**Interviewer:** *So how about you walk me through some of your experiences. You can choose whatever you want to share, but to give me some history of your drug use in your life and your relapse experiences.*

Wow [laughs], ehm ok...I so so five years ago, I went to treatment centre...I've been battling addiction my whole life and I started alcohol probably when I was probably 11, you know, that sort of just progressed into weed, ecstasy, speed, MDMA, Coke, crack, you know how it goes, and sleeping tablets to try and bring me down. When I was trying to give something up, I would swap my substance in order to try and get off the other substance, which I know sounds really crazy too like a normal person is like, well, I take one substance and I'll use another substance to get off the first substance. And then you're addicted to that substance and then, you know, so the spiral continues. But my longest period that I've remained clean is three years and two months. And that was after my first visit to treatment centre. This is my second time to treatment centre and yeah...the relapse that...I was in a really great place and very strong emotionally and spiritually strong. And I was actually so enthralled by what treatment centre does that I went back to [location] because my kids went back there and they're young, you see, they're now 13 and 12. But this was five years ago...and they were obviously younger then. So, I was so taken with how treatment centre help people get their lives back on track and how the people they can look past the years of pain and abuse and kind of uncover that gleaming diamond that's within everybody and show them that, you know. And I went to open a rehab in [location], and I did it off grid. So, no electricity, no municipal services, no... ehm I bought my own septic tank sewerage system, I pumped water, I bought the ablutions, the toilet and the shower and the sink and all that. And I used solar energy for lighting, and I used gas for cooking. And I took people, and I was in the bush totally off grid in the middle of nowhere. And I kind of tried to model it on treatment centre's system that they have...a holistic approach to work and improving self-worth and trying to build these sustainable eco, off-grid dwellings to show people that they do not need to have a mortgage over their head, that they can build in partnership with the Earth and almost in a in a in a recovery sense, we were using old tires and old clothes thrown away. There's a guy in the states called Michael Reynolds, and he runs Earth shook by a picture, and he started doing this in the 70s and I thought, well, you know, the ethics of society and stuff kind of put to one side. And I thought to show people self-worth, you know, using stuff that's been discarded by society, like the tires and the buckles ehm that, that they could sort of rebuild their lives that way. But I took on too much.

And recovery is it can be a very dark energy. Getting to terms with your past and all of that kind of stuff comes up to the surface. And I had a few people there and I found it very difficult. And just trying to do it by myself, obviously, with hindsight, coming fresh out of rehab to build another rehab [laughs] but like so I don't take it as a failure, but I recognise that I need to ask for help. But anyway, I relapsed and obviously the relapse happens in the mind way before I pick up a substance...and but also, I was quite I was quite tense because the political situation in [location] is fairly violent and where I was living off grid, like I was robbed three times and my neighbours across the valley, they were older, like 60s, and they got hammered with hammers, you know, in a violent attack. And it made me really paranoid. I started carrying my gun on me. And then I couldn't sleep, you know, in this house I built out of wood wooden structure ehm blocking...the wood moves, you see, you could hear the creeks and stuff at night. And you've got to be really aware where I was. And basically, I got paranoid, I couldn't sleep, and I went and got some sleeping tablets. I said to my doctor, I'm not sleeping. And I convinced myself that the sleeping tablets were just for sleep. And there was an element of truth to that because I couldn't sleep. But once I started taking one sleeping tablets per night, I really liked the buzz. And it takes me out of my own perspective on life and my view of myself, of my self-worth and low self-esteem, that having a substance in my body, a chemical substance, puts me at ease. And I started taking more and more of these tablets. And so, I had a girlfriend at the time, and she was also in recovery. And that was a very enlightening relationship, very aware of the relationship, probably the most spiritually aware relationship I've ever had. And when we strong, when we were strong, it would feed off positive energy from each other. But things took their toll. And we decided one day to try a substance called GBH, which is like liquid...I don't know what it is. But anyway, and that led to a full-blown relapse for me because from the GBH or from GHB, sorry, it ehm I went straight back onto the coke and the crack and things deteriorated quite rapidly from there.

**Interviewer:** *All right. So the questions I'm going to be asking now are more about your experience of relapse. So, what did it feel like to you when you were relapsing? And how did you feel?*

So, when I was relapsing before I picked up a substance, I knew I was going to relapse. So, it's a very strange place to be in, in my mind, because I neededto escape what I was feeling at the time. I was feeling low self-worth, low self-esteem, anxiety. Just anyway, that kind of encompasses what I was feeling and then I made sure to look at the calendar on my phone and work out how long I've been clean for. And that was three months. That's three years, two months and two days, I think. And I was thinking, 'wow, I'm about to throw all of that out the window now', but I can't see any hope of how I'm going to change my situation so I can't stand feeling how I'm feeling. So, I know it's a bad idea. However, I'm going to still carry on and go through with it. And it started that I would convince myself that I would just, you know, buy a bottle of vodka just to take the edge off. And when I had given myself permission to do that, justified why I needed to do that, it felt terrible. But then very quickly, the alcohol, the feeling that the alcohol gives me kind of just pushed that feeling to one side, which is exactly the point of why I was taking it, because I wanted those feelings gone. I wanted them out of my mind. I didn't want to keep on turning over in my head. What was I going to was I'm not going to what are the impacts going to be? What are the implications going to be? I'm not going to be able to see my kids, but I convinced myself that I'll be able to hide it...because I see my kids every second weekend and picking them up one day during the week from school. And I just convinced myself that I would be able to control, that this time I would be, it would be different, this time it would be, I have the self-discipline to be able to control my substance abuse. And obviously that never happened because very quickly I was back on the Coke, back on the crack, going to all different doctors, getting prescriptions for sleeping tablets, manipulating people in order to get sleeping tablets, you know, so it felt terrible. You know, I felt it's a really terrible place to be and yeah.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. Thank you for sharing that with me. How do you feel about having relapsed so many times in your life?*

Well, it's difficult knowing that before I started going into the rooms of AA and NA and even whilst I was in the rooms in the beginning days of AA and NA, I would be a prolific relapser, I would go into the rooms and I'd say, 'hi, my name is Jonathan, I'm an addict. I've got one day, one day clean or just for today or I had no days clean' and I felt really...it really impacted on my confidence and my self-worth. And I feel that being almost being like a professional relapser in the past has sometimes I try and project forward and think, 'well, is this the way it's going to be for the rest of my life? Am I going to be constantly doing okay for a period of time?' ...having some life event or having a sequence of life events that cause me to relapse and then start again. So, it's a very difficult feeling to try and to try and shake, you know.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, yeah. There's almost like this a healthy like a healthy fear or healthy respect yeah...So would you say that has going through these multiple relapse experiences, has it changed, how have you changed through it?*

Well, it's very easy for me to get into a negative space of mind. And to think that I'll never be able to do this. And this is going to be a situation of recovery, relapse, recovery, relapse is going to affect me for the rest of my life. But I get further along the journey, more counselling, more introspective looking at myself at who I really am and what I really am, and the life experiences that have taught me to go deeper within myself and to look at my emotional blockage or my pain-body as such, that in order for me to clear the energy that [pauses] I have not dealt with successfully, if I keep working at it eventually, somehow I will be on a clear level with my energy and be able to raise my frequency or vibration in order to be rid of that...not be rid of the negative energy because it's a duality of us. We all have positive and negative energy, and it's a way for me to accept my wholeness, my negative and positive about myself, all of the different facets of myself to be able to accept well, that's me as a whole and not to resist that and not to put that stuff, try and hide that stuff away within my internal family system that I try and hide that, but so that you don't see that but I'll hide that from you and I'll pretend I'm okay. Kick that out the loop and but that's not healthy. So I need to be accepting of my past and and that's it, actually. But I actually got a tattoo. I don't know if you can see it here [shows tattoo on arm].

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, I can!*

So this is what they call the [name of tattoo]. I got that after my first visit to rehab and....basically, what I thought was is it's my spiral into addiction and then on the other side, it's my spiral out of addiction and I might actually use this as my personal item...because the...you see it everywhere in nature, you see this like they sometimes call it God's fingerprint. And you see it in seashells, you see it in snails. You see it in sunflowers, you see it in cactuses. And I can't remember where I was going with this but anyways [laughs]...

**Interviewer:** *How does it connect to your relapse, how would you connect it to your experience?*

So my experience ehm by continuing to look at myself when I think I've reached as far as I'm going to get to look within myself. Some people equate it to like peeling an onion. And there's always another layer there. Yeah. And so the path of self-discovery is not linear, you know, and it's circular and the more I go, the more I see of myself. So that's how I'd relate it to my recovery. It's it's a continuous journey. I'm never going to be fixed. I'm never going to be cured. I'm never going to be recovered. And that's OK, actually, because I figured out that I used to be of a state of mind to say, well, once I've stopped drinking or stopped using, that was my goal. Stop drinking and to stop using. However, that is just a symptom of of how I medicate myself in order to block out my pain and block out my feelings and my emotions. So I've got to look at my, my trauma, my pain, my self-worth, my rage, anxiety, depression. I've got to look at all of those things within me so that I can manage my stuff and my feelings so that I don't get to the state of having to use a substance.

**Interviewer:** *Yes. Yeah. OK, so and the one question I have was the sleeping tablets that you took you, which ones do you remember which ones they were.*

Well, it wasn't like a particular brand. It could have been any any sleeping tablets. But when I was in [location] ehm my last experience of relapse is that they were called Zopiclone. And that was the sort of most readily available over the countertop tablet that I could get my hands on that seemed to work for me.

**Interviewer:** *OK. And another question. I just came up when you said you mentioned internal family systems. Is that something that you've worked on with counselling or is this something that you this is how you see yourself?*

This thing that has been spoken to me through a counsellor that I found very interesting that I've looked into further because it really sort of resonated with me, you know, like I have a side that I will show you and then I'll hide the side of things I don't want to show you. And but really, that system that everybody has needs to be clear and functional. And every part of me that I'm trying to block out out of that system needs to have a voice like the secret of me, the disobedient me, the angry me, resentful me, like all of those need to have the voice in order for me to manage my life.

**Interviewer:** *And yes, I love that. I'm asking because I'm actually trained in that method myself. I love it. That's how I work with my clients. So we're definitely on the same track here! OK so I love that kind of that that tattoo to that meaning of it's almost like a relapse. It's your journey is ongoing. It's ever evolving, ever learning more. And yeah, it's really fascinating. And so would you say that has have your family and friends. So I guess if I summarise this the way that you've changed the way that you've used self differently now, it's just. Is part of a journey, part of a process, and would you say that some of your family and friends have noticed a change in you since you since you relapsed?*

Well, I'm in a different country now because I was in [location]. And I'm really lucky to have people around me that can see the value in my soul or in my being when I can't, when I've given up. And they came together and they paid for my flight to England. So my mother is in this country and, you know, I think she's she's she is now quite old. She's 82 and she's tired and she's...my father. I come from a long line of substance abuse. And my father, you know, she's had to go through it with my father and now she's going through it with me. And she thought I was fixed because they say, 'well, you've been to rehab, you should be recovered now, you know, why aren't you recovered?' You know, then I'll speak to other members of like my ex-wife. And she says, 'well, you need to make sure this time it works. You know, you need to do a good job this time'. And it's very difficult to explain that it's not like a magic wand that you can just flip the switch and ok, you're fine now and I'll see you later. It's a continuous life struggle. It's a daily acceptance of my substance addiction. And I used to actually. I used to think of myself just as an addict, just as an alcoholic, whereas now I'm learning to look at that that is just one facet of me. That's just one segment of me that I have. But I have value in other ways.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, yes, yeah, yeah. How come you are in England? Was there like how did you make that change, if I may ask?*

Through and through I reached out to treatment centre from [locstion]. Because I'm still quite good friends with quite a few people there. I was able to reach out. So the guy who you interviewed, the other guy, I was on the programme with him five years ago. He is now working at the facility. And got in touch with him. And the guy who I told you about who runs the recovery cafe, good friends with him, and some other good friends of mine and they all put money in for me. I'd say like they recognised that, I didn't see it at the time. I don't remember a lot of the actual phone conversations, but people would phone me every day. Video called me like this. Talk me through my day and asked me how I'm feeling. And it's very powerful. And yeah, it's quite emotional really, because when I decided that there's no more hope. You know, they could see that that they they still had hope for me and they would phone me every time, and said 'right, we booked your ticket, if you could get to England, you could come back to the rehab and we'll help you'. So, the love that's there is is phenomenal.

**Interviewer:** *That's amazing. Yeah. So, um, I guess if you had to describe what relapse means to you, what would you say, like any kind of images come to mind or phrases or how, what does it mean to you?*

I think...So the word relapse for me obviously has negative connotations because for people like me to relapse, it's it's a failure, a failure of what I'm trying to achieve. But on the other side of the coin, I have relapsed a lot. And I know because I have children, I'm trying to show them that instead of giving up hope and hanging up the boxing gloves, as it were, and that if you fall down, you've got to get up again, you know, and you have got to keep going, keep exploring the reasons why I relapse you know, that to me is trauma. I had quite a lot of trauma when I was a child. And it's learning to accept the wound might not necessarily be my fault, but it's my responsibility to heal myself. And yeah. So I don't know. It's a difficult one, you know.

**Interviewer:** *How would you define relapse? I know if I asked you this before, but what would you count as a relapse?*

Well, the the definition of the term relapse is to pick up a substance that you have decided to abstain from, so it's it's a breakdown of your emotional and spiritual barriers. With something to soothe myself with a chemical substance, but actually harming myself at the same time and understanding both aspects of that situation simultaneously.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, so do you, because some people say different things about. So would you say for you the way you understand relapse, it's any time you pick up again or substance after you stopped? Or is it do you believe in like a lapse or a slip up or...*

Well, you know, a lapse. It's funny because when I started going into the rooms of AA and NA. People spoke of a relapse, and then when other people speak of a lapse, it's almost like when they said, 'oh, you can have it if you've had a lapse, but if you continue doing it, it's a relapse'. But in my head, if they say, 'oh, you've had a lapse, come back in' that's got more positive connotations to it. So therefore, in my head I said, 'ah, well, it's OK to have a lapse then so therefore I can lapse and then just come back'. And I really battled with the difference. It's only two letters. But if somebody said, oh, you've just lapsed. You're not, you're not relapsing. But for me the act is the same. You see, my aim is to stay abstinent of any substance. And if I lapse or relapse, I haven't I haven't done it but, I use the word relapse for me because I've re[emphasis]lapsed into past behaviour which I'm trying to avoid, whereas the word lapsed has more positive connotations for me. And therefore, in my head I cannot use that word because it allows me mentally to think, well, it's OK to have lapse.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Yeah. So can you I'm kind of thinking back through some of those experiences, maybe walk me through maybe one of them, um, how you felt immediately before you relapsed and immediately after that kind of what was going on in your head, maybe in your body and your feelings or emotions you can think of like what is it like to have a relapse?*

OK, so the feeling I have is I get butterflies in my stomach, I get nervous, my head starts saying to me, 'you know, you shouldn't do this. You know, it's the wrong thing to do'. But then the turmoil is that the other part of me is saying, 'well, but, you know, you need to do this to escape'. The feeling that I'm feeling and the feeling I'm feeling is is emotionally is is like a washing machine, you know, that that is on cycle 1000. And, you know, I can't stop it. So and I know that I know a really quick way of stopping it is to use a substance. But I know that the correct way of dealing with those emotions is to sit with my emotions and to communicate those feelings honestly, honestly, with somebody else who understands. So right after I relapsed, I feel when I'm taking the substance, I feel good because it's doing what it's intended, designed to do. And then when I've come down off of that substance, I feel a thousand times worse because I know that it hasn't solved my it hasn't fulfilled that...it hasn't...have you ever heard of a guy called Alan Watts? He was an English philosopher who died, I don't know, in the 70s, I think, and said 'trying to', he was talking about meditation, okay. However, I can relate it to relapse, like if I'm in a boat and there's sort of choppy water around me which are inside me in the boat and the choppy water around me is my emotions and my feelings. It's like me trying to get a paddle and try and smooth out and the paddle being a substance, using the pedal to smooth the waters of my emotions over water, you know, but it's not going to smooth it, calm the waters are just going to make it choppy you see. I don't know if that makes sense. It makes it worse. And I know that it's going to make it worse, but the desire to get out of my feelings, my emotions is very so strong that I take a substance and because I am now my neural pathways are hard wired to accept the substance really quickly and easily you know or have done historically.

**Interviewer:** *So how did you feel, I guess, when you when you were, you know, when you relapsed? Was there any other thought like that you carried on? I mean, I'm assuming you carried on using for a while after you used again. So, what was kind of like your you thinking or your feelings afterwards?*

Well. I suppose this is a very elusive question that...I didn't want to use, I've relapsed, I felt good or felt not good. That's the wrong term. I felt less emotions and I felt less less pain whilst using... Then I've come down off of using, then I felt really bad. And then in order to stop feeling bad and feeling stop feeling guilty, I use again because I don't want to feel bad or guilty. So I complete the cycle with regret and words or feelings of condemnation for myself. In order to get rid of those feelings, I convince myself that I'll just use again just a little bit just to get me over this rough patch. And I can just use the substance to calm my mind and to kind of float into like float like go towards being OK whilst using. But the water's never get any smoother. I think that they're going to like I just use just to get myself on the level and not too bumpy and keep my emotions in check. But the further I go along that stream; it becomes a torrential waterfall of madness again. So I'm not sure how to...see in like the rooms [AA or NA], they say you've got to play the tape forward, you've got to remember what happened the last time, and you've got to know that it's going to have the same things going to happen again. But the mind is very baffling because. Well, the disease or habitual forming, however you want to call it, will tell you that you're gonna be okay. So my head will tell me. Like, because I'll say it to myself like 'oh remember what happened last time', and then my head will tell me, 'don't worry about last time, it's okay, this time will be different this time'. And that's the problem, I think, you know, because once this picture is flipped, I'm screwed because then I'm like, I'm off, you know.

**Interviewer:** *Mhm. Yeah. And I also I'm thinking I just you know, you obviously knowing like if you, if you think forward knowing what's going to happen or having that like thought and. Yeah I, I think I know what will happen when I play it forward that doesn't often help us, you know, doing it and preventing it. I mean it's the same if you if, you know, knowing what to do in a surgery and a heart surgery, having the head knowledge and having studied the head knowledge of, you know, medicine doesn't mean you a good heart surgeon. So it's really it's really interesting that you that you say that way. And so before I ask the next question, I meant I meant to say so you seem to be quite spiritual. So spirituality is a big part of you. Would you say something that has that always been with you or did that develop through you experiences?*

It developed through my experiences of being aware of myself. And you see, I always thought that being socially programmed, like everybody is, I've been taught that I am a separate entity and a separate human being with a mind and and, you know, they teach you in school may the best man win; it's a dog-eat-dog world; every man for himself; You know, and marketing of social media products, anything they say 'well, you need to have this and then you'll be OK'. And it's very clever. And I thought I was separate but...it turns out that I'm not; it turns out that that from my perspective, we are all one consciousness, you know, and I am you and you are me. And I am not this physical body, you see, this is my vessel that I walk around with in order to complete this earthly walk. But really, my mind is like a programmed computer of my experiences and my thoughts and upbringing and my ethnic background and my community and people's moral values that I've been brought up with. But if I step back and realise that everybody else has got the same issue, but but I am actually an infinite consciousness of light and love, and I am the awareness behind...what my head is telling me is just what is the mind's chattering all the time. And when I'm listening to my mind talking, then what's the thing that's listening to my head? And that's what I am. I'm that of the eternal consciousness behind that. And if I recognise that, I can view life a bit differently. So that helps me to realise that I am I am who I am right now with just with my breathe, you know. You know, so it's something that and I was brought up in a very religious upbringing and I could never resonate with that path, so and I had a very bad experience with a priest. And so I run exactly the opposite way, 180 degrees the other way. When you talk about when somebody talks about religion, Christianity, or the dogma that's associated with that. So I fall more to reincarnation Buddhist/Hinduist background and I feel comfort in that. And that that's kind of what resonates with me, you know?

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, sure, it's more the eastern and eastern, not the Western kind of way. No, that's great. I'm just really. Yeah, that's really interesting. I guess so the question I'm now asking is more towards, you know, recovery and how, you know, having gone through so many different relapses, how does it make you feel - how did you feel going back into treatment? I'm assuming and you can tell me, but I'm assuming that before you went to rehab and you were in [location] and you had relapsed before, there were times where you went into treatment, I'm assuming. How did you feel then going back after having had know, 10 or more, 20 relapses?*

So the relapses were before I went into treatment, then I went into treatment, then I relapsed again for nine months or so, and then I went back into treatment and now I'm in recovery. So I'm abstinent except for nicotine and coffee. So but those relapses before...I was very unaware, you know, I didn't even know I was an alcoholic. I didn't even know I was a drug addict, even though I come from a long line of it, I thought, it can't be me. I was very unaware and I thought it was just me that there was something wrong with, inherently wrong with me. But since going into treatment and starting my journey, my ego tells me that I shouldn't go back into treatment because I'm going to look bad. I'm going to look like a failure. I'm going to look. Whereas the people in rehab understand that and say it's a journey. It's ok...but the people who are on the outside, the sort of normal people, they go 'wow, I don't know what to do. You've already been to rehab. So you know what's wrong with you?' you know what I mean? [laughs]

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. Yes, yeah. OK, so I'm going to switch over to asking more about recovery, if that's OK. So like, what would you say were the effects of your repeated relapse experiences on your recovery, like in terms of maybe motivation to go into treatment? What would you say were the effects of your relapses? How would you say it impacted on your recovery?*

Well, with a relapse, I recognise that, I don't know what I'm doing. I can't do it by myself. And that's a funny thing. Like recovery is nobody can do it for you, but you can't do it alone. So that kind of sums it up quite nicely for me, because I realised I tried to do it by myself with the knowledge that I had at the time saying, 'OK, this time it'll be different'. But nothing, nothing is different because I'm trying to fix myself with the same head that got me into the situation I am because I've only got a certain amount of knowledge. So going into treatment, continuously relapsing and then going into treatment and then having a period of time, that for me is a very substantial period of time. For the three years be clean. Taught me that when I relapsed again, the first thing I need to do is to go back into treatment. Even though my ego tells me don't do it because of my ego is going to be bruised, but my soul understands that I can't do this alone. That it has to come from within. But there's obviously more of the onion I need to peel away because there's obviously something still missing that I don't understand. So this time in rehab, I was really worried that I thought, 'oh, I thought I went through everything last time. I don't know what I'm going to do differently this time. How is it going to be different?' And I was really worried about that. And luckily through counselling where we brought up where my counsellor brought up the sort of ACE's experiment, you know, the adverse childhood experiences, he's like, well, look, look at look at your score here. And, you know, out of ten, you know, you're scoring eight. You've had a lot of trauma in your life. And, you've got to recognise that the reptilian side of my brain, the old part of my brain, you know, I'm jumping between my parasympathetic and sympathetic system. I'm just off the chart, you know, I'm just all over because I think there's danger everywhere, so, you know, it's part of the journey. So if I'm honest with my counsellor, I discover more about myself and realise, OK, well, you know, everyone's got a cross to bear. Everyone's got problems. Life is not meant to be all unicorns and rainbows because otherwise what's the point. You know, life is for growth. And if I look at the sort of the Buddhist or Hindu principles, it's like, well, we are here to learn lessons in order to get a different perspective on that and not come out of that pain better, but to come out of that pain with growth. And, you know, at the end of the day, as souls, as people, we're all here just to walk each other home. You know, to wherever that home is. So it's a case of there's no right and wrong before walking the path. And if we can help each other along the way, then brilliant. That's all that I'm not you know, anyhow I think I went off point and I can't remember the question [laughs].

**Interviewer:** *You know, it's actually really interesting to me...so if you had to describe what recovery means to you and after these experiences, what would you say? I know you've already hinted at that of like it's its growth. And would you say anything more about that or what recovery is?*

It's just being able to look at myself from a different perspective and to be kind to myself. You know, I don't have to...I'm not here to make my life any more difficult than the experiences I'm going to experience anyway. You know, death, separation, good, whatever that whatever the negative experiences are, you know, I don't have to impact that more by shoving a lot of chemicals down into my body. So if I can accept myself as I am with all of my flaws and fault in my family system and learn to that my experience of pain can help others on their journey. And not to get twisted about my experiences to accept them, leave them where they are, learn from them and try and move forward. That's a way of being kind to myself. And instead of thinking about poor me, poor me, you know, and then looking at the world through that lens. Well, you know, I can't save the world from all the negativity, but I can save myself from the hurt and the pain. And by saving myself, I'm going to help raise the collective consciousness of the world because by me opening my soul to show my light or vulnerability to others encourages others to show their vulnerability in order to release pain and in order to come together collectively in order to to move on, you know.

**Interviewer:** *So there's a real sense of purpose for you in your recovery. It's like you're part of something much bigger. It's amazing. Um, yeah, would you say there's anything that you would have done knowing now about your relapse is anything you would have done differently when you were relapsing?*

Hindsight is obviously great, but I don't think. Yes, so I'm grateful that I've. I'm grateful that in my pain, I got to so much pain that it wasn't worth the pain anymore, so I had to try something different. So I'm grateful that my pain has led me to a greater understanding of myself and then thinking I had it all fine and, you know, everything's fine, and then realising that the pain takes me a lot of pain to change, you see. So when there's too much pain, then I change. So the relapse has caused me so much pain that I had to look at things differently and in a way I'm grateful that that has been my path. I don't know if I would change anything, but it's a very fine line that we walk. Because a lot of people die in this experience. Which is obviously terrible.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. Yeah. How do you manage your recovery? How do you on a day-to-day basis, how do you protect yourself from relapse.*

I talk to people, yeah, I'm honest with people about feelings. When I got three years clean, I started thinking that I can't show people that I'm not in a good place because I'm three years clean, so, well, I must be OK. You know, people are saying, 'wow, you were such a mess, and you were such a train wreck. And now you are clean'. I have to keep that facade up, which is my ego, my false self-telling me, 'yes, you're OK'. Meanwhile, I'm dying inside, but I have to project the image that I'm OK. So what I've learnt to just to be honest, really honest you know, and that's really difficult to do. So I've got a few key people around me. I've got to look at my decisions. Each decision I make, I've got to try and make the next right decision. And if I just try to make each little decision, the next right one, it helps me for tomorrow to carry on making those right decisions because there's so many forks and branches in the road that I could make a wrong one and then make another wrong one. And then suddenly I'm in prison or dead. So and I seek counsel of others. I ask people for their opinion. I'm humble. I try to be humble. I don't get it right. I try and be willing to learn to take on another different idea. I don't get that right. So I also accept that I'm far from the finished product and that's OK. And I'm happy with that actually, because if I think I'm the finished product, that's immediately where the problems begin. I've got to remember that it's a lifelong journey. Actually, that journey can be really beautiful learning about myself.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. And it's almost like those three years that you were sober, clean, it's almost like that put even more pressure on you. So accepting that you're not finished and you're not perfect helps you keep you in that mindset of, of not you know, not adding on more pressure on having to keep up a facade of the sober you or. So that makes sense to me. Yeah. Yeah. OK, great. Um do you think much about relapse? Is it kind of in the back of your mind?*

I do think about it. I have I have thoughts of using I have thoughts of thinking well, like not now, not now, but if I think about like yesterday, I had thoughts of of using, of saying, 'OK, well maybe this time it'll be different'. My head is telling me, 'OK, you seem to be OK now what about if you finish rehab'...because I have finished treatment but I'm in a community house in, you know, just in CE. So I'm thinking, OK, so 'I do I've done a year there, I'll do a year here and then long time forward. OK, ok. well when I'm finished here, I book a week off, I'll go and have a use up', you know, all the debauched, all the madness that goes with it. You know, because for me drugs and sex are very closely interlinked, you see. So it's very difficult because I've used so much and you know, lots of inhibitions and sex becomes a very debauched act. And so I think I can go and do that, you know, go and use and and have debauched sex. And that'll be a release, like a reward. But then what I do is I speak to my housemate who you spoke to on Saturday, and I'll speak to some other guys in the community. We went to a meeting last night and I'll speak about it there so that I'm accountable. And also, I can get it in the light, you know, I don't have to keep it in. It's quite normal to have using thoughts for whatever substance for over now 33 years. It's quite normal for me to go 'ah, I don't like this feeling or this emotion, I know what I can do, I can use' ehm or as a reward system, so if I'm honest about it to other people, it keeps me accountable. And then, if I can just do the right thing today, then tomorrow I could maybe try to do the right thing again. And then maybe by the time my year is up, I would have peeled enough layers off of the onion to realise that I don't have to do that. So it's just keeping myself around like minded people in a recovery setting, which is why the rehab works so well, because it's a lot of rehabs that that say 'well come for a 30 day rehab', you know what I mean? And then it just the cycle of pain continues.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. So did that change the way that you kind of go about talking openly about your feelings and all of this to protect yourself from relapse? Did that change with the number of relapse experiences or was it always from the get-go?*

No no, it's only through experience. It's only through the relapsing, but it's only through coming to an institution like treatment centre in order to learn about myself, that has changed the way I protect myself from relapse. Because of the awareness.

**Interviewer:** *Is there anything else about your experience that you feel I need to know, or people should know anything that you may have. I have maybe missed, or you want to share more?*

I can't think of anything else really. I'm a specific person but yeah I think all I could say is that this kind of I know that they are looking at changing the recovery models or treating I don't like labelling people addicts, but treating people with a history of substance abuse problems due to pain and unawareness of themselves and how to sort that out. And treating that as a criminal activity to more of a mental health way of thinking. So I think what you're doing here, asking about feelings and emotions and awareness is really important. It's going to be really important for for me, for the people you are doing this for and ultimately for future people who will experience pain and try and relieve that pain through substances.