**Interviewer:** *OK, great. So, I would open up with your personal items. So, if you want to maybe just explain it and kind of just share with me a little bit about how you chose that particular item?*

It's a medal for running a half-marathon. It's a very long time ago. I had it about 20, maybe 21 years. And basically, a client who relapsed once - he was a young man, and he ran a half-marathon and he told me that this was his achievement in life. He never achieved anything apart from running this. He was in his early 20s. And he here basically...after finishing the marathon was probably a couple of weeks or so. He decided to leave rehab...leave treatment and he left the medal behind because...and he told a friend of his...that it belongs to him, not to me. And he said, 'if I took it with me, I'm going to relapse and I'm going to lose it'. It was so precious for him to lose it to drugs. So, he left it behind. And after four days, he and this guy overdosed and lost his life. And he I don't know exactly who made the decision, but what we're going to do with his medal. He didn't have anybody to pass the medal to. So, he gave it to his counsellor and it's become a very precious item for me. And it's almost bringing me back or grounding me to what I'm engaging with. So, it's an item that I kept all these years, and I think I'm going to keep it the rest of my life.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. Wow. Mm hmm. So, it kind of almost symbolises the severity of the severity of, um, of relapse in a way.*

Yeah. And it's it made it more a life-or-death matter. And it's not something that I'm engaging with therapy, for me this item is a symbol of how serious working with people and how close to their, how their recovery impacting their lives. So, I never take it lightly. And basically, especially when I'm remembering about this, this guy…he's not the only one, by the way, kind of lost his ehm…there's many...for some reason, he was quite young. So, it was it was a bit hard.

**Interviewer:** *And it seems like to me that it just really connects you with really a reality check, like, yes, this is very serious and it's almost like you're holding his whole life achievement...It's just really powerful. Yeah.*

I made ehm...very shortly a few months after that, I made big life changes for me as a result of this incident. I, I, I changed jobs to enable me to do more for the people that I wanted to help. So, I took quite a big risk. So, in those days I was quite young. So, I was more adventurous than now...yeah, I changed jobs as a result.

**Interviewer:** *Wow. OK, so does that mean you kind of moved right into a different style of therapy?*

Basically what I thought at the time that working in a in a very controlled context and I was part of a team providing a service that I wasn't free to to come alongside, if you like, using my heart, I felt. I have to use my skills only to help the residents in that place a long, long time ago. And I was in about that. So, this is a matter of life and death. Therefore, I want to use my heart as well as my skills. Therefore, I'm going to step out of that to more less structure and more able to connect in a deeper level and a personal level with the clients. Still, obviously professional service. It wasn't it was less structure, less demanding on my time. So that the working hours and in a way, it was, it was different and it just enabled me to ehm so I pioneered a new initiatives and outside and this lasted to the past 20 years.

**Interviewer:** *Amazing. So what would you say is your understanding of relapse? Like, how would you how would you define relapse from what you've known about it?*

I'd like to say it's part of the journey...if the person learning something from it, it will advance him or her. And if the person not learning anything from it, it will be having an effect on confidence and faith in himself, on himself or herself and so on. So, it's a very significant part of the not only the recovery journey...it's the life journey. And in the broader term, we all actually relapse, and we're all learning how to handle our relapses. I've never used drugs. I'm not somebody coming from the background of a drug user and recovered. But I see in my life many relapses and many setbacks. And what do I do with that? So, it's a it's a broader than a relapse using drugs. And yeah, it's more of a human and a part of the human journey. But then for the people who are using drugs or alcohol, they are [inaudible] their relapse is out there. People get to see whereas some of us who are not addicted to the methods that grass's us, we relapse secretly. In our kind of own way we our setback is it is not a public and I see basically it's connected to grace and hope...so give ourselves and give others a grace to get up again.

**Interviewer:** *OK, so I'm going to ask a question about if you can remember back to a client or maybe a couple clients. And so what did it feel like to you when you kind of first heard about your client relapsing? Um, again, so not relapsing for the first time, but maybe, let's say the second or third time. What did that feel like for you when you heard that when they get the news?*

At one point in life...because within the 30 years of...even though I didn't work with drug addicts the whole 30 years of my life, my first seven years were more focussed. And then I had no first ten years were more focussed on addiction. I moved from out of that to general counselling and charitable work, and I went back into addiction work. So it's backward and forward. And when I look at it on my journey, engaging was people addicted to whatever kind of substance or what other addictions in their lives. I was ehm it's a dynamic journey for me. It wasn't the same in the beginning. It was something after a little while it was experience change. And now I look at it totally different...a changed over the years of my view. Well, to start with in the very beginning for me it was people using drugs, people recover and I'm in the recovery end and just don't have a relapse. And this is a huge mistake. So no grace, really. It was a relapse. I wanted people to succeed. And I'm investing my life into their recovery. In a way. I was doing a lot of volunteer work for this area as well. So it was hard for me the set back. It was personal for me as well as personal for the other people. So it had an impact on me. And to some extent and kind of I was in my twenties and kind of in this time and I was and it was related to my identity their failure ismy failure, myfailure is their failure, and I'm connected to the setbacks. So it used to hit me quite hard and backward and forward. And it takes quite a lot of me emotionally as the years went by. And you see people sometimes after two or three, four, relapse just didn't make it and they stand back for longer and stuff like that. My vision of relapse become not as fatal, as big as it used to be, and my ability to separate my connection, my kind of this is not my failure. And I may do that when I when I give my clients their success. Their success is theirs, not mine. So their failures become theirs, not mine. So it was really when I understood that if you succeed, I will succeed with you well no... I gave them the success and that helped me also to give them a big fail. I'm kind of allowing them to own their journey. And that freed me a little bit from the emotional ups and downs, that I used to have experience.

Fast forward, I started to learn more about relapse prevention and learn more about how to handle relapses and my vision of relapse now, as I explained it a bit earlier, it's part of the journey... It's not particularly has to be at the failure side of it, only it could be part of the successful part kind of journey and with some kind of boundaries, because relapse could be obviously a setback and a total failure. Yeah, but what I'm trying to say, my vision of it become a little bit more even broader to be contained in into the success of a story. Not this is out of the successful story. To become part of it. And so the grace become larger released in in the journey and then and more lately talk about it now, the new development is this idea of people recover not from drugs, people recover from how they live life. So it's become about life, it's recovery become a bit stronger, more balanced person. Not, they're dealing with the drug, yes they're dealing with the drug problem, but the recovery is a bigger journey than I and we are all in that journey to some extent. So I've become more not the therapist who helps the addict, I've become more of a two human beings sharing the journey. That's my vision of it at age 53 [laughs]...God knows where I'm going to go, but my vision changed you see...over the years. Of my place and the substance misuse and the person that was using.

**Interviewer:** *How that was like for you to receive that news, you know, what was going on in? Did you have any feelings or any sensations in your body when you heard, oh, you know, so-and-so has relapsed again?*

Um, I'm thinking about a particular guy who kind of I was his witness. He's had few relapses, one after another if you like, and I worked with him for five, six months. It was in drug rehab, I was a therapist in that rehab, and he left rehab and he relapsed. And my it was very sad, and it hit me quite hard.

First time. He disappeared a couple of years or so. I didn't I didn't have any contact with him. I heard about him that about five months after he left the rehab, about the relapse he used for five months, he decided to apply everything that we were talking about in his life on his own out there. So he recovered and he managed to sustain his recovery on his own outside of rehab was kind of really unique. But when I met him two years after that, he was talking about I just remembered everything that we were talking about. And I didn't apply when I was in rehab. I didn't it was imposed on me and I didn't like to having it imposed on me, so I didn't want to. So this guy, when I met him, hewas having like a little relapse when he was playing with drugs, I think, and he was trying just to put his life together.

The second time when I heard he was already like it was a lapse, not a relapse. And trying to pull his life together. So even though I heard that he was kind of relapsing or lapsing and it wasn't very heavy because I heard it and he's trying to do something about it, and I came in there so it wasn't second time wasn't very heavy. It was more hopeful because he's trying to pull his life together.

Third time he relapsed, that was maybe seven, eight years later, six, maybe six, seven years later. He did very, very well. He moved to be a staff in the recovery programme, he was doing really well. Up to a certain point. He had a miraculous experience. The place was a Christian rehab, and he had an engine of a van or something like that...he was trying to take the engine out of the of the pickup van and the engine fell on his foot. It's really just kind of crushed it. It was no way for him to walk again when an engine fell on somebody's foot. And it was a miracle. Basically, they prayed on the spot and he saw the bones and that's how that's actually what happened. So he went the miraculous healing happened in that moment after this accident. They prayed on the spot and his foot healed and pain stopped and when he went to the hospital, it was healed. So he basically became a committed kind of Christian and all his family and become a huge thing, basically changed his life. And everybody else, who knew him, their life. Fast forward. I met him after that relapse, even after an experience like this. And it was a really confusing time. My feelings about this third relapse was very, very confusing. I know. I'm thinking, how much do you need to see in order to stay away from drugs after all this massive, miraculous experiences? You relapsing? Ehm I mean, he was he went to be number two in that rehab that he was in. And the right-hand guy for the top guy, he was working alongside the CEO, so he was really putting it together. Life back to normal and he's back to his family it's just everything was in the right place. So this relapse, the third one, the second one wasn't any emotion. A third one was really heavy for me and confusing*.* And I stayed confused for a while and almost feeling addiction. If this guy could relapse, who...anybody basically and everybody can relapse and it became a confusing thing for me anyway. And during that time, I worked with him. He was kicked out of rehab and we organised detox and stayed with us pulled his life together. And he was again in the caring end...he did well.

And the fourth relapse, he basically was cheating and and misbehaving. And I mean, it was a little bit of money because he worked alongside me by that he became a colleague and initiatives that. So he did well and he's been accepted as a team member, not as a client of us. And he relapsed while on his team. So that relapse, I felt more of a manager, not a therapist. I almost dealt with it professionally rather than and I think because I was dealing with other staff members and stuff like that, it wasn't I wasn't in touch with my feelings. I become more of a manager for the place. So it didn't help me emotionally and actually he was being kicked out and put his life together a little bit after that. And he was basically in and out drugs and many, many relapses that it didn't feel difficult for me until last bit where he actually took his life in the end. And I wasn't sure if that was a relapse or he was using...by that time I was hearing bits and pieces here and then about him. So that's just a guess I'm sharing with you one, one of my, you know, many years old. I know him for 15 years or so. This guy with many multiple relapses. So each one of these relapses had a different impact on me. Depending on what was going on at the time was and with me as well.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. What would you say does your client’s relapse mean to you and how it kind of affects you personally?*

What it means to me, I say, what a waste...And in many different ways, but I feel the first thing that jump in my head is 'what a waste'...It's just time and effort and money and lots of waste with those relapses and I'm thinking about the pain. Mostly people around the person relapsing. So I think about the pain. In terms of looking at it therapeutically, I straight away think about how this could be part of the journey and how this could be beneficial. It doesn't have to be end of the story. This is part of the story, not end of the story. I hear from that perspective and keep me hoping and sometimes allowing me to have hope for the person. So if I'm close or I'm in contact, I can offer hope within that ehm...what else...Really depending on how emotionally I connect to the to that person, how it feels to me. There's two levels really, one level of 'I am sad, I'm impacted because this is a waste and this is a risk as well for the life'. And, but there is another side of it, some, some people you just kind of build a relationship with or they are close enough to have some sort of connection and when those relapse it becomes...cuts deeper if you like...Really sad. And so it's different degrees of sadness. When people relapse. And also, if I'm prepared to see it coming sometimes our clients, they prepare us [laughs] they change the attitude and they become pain [laughs] and they kind of play in your head and you can see it's coming. And some of our clients, they just surprise you. Normally the surprise is one is a bit of 'oh, where this came from'.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. How do you manage that when you hear the news. I mean do you like how do you process your experience, how do you what do you do when you hear, hear the news now?*

It's as I said earlier, it's seeing it part of the part of the journey and able to stay connected emotionally and mentally. And I'm seeing it at but I, I, I used to it used to hit me. Used to be like, 'oh, again?!' I'm engaged with this news emotionally, and I think I've seen so many people relapsing and also seeing people relapse and recover. So in my...it was not as dangerous as it used to be. 'You're throwing away your life, mate!'. It used to be big in my eyes and I'm seeing it risky but not the end where I used to see it. So I receive it differently. All this, the reality of it, it takes something out of us. Oh, that's my deep down it maybe it doesn't take as much as it used to take out of me, but it does obviously when people are not doing well and it takes something, something of me goes with the person but maybe a little bit.

**Interviewer:** *Do you have any kind of supervision, a self-care practises for when you hear the news and when, when you experience indirectly a relapse, I guess what do you typically do, um, to process?*

I think that the idea of yes I right now I have, I do group supervision with, with other therapists so all of us connect with each other and all of us have seen it over and over in the moment. They are experienced counsellors, all the people in this group...many years of experience. So that's normal life, if you like that, the feelings and enable us to support each other. And I have a supervisor. If there is something cutting deeper, I would take it to supervision. I think the third layer is just a chat in the heat of the moment. When I hear it over there and having a little chat about what's going on, it releases the pressure and the emotions that's generated. So the informal chat is part of that release so these are the three layers in my opinion. But I don't go to the pub to have a couple of beers there [laughs].

**Interviewer:** *So can you tell me how this has affected your therapeutic work? Is there anything else you would like to kind of say along those lines?*

I would probably say it enabled me to give more respect to the clients, enabled me to allow more autonomy for people's choices. And in a way, it's a hard way of learning the lessons as a therapist. That actually, this is their success, not mine. And I'm respecting their decision, even though I don't approve that, but I would respect the decision ehm not many in-your-face examples would enable us to, as a therapist to learn these lessons or let me put it in a different way. Relapse is a very loud way of teaching us to actually respect our clients. Yeah, they are actually allowed to choose for themselves even relapse. I respect that choice, even though I am not going to approve it or like it or I think it's a good idea. Or maybe that helped me to grow in that respect.

**Interviewer:** *Mm. Yeah. It's quite interesting, right. How we expect them to just be perfect. For some people it works but yeah...we expect them to have this linear kind of way to recovery and be perfect.*

I don't know if you have any faith or not. I will talk about my faith. I feel this reflection of the relationship was between God and man. It is God allowing us to choose. And I have a choice. I have a choice to choose life or to choose death. And God, let me do that. And I'm a Christian. So it's a biblical view of this is: Is a loving God allowing you to choose that? Yes! He respects my autonomy enough to let me choose, even something He doesn't approve. So it's a respect…it's not a God who doesn't like us and lets us choose bad choices. It's the other way around. But I see the greater point is, is, is respect for our autonomy in a way, our choice, our freedom.

**Interviewer:** *And would you say has it has that kind of journey affected the way that you see yourself, how you see yourself as a therapist? It's kind of going along those lines of I see myself as somebody who respects my clients more. Is there anything more you want to say?*

To some extent, it's a humbling, but enabling me to be humble in my journey. I'm not actually the expert, the person who tells people what to do and if they do it they get to a good place. And it's more of humbling me that I actually I'm only journeying alongside that person. And it's and I'm allowing them to choose their choices. And I'm just travelling alongside them. So I'm a fellow traveler. I'm not their therapist. And I'm, obviously I do follow a code of ethics and I am a therapist, but deep down I'm actually travelling alongside another human being in his journey in life. So that's maybe giving me grounding me.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, I love that. And so another question would have been, do you continue to work with the same client when they relapse?*

Yeah, I see working with clients is not to do with how I feel because I chose a field where people could do really horrible things. And if I let my emotions dictate what I do and don't do, there are people that I would never come near them. And so I see my engagement with those to do with my commitment and not how I feel about it. So based on that, I'm committed to see people recover from pain or learning how to get rid of their pain and have their freedom back. And that's kind of the vision of my mine to...or this is my own personal calling in my own life. To come alongside those deeply hurt and deeply disturbed and lose their freedom on that journey. So in order to be with those, I don't rely on my feelings. I have to rely on just the commitment. And the purpose of me being here to the calling that I feel in my heart to engage with. And so, yes, I do work with people. I do work with people who every single thing would indicate that they're going to relapse. And that's fine. I do work with those. So I don't I don't say no. Obviously, unless it's compromising other people, but if it comes to there's no one else compromised, yeah I will engage again and again.

**Interviewer:** *And how do you how do you work through a relapse with a client. Let's say a client has a relapse and they come back to see you? What do you then work on and how do you work through this?*

It really depends on the setting because I have...setting within that they have I suppose in a way, the stabilisation and the control and accountability are all provided. I'm one of therapist, so I walk in, I walk out and I'm only a therapist. And there are a team of others providing the setting for that person to be safe in this wobbly time and the protection of being in the residential place, working with those outside, it become more stabilising the person, eliminating the risks, looking for the network of support and all that will be my initial focus. Not really the treatment, if you like, it would be the preparation for the treatment and would be my focus. I worked in the two settings. One in the community and in rehab, which is much easier obviously.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. OK Sean that was it. Do you have any, anything else about your experience with this that you feel like people should know or you haven't mentioned anything you think is missing or how do you feel?*

Even like talking about myself and my opinion and my ideas for that long... it felt like I am indulging myself of yeah my opinions and somebody's listening to what I've got to say about this and what I've got to say about that. So there is something with a personal pride that I might need to think about and humble myself a bit because I'm not really the gift for this world [laughs] or anything like that. So it's not anything to do with you [laughs].