life, you know, because, like, it doesn't matter how much money I've got or how many drugs I put into my system, it's never enough. Never enough. It's like Groundhog Day.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, so that is so interesting, so it's it's almost like like I think even you said in your poem is this this kind of dark where it's like a force that kind of really drags you down, like really wants the worst for you, yeah.*

Yeah, I don't buy into all that, you know, the dark side. You know, sometimes if I'm if I'm honest, sometimes I miss the chaos and madness of using, you know, the thrill seeking behaviour. I still find it quite exciting but is dangerous. You know.

**Interviewer:** *You kind of are aware of the consequences.*

That's why the most important tool in rehabilitation was to fast forward things. So when my head is telling me, 'oh yeah you can, you've been clean, now you've got control, just have the one' I thing 'wow' fast forward it and think where would that one take me? Because it wouldn't just be one, it would be one. And then two, three, four, five, six off and I'm running again, you know. And who knows when I'd get back if I ever made it back.

**Interviewer** : *Yes, that's right. I think that's even my next question. How would you how would you define relapse?*

For me, I call it 'hit the fuck it button', you know where I've had enough and I think 'screw this' and, you know, you can seem more appealing than being straight, you know, free to be in recovery. And there's a difference between being in recovery and just being abstinent. Big difference. And you have to make life that's worth living more than the life you had when you were using. Otherwise, you're going to end up using again. Simple as that.

**Interviewer:** *So I wonder, you said there's obviously a lot going on in your head and you said you kind of already relapse previously before it actually happens in your mind.*

Yeah. Relapse starts well before you pick your drink or drug up. It's your thought process.

**Interviewer:** *Yes. Right. Exactly. So would you say that you're kind of when your thought process starts like this, it's kind of you do you would you remember all the things that you learnt in recovery about, you know, you know, choosing the life and not being empty and all of these things that you just said?*

I think I do remember all that ehm but when I have relapsed in the past, despite knowing all that, I just end up using **more** because I know the answer is there, you know, and how to get clean and stay clean but...my head just thinks once I've had that first one well fuck it, I've relapsed now might as well carry on.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. OK, so it is if you, if you start using once it's you would define that as a relapse for you?*

Yeah. For me there is no blips or small lapses. Relapse is a relapse you know. And people are lucky to get back from it a lot of people don't you know. It kills a lot of people sadly. But I think today I genuinely do have a healthy respect for relapse. You know, I have a healthy respect for the disease of addiction. And like I said, using is just one of its...[pauses]...One of its characters. Yeah. Ehm, you know, I get obsessed and compulsed around other things, self-harm is the prime example. Ehm self-harming to me is like using you know that obsession comes on you to do it and you can't you can't not think about it, you know, and it all gets out of control.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, yeah, yes. How did it feel for you to go back into treatment?*

I was relieved. This last relapse was like two and a half years. And I was using against my will every day. I did not want to be using, I wasn't enjoying it anymore. I just could not stop, I just couldn't stop. And the drug team were really fantastic because I was actually peer mentoring whilst I was using pretending to be clean and I came clean to my boss and within five days they got me on a methadone script. Within four months they got me to detox and into rehab and I couldn't wait for the day to go into detox. I knew it was going to be tough and I did a four and a half week detox in Liverpool and they wanted me to get off the crack and reduce my heroin intake and go to weekly detox public meetings at the Inspire service in Blackburn and I had had to say to the doctor, look, I cannot reduce my crack use. I can't do it in the community. That's why I'm asking to be taken into rehabilitation. There was just no way I could even reduce my crack using you know, you can't you can't do that. If I could do that, I wouldn't have been trying to go into detox in the first place, you know?

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, right, yeah, so so that's interesting to me, that is it's like almost this instant relief of like it's going to I'm going to feel better soon.*

I hit I hit an internal rock bottom and, you know, and the day I went into detox, I have the gift of desperation. You know, I got to the point where I was, you know, it took me to my knees and I had to surrender. I had to accept defeat. You know, I tried using successfully so many times unsuccessfully. And, you know, it completely beat me. And I know that that's going to be the same in the future. If I relapse, I'm never going to win. I can never use successfully. Some people can. I just can't, you know, and I've accepted that today. Don't get me wrong. Sometimes I can play with it in my head and and play with the thoughts in the room with them for a while but more often than not. Like I said, I used the fast-forward method. And, you know, I'm able to sort of like bat them off and almost laugh at them, you know, because that's the addict in me. That's the part in me that's the addict. And that's what I'm up against on a daily basis.

**Interviewer:** *Yes. Yeah. So would you say that kind of the way that you were feeling this relief of going into treatment? Was that always the same or did that change with having had more relapses?*

It changed with having had more relapses!

**Interviewer:** *OK, how was it before?*

Well, it was just for a bit of a break before, you know, I had no intentions of staying clean. It was just it was just a break. And then, you know, I thought I'd go and get myself sorted and, you know, come out and be able to use, like, other people who use successfully do, you know. I'm fortunate, you know, and I used to be bitter and resentful towards people that could use socially without it affecting their life. Well, that just leads that just leads to, you know, resentment and hostility to people. You know, I've just got to accept that's something I can't do or I'm I'm I'm probably just as crazy, if not crazy clean that I am using.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. So I'm really interested in how you said using successfully. So what, what gives you the impression people use successfully. What is that.*

Well for instance people who, who have, you know, nine to five Monday to Friday jobs, you can come home on a Friday evening and enjoy a glass of wine or a bottle of wine, you know, maybe go to the pub and have a few pints or go to a nightclub and have a couple of ecstasy or sniff a bit of coke at the weekend. But financially, emotionally and socially doesn't doesn't destroy them. You know, they're able to function. They're able to meet the responsibilities. I can't do that because I don't have an off switch.

**Interviewer:** *Right. So, what makes you think that it doesn't affect them? Like I get the point that they can meet their responsibilities and maybe to the outsider seem to be able to do all the things they need to do. But like, how do we how do we how do you know it doesn't affect them?*

Well, it may affect them but not to the extent that it, you know, it spiritually bankrupts me. You know, it robs me of everything. You know, I'm not able to function as a daughter, a sister, lover, a friend, you know, all that goes out the window. Because the only person I'm concerned about is me, and where I'm getting my next hit from. And I don't care what I have to do to get it, you know. And, you know, I resort to shoplifting, I resort to selling drugs and my behaviours are all over the place. I can't even look after myself. So, these other people who I would class as successful or social users. You know, it doesn't affect them to that extent.

**Interviewer:** *So what effects would you say did have the number of relapses. So, 20 is quite a lot large number. What effects did that number have on your recovery, like maybe on your motivation for recovery?*

I've been in and out of Narcotics Anonymous since 1999. And, you know, and I've attended groups in all sorts of states. Obviously have attended them clean, but I've attended them under the influence as well. And I've lied to my peers about how clean I am. And you know, I've got up for [connection buffered] knowing full well that I've been using ehm but in total denial, you know, and it gets harder each time you relapse. It gets harder to get back into recovery because the shame and the embarrassment and the guilt, you know, they cripple you really you know, I've taken people through the 12 steps whilst I've been using. That's how much in denial I was about my using. You know, like I sais, a peer-mentored for 18 months whilst I was using. And then when I came clean to my boss that I'd been using, I ended up back in the group as a client with the very people that I've been mentoring. And that was really difficult...really difficult. But [emphasis] having said that, ehm I got a lot of respect for my colleagues for being honest in the end and, you know, and and going back to those groups as a client rather than a teacher. You know what I had to show humility. And and I did.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, that is unbelievable. Yeah. I cannot imagine that that that does show that to show character as well. Like, like you said, humility and in character that you actually you are able to show up and yeah. It's all part of you, you're part of the group.*

Yeah. Yeah. You know fortunately for me the rooms of NA, they welcome you back time after time after time. You know, they never shut the door on you or people and never you know, people never judge you or downgrade you for relapse. You know, they are just glad that you keep trying.

**Interviewer:** *OK. Actually, yeah, so did you always kind of think about relapse the same way or the way that you understand relapse? Did it kind of change from having had so many of them? Or did you always say relapse is using again, kind of. That is the the thing from your first time using and then from your last time.*

Yeah. Yeah. Ehm. I just think I think it's the more the more knowledge you have about recovery and knowing what you need to do, the harder you relapses get because you know that there's a solution out there. You don't have to be doing it because at the end of the day, you self-harm. You know drinking and using is just another form of self-harm. And each time it gets harder, you know. You can't fool yourself anymore. You can't keep yourself, you know. You know, you know, the answer is, you know how stay in recovery and you end up using even more to block those thoughts and feelings out.

**Interviewer:** *So what would you say, does it feel like to I guess when you were in recovery and you were back after having used for two and a half years, your relapse kind of lasted two and half years, and then you went back to treatment with that group that you even supported, which is amazing in and of itself. And like can you maybe explain just a little bit about how that felt to you to kind of then move forward and then kind of getting back to, OK, I know I know what I need to do.*

You know what it is? I was a grateful addict. I was grateful that there was a programme out there for me to use and implement in a life that could keep me clean. And I've seen it working in others in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous. And I'd seen the light in the eyes of the people that were in the rooms who were clean and sober, you know, and they were all working a programme on a daily basis. So, I knew I had to do and I knew because I used with some of these people and they used to the extent that I used, you know, and they were clean and they've got things together. They got family back in the life. They had jobs or studying, you know, real quality of life, good relationships with family, lovers, friends, all that kind of stuff. And I knew it was mine for the taking if I put the work in like I said to you before about where recovery needs to be 24/7, you know, because it's true, you get out of recovery what you put into recovery, you know, and it is no coincidence that when you work in a programme in your life, life gets easier.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. So I'm just looking at the sheet. So another question I had was, what would you say you learnt from relapse? Like, would there have been anything that you would have done differently, knowing what you know now kind of looking back at you relapse?*

Yeah I wouldn't have relapsed at all [laughs]. If I had know back then what I know now, I could've saved myself many, many years. But I mean, I was thinking about what a waste of life I'd led but, you know, that's made me who I am today. And yeah. And I'm kind of OK. I'm kind of at peace with that, you know.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. I remember you said something about in your first couple of times that you relapse, that you kind of didn't feel like, just like this inner drive to wanted to change like this. You weren't quite ready or you weren't like deep down you just didn't want to change.*

Yeah. The bottom line was I wasn't ready to change. I hadn't fully conceded.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, yeah, yes. It's almost like it's almost like you kind of need to get to that point and then you're yeah. I guess just kind of looking backwards from it.*

You have to hit...rock bottom and when I say rock bottom, I don't mean about like all the extras in life cause jobs part is blah, blah, blah. You know, it's an internal thing. I think when you reach that that pure rock bottom and the like I said, the gift of desperation. I don't know any addicts or alcoholics who stay clean who haven't hit a rock bottom. You know, you have to lose everything to realise just how much you want life.

**Interviewer:** *That makes sense. So I can yeah. Like an internal awakening, like looking at it with different eyes. Fresh eyes like this needs to change.*

I was, I was spiritually bankrupt. I had nothing, I had nothing left you know.

**Interviewer**: *So interesting. And so I guess on like a day to day basis. Now I know that you're going to meetings which is amazing. So how would you say how else would you protect yourself from relapse?*

Ehm keeping myself out of dangerous situations, not associating with people who are using or drinking. Ehm, keeping it in the day. That's a big one. I'm trying to look after myself, not get too tired or not get hungry. You know, the little things in life. Cuz they say, you know, when you feel restless, irritable or discontent, check yourself. And it's usually because you're tired or you're hungry.

**Interviewer:** *Yes. Yeah, did that kind of change with the number of relapses you've had? Like did you do this differently?*

Yeah, I can't be around people that are using because just...Well, it's just the danger zone, you know.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. Yeah, yes. So did that kind of change they all the things you're doing now to protect yourself from relapse, did that change with the number of relapses you've had?*

Yeah it has changed because I thought that I could get clean and carry on doing a living the way I've been living, but without using drugs. And it's just not at all. You know, you need to change your playground. It's changed members. You need to change behaviours. Because if you not doing those things, eventually you're going to pick up, it's as simple as that, you going to pick up.

**Interviewer:** *So, you know, in a way it would be like, you know, almost like when I asked you, you know, what could you have done differently? It's almost like putting all of these things in place that you're doing now.*

You can't. You can't because it's like wearing a comfy pair of slippers, you know, for so many years. The people that I associate with who I did class as friends obviously they are not, they were just using associates but at the time they were friends, you know, and I still wanted contact with these people. And an ex-partner of mine as well. And I just had to change everything. I got a new phone, a new number there's nobody having my number anymore. I had to walk away from the home of 16 years. I had to walk away from my partner of three years. You know, I had to change everything because if you go if you've got one foot in the past an one foot in the future, you pissing on the present.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. It's almost like you had to kind of go through that to like get to that point of...*

You can't, it's all in the past. It's like being a dry drunk, you know, you're not in recovery. The only thing you're not doing is drinking or using or everything else remains the same. And eventually that will lead you back to drinking or using. It will.

**Interviewer:** *So, um, is there in terms of your experiences with relapse and all of this, is there anything else that you would like to say or anything you think is important for us to know?*

And just like I said, not to let complacency slip in, because that would take you back as well. But like I said, the fear that I have around relapse. You know, I had a friend wobble a few days ago and the thought of fucking that person relapsing you know, it was horrendous, you know, because I don't want it for myself, but I don't want it for anyone I care about either, you know?

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, yeah, yeah. How are you managing that thought of like there's a healthy fear or respect. And you also do know in your head what you need to do for yourself to protect yourself. So how do you like... What does that make you feel?*

Ehm like I said, if you work in a programme and you put your recovery first, they say a grateful addict never relapses. And I'm grateful for so much today. You know, every morning I wake up in a nice, warm, comfy bed with a roof over my head, bit money in my pocket, food in the cupboard, surrounded by people that love me. You want nothing from me. Those kinds of things are priceless. I mean, it's nice to have the shiny things. Don't get me wrong of them, I'm bad at fixing my internal with external stuff to fill the internal void but I'm getting better, you know. And trainers aren't going to kill me, crack and heroin will.

**Interviewer:** *Thank you so much for sharing all of this with me.*