

# THIS IS ME

## IAIN'S RECOVERY STORY

*A treatment agency helped Iain detox from the methadone that was prescribed for his heroin addiction. College, employment, recreational activities, and romance facilitated Iain's recovery.*

### 1. Early years

I was born and brought up in a small village on the outskirts of Aberdeen in Scotland. What I can remember about my early years is living in what I felt was a safe and secure family home. My parents worked hard to provide my sister and I with a stable upbringing. Although we were never what you might call well-off, there was always food on the table and clothes on our backs.

While growing up, I always seemed to be the master of underachievement and fell short on many occasions of what I now believe I was capable. Although school was a really enjoyable experience for me, I treated it as a laugh and very rarely took it seriously. I was a bit of a daydreamer and joker, but these were still good times. I spent most weekends and holidays on my best friend's father's farm.

After leaving school at 16, I studied agricultural engineering at college. Just like at school, I didn't take my studies seriously and halfway through the two-year course I left to work for my friend's father on his farm. I was young and couldn't see the big picture; all I was looking for was money. However, I got fed up of working sometimes seven days a week on the farm and became a postman. I then worked for my father in his butcher shop for eight years.

### 2. Descent into addiction

Around the age of 17 or 18, I started smoking cannabis and using ecstasy and speed at the weekend. I did this because it was something that my friends were doing. I was young, curious and somewhat naïve. I was also in party mode, wanting to escape the reality of everyday life and having to develop a career. I took the easy option of focusing on having fun. Over time, I drifted towards people who were heavy drugs users and were not the best type of friend. My drug-taking increased and a bad part of my character came out. Although I was enjoying myself, the constant partying eventually took its toll.

The girl I was going out with, Karen, fell pregnant and our son Shaun was born on the 14th of January 2000. The three of us moved in with my parents for six months. We then broke up and Karen moved out. She arranged that I could only have supervised contact with Shaun. I remember not really caring, an awful thing to reflect upon now. I finally lost contact with Shaun.

I started experimenting with heroin not long after the break-up with Karen and this was the beginning of a downward spiral for me. I was naive and thought I could control my heroin use, smoking the drug on a

recreational basis whilst maintaining a normal personal life and working. I didn't think I would ever inject the drug. However, I soon became addicted to heroin and started injecting the drug.

Gradually, my mind gave in more and more to what was happening with my drug-using. It became too easy for me to say to myself that 'my body is shouting out for heroin [due to the physical withdrawal effects] and I don't have the strength to fight it.'

I also started to reflect upon my old life and how things had gone downhill once I had started to use heroin. I realised how bad my life had become and how much I wanted to escape from my current reality. Well, what better way to escape reality than to use more heroin? The drug numbed everything, made all my problems irrelevant. How ironic?

I also used the excuse of not seeing Shaun to continue using. I would say to myself 'I've lost my son, haven't seen him since he was two,' and use drugs so I would eradicate these thoughts. However, in feeling sorry for myself in this way, I was losing sight of the fact it was me who had ultimately caused this ruination. I then used drugs in part to rid myself of the guilt that I felt for being responsible for the split.

Any semblance of control in my drug use disappeared when I started using crack cocaine. The buzz that crack gave me was even better at helping me forget the 'shite' in my life, and when combined with heroin (the so-called 'snowball') it provided a perfect oblivion. The problem with crack though was that it was very more-ish. You'd have some and then you'd just need more. I was always chasing the unbelievable high the drug created, and this became the driving force in my life.

Crack changed my values and the way I thought I should live. I was brought up to have good moral values, but these quickly went out of the window once I started using crack. I descended into a life that was dominated by the never-ending challenge to find enough funds to support my habit. There was only one way to acquire such funds—stealing.

My drug use took me on a voyage of discovery, where I learnt just how low I could go in order to satisfy my urge for drugs. I travelled so far from who I was. I was isolated from normal people, as the relationships in my life at this time were dictated by what I could get (drug-wise) and from whom I could get it. I wanted to forget, and taking crack and heroin helped me do just that. I was caught in a vicious cycle. Drugs made me hate myself for what I was doing and who I now was, but drugs also helped me to forget all this.

During this period, which lasted about 18 months, I lived mostly with my parents. I thought that my father, for whom I was still working, was unaware of my trials and tribulations, but I have since found out that he knew that I was having difficulties, but not to the full extent. I constantly borrowed money from my parents, with various excuses for what I needed the money for, and if this failed, I stole from them. I stole from dad's shop and from home, stealing from the very hands that fed me. This process continued for a long time.

I started breaking into pubs and shops, and eventually robbed someone in the village where I had grown up and worked. I was arrested. My time in front of the courts was a bit of a blur; it seemed to happen so quickly. I never contested the charges and pled guilty. At the age of 26, I was sentenced to one year's imprisonment.

The full extent of my feelings did not become apparent until I got locked up. I distinctly remember New Year's Eve 2002 lying in my cell and hearing the celebratory fireworks going off, as Craiginches Prison is just across the water from the centre of Aberdeen. This brought home the fact that I still had 12 months to serve. I remember crying quietly in my cell and wondering whether I would make it through my sentence. And if so, how?

The way I made it through was basically by just keeping my head down and doing my time. I know that sounds like a cliché. I tried to focus on my parents' weekly visits, and the fact that if I kept my nose clean I'd be free in 12 months. I started to learn to play the guitar, as my cellmate could play, and this helped keep me focused. During my sentence, I experienced strong feelings of guilt about what I done to my family and the person I had robbed.

I didn't use drugs whilst I was in prison. I made plans on the run up to my release date, plans to apply for money to help me integrate back into society. I was awarded £400 which, for an individual with substance use issues who had been locked up for a year and offered no kind of personal therapy during this time, was an accident waiting to happen.

I started using drugs again almost immediately after I was released from prison. Whilst in prison, I had never really considered what I could do with my life in a positive sense once I was released. I never thought of a future drug-free existence. Therefore, I guess my relapse was inevitable, particularly as I was a pretty messed up and confused individual at this time.

My addiction took hold again, got worse, and my life became very chaotic. I eventually started to sell drugs for some major drug dealers, who paid me with a personal supply of crack and heroin. However, the amounts of drugs the dealers were willing to give me for a night's work were not enough, and it wasn't long before I resorted to stealing product from them. Not long after that, I stopped working for them altogether.

During this period of chaos, I overdosed three times, each time requiring hospitalisation. On one occasion, I overdosed in a friend's car. He dumped me semi-conscious at the entrance of the A&E department at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary and disappeared. Staff brought me around with naloxone. Soon after, I signed myself out, ignoring the advice of hospital staff. I headed off into the night to find some more heroin, feeling pissed off that I had been 'robbed' of my previous hit.

I know this sounds crazy, but this experience and the other near-death experiences had no emotional impact on me and didn't change my behaviour. I suppose I viewed overdose as an occupational hazard, part and

parcel of the lifestyle I had chosen to lead. Moreover, I didn't value my life much during these hectic years. The driving force in my life was to satisfy my strong urges for drugs.

If the police had issued a warning that there was strong heroin on the streets (increasing the risk of overdose), I'd have wanted to be the first in the queue to get a hit. Rather than worry about overdosing, I'd have thought, 'This will be a better high.' Many heroin addicts think like this.

### **3. Accessing treatment**

At the end of 2004, I finally decided that I needed some form of help. It's hard to say what exactly triggered this decision, but I guess it was a combination of realising the terrible things I had done and was continuing to do to my family, and the fact that I was getting older and less naïve. I contacted Social Services who referred me to the local treatment service in Aberdeen. They put me on a methadone programme, which I remained on for about two years.

I remember little of what I was thinking and feeling at the time I was put onto the methadone programme. However, I do remember feeling very uncomfortable about picking up my weekly prescription from the chemist in my village, as I was looked down upon by staff. I was not drug-tested during this two-year period, although I did see a care manager at the treatment service once a fortnight to briefly discuss how I was doing and to get my script for the next two weeks.

I didn't stop using heroin during this time. Rather, I used methadone in the morning so I could get going and later be more 'functional' when acquiring my next supply of heroin. Most days, I begged, borrowed and stole from my family to get the money I needed for my next heroin fix.

I finally realised I had to do something serious about my drug use after I started stealing from my sister's purse. Don't ask me why stealing from my sister was any different to stealing the massive amount of money I stole from my parents, but I just thought, 'Enough is enough.' This was a major turning point for me.

I told my care manager the methadone was not working and that I wanted to stop using drugs, and he referred me to a residential treatment centre in Glasgow. I spent 12 months with this treatment service, six months in the residential phase of their programme and a further six months in the resettlement phase. I was detoxed off methadone in the early part of my residential stay and I don't remember experiencing any great difficulty in doing this.

The residential phase of the programme involved two daily groups and a weekly one-to-one session. We had to complete daily housekeeping duties to maintain upkeep of the residence. In the resettlement phase, I was meant to be housed in supported accommodation and receive one group and a one-to-one session per week.

However, due to funding restrictions, no secure accommodation was offered and I had to live in my own apartment. Although I attended one group session a week, I was only given a few one-to-one sessions during this six-month period. I felt let down by the shortcomings of this resettlement phase. An opportunity to consolidate my recovery was lost and I started to become complacent. I also felt separated from the people with whom I had done the first phase of the programme, recovering people who could have helped my ongoing recovery.

#### **4. Relapse**

I was clean for the six months of the resettlement phase and for six months afterwards. During this year, I worked on a casual basis for a heating engineer/plumber in Glasgow. I enjoyed the work, but there were no long-term prospects, and I gradually felt more and more like I was stuck in a rut. My life had become predictable and uninteresting.

Prior to this realisation, I had begun drinking at the weekends. I soon began using cocaine along with the alcohol. Since I only did this at weekends, I thought I was in control and didn't recognise that I had a new problem developing.

When the work I was doing dried up, I was left with nothing to do during the week. My addiction took over and the money I had saved in the bank was spent within weeks. I was once again living from one dole payment to the next. I started using heroin and crack again.

Although my addiction wasn't quite as extreme as when I lived in Aberdeen, the mental lows of relapsing after what I considered a reasonable amount of clean time were something I'd never experienced before, even during the darkest parts of my earlier life. My confidence was shattered, and I was left with no belief in my own abilities to do anything positive with my life.

I started to feel that I really couldn't be bothered fighting this anymore. Suicide sometimes seemed an easier and a more appealing proposition. However, even though I was consumed by my failings, I managed to keep going in some sort of positive direction.

I spent about six months using heroin and crack. I can't say for sure what made me realise that I needed to do something about my desperate situation. Maybe I had a moment of clarity, where I started thinking about my security and future. Even though I'd basically been living on bread and raspberry jam, I had been sensible enough to keep hold of my flat. I think I realised that my habit was threatening to take off to another level altogether, and if I didn't do something soon my flat would disappear. I now admitted defeat and accepted that I needed help again.

#### **5. Back on methadone**

My doctor gave me the phone number for the local Community Addiction Team (CAT), who put me on another methadone maintenance programme. I started on 30 ml methadone, but as I was still using heroin

on top and submitting dirty urine samples, the dose was increased to 55 ml over the following year. I found it hard because I had a huge amount of free time (I was not working) and felt terribly alone and isolated. I only had a few genuine friends in Glasgow and the people I had got to know in the city were of a negative sort.

I also hadn't really addressed the issue of whether I wanted to stop using or not—I was suffering from ambivalence. I felt ashamed about my latest relapse and the fact that I hadn't told my parents, and this made me feel even more alone. I didn't want to continue with my chaotic life as it was, but I couldn't see how to change, so contemplated easy options out.

Looking back now, methadone did its required job in one way, by stabilising my drug use to some extent, particularly when I couldn't afford to buy heroin. Methadone reduced the craving and physical withdrawal symptoms I experienced. It provided a platform for me to build on.

When I picked up my prescription at weekly intervals, I discussed with the CAT team how my last week had been. The care worker assigned to my case seemed focused on me and understood from the beginning that I did not want to be on methadone for any long period of time. She was very supportive, and I valued her help.

Strange as this may sound, being tied to visiting the pharmacist every day to drink my methadone actually helped me, as it meant I had to get out and interact with other people, and not sit at home all day stewing in my head. The girls who worked in the chemist were great and I really enjoyed talking to them. They seemed to treat me the same as anyone else, which was so different to my earlier experiences with picking up methadone in Aberdeenshire. I still often nip into the same chemists when I am walking past just to say 'hallo'.

I then decided that enough was enough, the script had to stop. I realised that if I didn't do something about getting off methadone, I could end up getting stuck in a situation where the methadone kept getting increased. This was something I wanted to avoid at all costs, since I would be just changing one dependency (an illegal one) for another (a legal one). I thought that if I was going to end up being dependent on one drug (methadone), then why bother stop using in the first place?

This thinking may sound strange, but this is what was going on in my head—and it was what actually triggered my journey to recovery. Yes, after a year of being on methadone, I decided it was time to actively detox off the drug.

## **6. Detoxing off methadone**

My care manager at the CAT team suggested I attend the Leaving the Blue and Green group run by South East Alternatives (SEA) in Glasgow. This group ran one night a week for 16 weeks as part of the SEA overall treatment programme. It was connected to a day programme and was specifically designed for individuals who wanted to get off methadone.

The only problem was that I needed to be on 30ml or less of methadone to be able to join the group. However, by this time, I had begun to catch a glimpse of a better life for me. I saw an opportunity not only to become drug-free, but also to put in place something that would sustain my recovery in the long-term and help me make something of myself. I didn't want to return to my earlier depressive thoughts or upset my parents anymore.

I started to reduce my methadone in the middle of 2009, in collaboration with the CAT. I had reached 30 ml by late 2009 and was now able to join the Leaving the Blue and Green group. Although the dose reduction had taken a number of months, I did not find it that difficult to be honest with you. The prospect of joining the Blue and Green group had acted as a strong goal and kept me focused. Sometime in January, I also began playing football every Tuesday afternoon with some of the guys who were engaged in the day programme at SEA.

My methadone detox became a little tougher when the dose dropped below 30ml, although it was still relatively easy. The Tuesday night group and football gave me the drive and focus to believe that my life could be better, which helped me during the detox process.

The Blue and Green group used a cognitive behavioural approach to help you change your negative thinking into positive thinking. To me, this was very important, as it is so easy to be influenced by all the horror stories about methadone withdrawal, and convince oneself that the withdrawal symptoms and psychological pain are worse than they actually are.

Reducing from 15ml was harder and I began to realise that I was approaching a time when I would have no drugs in my system for the first time in years. I gradually reduced down to 4ml and things became a little harder again. I now realised that not only would I soon have no drugs in my system, I would also not be making my daily visits to the chemists (at least to pick up my methadone). These visits had served such an important function in getting me out of the house over the past months.

I took the 16 weeks of the Blue and the Green programme to reduce my methadone from 30 ml to zero. In fact, I was still in the final stages of my detox when I started the day project, and for a short period I was visiting both the day project and Tuesday night group.

Reflecting back, I realise that apart from a relatively short period of broken sleep, I felt no ill effects during the methadone detox. My own head had been attempting to do a number on me, trying to make me believe it was too difficult to detox off methadone. This was, however, something I refused to accept. Positive thinking helped me get through any discomfort I experienced.

My opinion on this matter has not changed since this time. The mind controls how a person feels in any given situation. If you can control your mind, you give yourself a fighting chance of ridding yourself of the 'green death' (methadone) for good.

## **7. Structured day care programme**

I started the SEA structured day programme in March 2010. This programme, which had three phases, was designed to help a person learn to cope with daily life without substances. I was put directly into Phase 2—which involved activities five mornings a week—as I had already done the Blue and Green group. The main aims of Phase 2 were to change your thinking, enhance your self-esteem, and help you identify any triggers that might threaten your recovery.

I attended group sessions each weekday morning for two hours. We were offered a choice of two groups, one which was based on the 12-step fellowship approach, whilst the other was a non-12-step behaviour and motivation group. I also had a weekly one-to-one session to help me focus my recovery journey down the path I wanted and help me monitor my progress. I found all of this very useful. Moreover, the programme helped me get up in the morning knowing that I would be doing positive things during at least part of the day.

The time immediately after I stopped my methadone was an emotionally charged period for me. I found myself getting extremely emotional over things that shouldn't have affected me so strongly, particularly as they did not necessarily concern me. Stories of other people's anguish and pain often brought me to tears.

These emotional outbursts confused me greatly as they were new to me. For years, I had dealt with (suppressed) my emotions by taking illegal and legal drugs, and had never really learnt how to cope with emotional situations without being medicated. I can now cope emotionally without substances, which has made me even more grateful for SEA, the staff, and all the recovering people who helped each other.

During my time in SEA, one question kept resonating through my mind: 'Why?' 'Why, when I had come from a settled upbringing and relatively good schooling, did I choose the path I chose?' You might wonder why I was so fixated on this question. All I can say is that it really bugged me, and I needed an answer. I finally gained some insights from one of the SEA counsellors and this initiated a long and hard personal process of acceptance.

As I've said earlier, I grew up in a safe and secure home environment. However, after discussions with my counsellor, I started to reflect more upon my life as a youngster. I realised that it was a time during which I was unsure as to how to cope with my emotions. My counsellor helped me realise that I had not only learnt to avoid showing my emotions before I started using drugs, but I later discovered that drugs helped dull my emotions and therefore I did not have to deal with them. I think I am naturally an emotional person, but when I was young, I just wanted to suppress my emotions by any means possible. This new understanding gave me answers to the 'Why' question and I felt very much better about myself.

## **8. Attending college and graduations**

I completed Phase 2 of the SEA programme after six months and began Phase 3, Making Your Recovery Last, which involved group sessions three afternoons a week. However, I had to build in some flexibility into my Recovery plan as I needed some time off to attend college. I had first started thinking of doing a Social



Care course when I was in rehab at Phoenix. However, as things fell apart after I left Phoenix, I never followed up on these thoughts. I was now keen to study.

I started a full-time one-year NQ in Social Care in August 2010. It was a bit scary at first, going back to studying after all these years, but I quickly started to feel quite comfortable and slipped into student life. I made friends with several people who had previously experienced drug problems and we supported each other. In addition, the head lecturer was very supportive—he knew about my drug-using past, as I had made this clear when he interviewed me about joining the course.

We had a rolling assessment throughout the year, so I would get stressed at times as I had never previously had to meet targets in this way. Moreover, in the past I had always used drugs to help me deal with stress. Not anymore! What helped me apart from my friends was, ironically, the fact that I was learning about stress management in the course I was doing! Overall, I really enjoyed the whole year of this course.

I stopped being on unemployment benefit at the beginning of my NQ, as I received a bursary from the college and a student loan. Breaking away from state support had a strong positive impact on me. Benefits were associated with my past drug use—they were always there when I was a user—so everything associated with them (e.g. having to sign on each week) was conditioned to my using and my using-state of mind. When I stopped using drugs, the only thing left of my past life was my unemployment benefit, so I really felt that I was starting a new chapter of my life when they stopped.

At this stage of my life, I felt that I wanted to work in the recovery field. I loved interacting with people and felt that I had a lot to give.

I finished the SEA programme in March 2011 and had now been drug-free for a year. On Graduation day, I felt very proud of myself and with what I had achieved. All my friends who knew what I had gone through were there at the Graduation Ceremony. A year earlier, I would never have talked to a room full of people. But now, I felt comfortable talking with, and thanking, people.

I began studying for an HNC in Social Care in September 2011, a course that I did not enjoy as much. I found it harder, the workload was much greater, and the standard that we were expected to attain was higher. Moreover, I felt that I'd been at college long enough now and I wanted to get out there and work. In saying all this, I must emphasise that I did enjoy the course, just not as much as the previous one. Importantly, I found I could now deal with stress easier due to all I had learnt through my studying.

## **9. Volunteering and working in the recovery field**

Early in 2011, a group of us, including my good friends Eamon Doherty, Gibby and Desie, started to brainstorm how we could create a recovery conducive environment in Glasgow that would draw in people who were looking to move away from their substance use and would facilitate their recovery. We came up with the idea of RAFT (Recovery Aftercare, Friday Time).

RAFT is an event held every Friday night from 17.00 - 21.30 that brings together people in recovery (and others) to engage in a variety of activities, including AA/NA, SMART Recovery and Woman's Group meetings, acupuncture and aromatherapy, live music and a café. I was made the inaugural Treasurer of RAFT and Eamon the Chairperson. Desie and Gibby were Committee members.

It was amazing to see RAFT develop over time and the number of people increasing. I don't know if I can express how strongly I feel about seeing so many people who are recovering from problems which have plagued their lives, often for many years, coming together, being happy, and supporting each other. It is a very, very special feeling.

RAFT is special for various other reasons. It shows that a simple event can break down barriers between individuals and groups, barriers that exist within recovery, across different peer support groups, and even within such groups. These barriers just seemed to magically disappear on a Friday night at RAFT.

Mind you, I often saw those barriers come straight back up on Saturday morning, which was so disappointing. At times, it seemed that people are not learning. However, I accept that you cannot change everything all in one go. For now, it is great to see such a simple concept as RAFT bring people together and give happiness to so many people.

In July 2011, I met David Clark, Director of Wired In and developer of the Wired In To Recovery online community, who was visiting from Perth in Australia. I showed him around and explained to him what we were trying to achieve with RAFT. Our meeting was the beginning of a connection that would lead me to writing this Recovery Story with David.

In September 2011, RAFT was the recipient of the first UK Recovery Champion Award (Organisation), an award made by the Recovery Academy and Wired In To Recovery. We were not able to pick up our award at the annual Recovery Academy conference, but Michaela Jones came up to Glasgow to make a presentation.

I was chosen to receive a hand-made piece of glass, one of only two in the country, and had to make a presentation speech. This was a nerve-racking experience, although I enjoyed doing it. As the presentation was made, I sensed a strong feeling of pride from the volunteers and attendees of RAFT for being a part of something special.

Hundreds of people came to our first annual RAFT event and the feedback was absolutely amazing. I got the same positive feelings at this event that I got with RAFT each week, but multiplied by about a thousand. I also felt like this after the Annual UK Recovery March in Glasgow in 2010.

During the early stages of RAFT, I was introduced to the Wired In To Recovery online community. I started blogging about RAFT on Wired In To Recovery every week, either at the event or at home straight afterwards. I immediately found this blogging to be a great way to air my feelings and thoughts in a safe

manner, whilst receiving thoughtful comments from people around Scotland and further afield. This was all extremely helpful to me.

Reading the blogs on Wired In To Recovery brought home to me just how extensive the overall problem of substance misuse is. I began to realise more and more that society cannot continue to sweep this problem under the proverbial carpet.

In June 2012, I started working with Wired In and the Scottish Recovery Consortium on a new collaborative project supported by the Scottish Government. I was one of three initial members of the Wired In Away Team, along with Eamon and Donna Campbell. We visited various Scottish communities, building relationships with existing recovery activists, identifying and mapping recovery assets, and building a picture of local aspirations.

This project intended to link recovery activists around the country, get them engaged on Wired In To Recovery, and invite them to a Recovery College where they would learn new skills, including how to protect their and others' recovery, and how to disseminate recovery messages and stories. Witnessing people engaging in the College taught me that there is a real thirst for recovery out there. The Recovery College also played an important part in helping me maintain my recovery.

I was so excited whilst working on this project. It was pioneering stuff and I was convinced that such a project would eventually help reduce the substance use problem in Scotland. This was the sort of work I really wished to continue. However, I knew that the project was only short-term—the funding wasn't there to continue despite the importance of what we were doing—and I would have to move on.

I celebrated my second anniversary of being clean in March 2012, an event which stands out from everything else. The anniversary was significant because it represented the longest period of clean time I had accumulated since starting on my recovery journey back in 2006.

#### **10. Iain Donald Today (2013)**

My current prospects have NEVER looked better, EVER. My past is nothing more than a painful memory, something I will never forget, but something I don't need to remind myself about.

I'm currently working on the Addiction Worker Training Project run by the Scottish Drug Forum (SDF). This initiative supports, trains, and prepares individuals with a history of problematic drug and alcohol use to work in Social Care. It involves in-work placements and formal learning in the SDF offices. The latter relates to an SVQ (Scottish Vocational Qualification) Level 2, although I've already covered a lot of the course in my previous college work.

I don't wish to sound ungrateful though, and I have to say that it's good to at long last to be receiving a wage! I still attend RAFT every Friday night, along with my good friend Eamon. However, I think I've volunteered for long enough now (over 18 months), and with other things happening in my life I will be moving on.

I joined a local rock-climbing club when I started college and used to go out climbing every Wednesday night during the summer if the weather was okay. I had always wanted to try climbing and one day just felt I should just give it a go. I purchased my gear from the £300 I was awarded by the Make It Happen fund—this fund is run by Turning Point to help make people's dreams come true.

Although I've stopped climbing now, the experience illustrated to me the importance of having a hobby, as well getting off your behind and doing what you've always wanted to do. Climbing also gave me a scary buzz when I was hanging there by my fingertips. Even with a rope on, I used to get a natural high.

I've gone back to playing the guitar, eight or so years after first learning to play in prison. I'm now paying for lessons and my playing is improving as each week goes by; this has now taken the place of my rock climbing.

It's funny, but during the early period of my clean time I wasn't successful with relationships. However, I then heard a quote on TV that I identified with completely, and it stuck in my head during this time:

'Then must you speak of one who lov'd not wisely but too well.' (Shakespeare's Othello: Act 5, Scene 2).

I first met Nadene on an online dating site in October 2011. We talked online for a month or so before arranging to meet. The trip to her house in Denny was very nerve-racking, as I was still unsure about myself and scared of being rejected. However, all went well and we soon started meeting every weekend, either at her house or in Glasgow.

Our relationship continued from strength to strength and one day Nadene informed me that she was expecting our baby in January 2013. Although I was initially in a state of shock, I was over the moon! Over the months, my relationship with Nadene's first child William, who is seven years old, has been getting stronger and stronger. We're now living as a family, and my life is exactly where I want it to be and heading in the direction I have always wanted. I could not be happier in my personal life.

If I could go back in my life, would I do anything differently? I have asked myself this question a few times and the answer remains the same, 'No!'

Don't get me wrong. I regret to a certain degree ever getting involved with drugs, but involving myself with drugs and battling the chaos that goes along with that lifestyle has made me who I am. And I am really happy with who I am. I am Iain Donald.

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## **Seven Years On (July 2020):**

### **1. A sad break-up**

When I finished writing my Story in 2013 I was thriving in my personal and work life. I knew what I wanted most in my life was to be in a strong family unit—father, mother and children living together happily. My son Harvey was born on the 4th of January 2013, and Nadene and I were married about a year later. I now had what I wanted and this was a key foundation underlying my recovery.

However, my marriage to Nadene started to slowly deteriorate after about two years and continued to breakdown over the following two years. A lot of factors contributed to this marriage breakdown and we both had to accept some responsibility for this.

During this time, I became disillusioned with my job at Signpost Recovery in Alloa. The organisation created few recovery-oriented activities and no group work structure for the people with substance use and related problems who had asked for help. To be fair to the organisation, it was a difficult situation, as we were working in a number of small communities and much of our work had to be of an outreach nature. Anyway, I became despondent and lost my sense of purpose. I wanted to help people and felt we were not doing that.

I took a simple van delivery job, thinking that I would not now take my work-related stresses home with me. I would also be able to spend more quality time with my family. Unfortunately, the job change had the opposite effect, as I ended up working very long hours. I would often leave before the children had got up and returned after they had gone to bed. I had no job satisfaction and still no feeling that I was helping people. I took another delivery driver job, but the situation was the same.

Eventually, Nadene asked me to move out of the marital home. I rented a small place a couple of miles away from her house. I saw Harvey every weekend. However, I felt lonely and isolated, left alone with lots of negative thoughts. I started to question my belief in love and even my own recovery. I was not in a good space.

I have to confess that at this stage, my four-year son was keeping me sane and clean. A primary reason why I didn't go backwards and relapse was that I knew Harvey was coming every weekend. If I used, I would lose him. I could not let him down. The little boy became a driving force in my life and remains so today.

At this stage, I wanted Nadene back and was jealous if I saw her with another man. I didn't want someone moving in on my family. At times, Nadene wasn't honest with me with what was going on, which made things worse. She once told me that a male I saw entering the house was the gasman. I started to worry when I received texts from Nadene's phone (not sent by her), the first reading, 'I am sitting up here in your house with your wife.'

Later, I received a text saying, 'That's a good-looking boy you've got. Is he for sale?' More alarm bells really started ringing when the fellow started physically abusing Nadene. 'Would my son be next?', I asked myself. Eventually, their relationship ended, not before the man had barricaded himself in Nadene's house.

Nadene and I decided to get back together again, much to my joy, and I moved back into the marital home. We went on a holiday together with the children and Nadene's mum. Three weeks later, I received a text from Nadene saying that she did not love me anymore and wanted me to move out. I was devastated. I should point out that Nadene and I now have an excellent relationship and I am very grateful to her for helping ensure that the relationship between Harvey and I remains close.

I couldn't have been in a lonelier place, just outside Falkirk, with no family or support network around. The only people I knew were Nadene's friends.

## **2. A new loving partner**

I therefore reached out to my good friend Brian in Glasgow. We had done the HNC in Social Care together during the earlier stages of our recovery. I had lost touch with a lot of other people in Glasgow since my move to Denny, so Brian was the only person to whom I felt I could reach out. I spent six weeks sleeping on his couch and we supported each other during that time. Brian was the full-time carer for his young daughter, and was having trouble with his ex-partner. Harvey came to stay a few times and we all got on well.

I had to turn to Mum and Dad again for money to help me rent a new apartment in Glasgow. I then landed a new job with Addaction as a Recovery Worker, working in the North East part of Glasgow. This was a new setup and there was no groupwork structure. I developed three different 12-week groupwork programmes—recovery and life skills, CBT (Cognitive Behaviour Therapy) and 'Keep the Head' (formerly called anger management). These programmes are still running, or at least they were before the Covid-19 closedown.

I met my current partner Samantha (Samie) through a dating website and we've been together nearly three years. We live together and are engaged to be married, although no date for the big day has been set. I had been very worried about getting involved again after the breakup of my marriage, but Samie and I just clicked immediately. We have the same sense of humour and we make each other laugh. We get on so well.

I was initially worried about bringing someone into Harvey's life who might walk out after a few months. Although Samie knew about Harvey, I didn't allow her to meet him until about a year into our relationship. All my doubts melted away as soon as Samie and Harvey got together. Samie gets on well with both Harvey and Nadene.

## **3. The ups and downs of life**

Over time, my work has created an increasing amount of stress and a good deal of doubt in my head. I've even been questioning my own capabilities lately, which is not like the positive-thinking Iain Donald who started working in the field. I've applied for a few jobs in the organisation, one as a Team Leader and another

as a Community Development Officer. I was unsuccessful with two of these applications and the third job just seemed to 'disappear'.

I became despondent after these rejections because I had been trying to advance my career. I've put a lot back into the field, but I honestly feel that I am no further advanced in my career development than I was when I left College. I have pretty much the same job as I had in my first position all those years ago.

I've now started to periodically question whether I am going to be able to develop my career in the recovery field any further. Moreover, things occasionally start to fester in my mind, and words are sometimes treated as personal attacks, when they are not. I've reached a stage like I felt just before leaving Signpost Recovery in 2015.

At times, I start to feel that I am putting my recovery at risk because of my negative thought patterns. That is certainly not a good feeling! Throughout my recovery, I've mostly been a very positive person, but I seem to be changing. Instead of saying, 'It's the organisation's loss' when I don't get a job', as I used to say, I'm now interpreting the rejection as reflecting something negative about me. This negative thinking is helping drag me down at times.

Things have become worse during the Covid-19 situation. I'm currently in lockdown for three months, due to a recent operation to which I will refer later. I'm having to work in a different way to usual, a way that is completely foreign to me. In normal circumstances when I am taking groups or having one-on-one sessions, I am in the same room with the person (people) I am trying to help. I am able to 'read' their whole-body language and this is an important element of our therapeutic relationship. I find that I don't get the same information and the same emotional attachment when I am working with a person, or people, using a computer. I'm finding it hard to adjust to this way of working, although I know the situation is only temporary.

Other Addaction staff in our office, who I think are brilliant and with whom I get on well, are involved in a range of helping activities, including getting supplies to people who can't get out because of Covid. I am not allowed to be involved in such activities because of my personal lockdown, which is leaving me feeling rather detached from the main body of our workforce.

I hope that this section of my Story does not sound too down-beat. Life is always full of ups and downs, and I just wanted to share what I'm going through on the negative side of my work-life. I'm aware that my thought patterns are similar to those I had in my last recovery-related job and I don't want a repeat of what happened then. So, I am questioning my questioning, so to speak. Does that make sense? Anyway, at least these reflections are going on at a time when I have such a wonderful home life, which makes things easier.

I was diagnosed with Crohn's disease when I was sixteen or seventeen years old. Most of my life I've had no real problem with the disease. I am supposed to take medication, but I stopped doing so during my using years, as I had more important drugs to take!

I started getting stomach pains at the beginning of 2019 and began taking medication again. However, I was having to miss work at times because the pain continued. Eventually, I got taken into Glasgow Royal Infirmary for a scan and found out that a 38cm section of my small intestine was damaged from years ago. This section of intestine was scarred and so narrow it was not allowing any food to exit. The backing up of the food was causing the pain.

I had an operation on the 6 January this year and was off work until mid-March. Soon after, the Covid-19 situation hit. Maybe this long period of disruption to my work life has contributed to my current negative feelings. I've had no pain after the operation, so hopefully the blockage is sorted. However, I'm still feeling tired and de-motivated at the moment.

My oldest son Shaun, who is now 20 years old, lives with his mum Karen just outside Aberdeen. As I described in my main story, I stopped seeing him when he was two years old. However, I used to send cards for his birthday and Christmas to Karen's twin sister who passed them onto him. When Shaun was 14, his mother asked if I would like to meet him. I agreed and we decided to meet at my parent's. I was very apprehensive about the meeting, as I am sure he was. When we did meet, I was struck by the fact that he used the same sarcastic humour as I do; it was really uncanny.

We've continued to meet over time and our relationship has slowly developed. I spend time with him when I am back in Aberdeen and he visits Samie and I in Glasgow from time to time. He also came on a couple of caravan holidays with Nadene, Harvey and myself. I am very conscious of helping Shaun develop a relationship with Harvey, as they are half-brothers, and get together with him when I take Harvey to see my parents.

Shaun has experienced some emotional problems and I worry that my abandoning him has damaged the laddie. At times, I feel that he wouldn't have the problems he has today if I'd been in his life more. He was the first person in my life who really needed me. I have my parents and my sister, but they don't need me. Shaun needed me, as I am in his Dad. I chose to go off and party and to take drugs, over him, a human being, my son. I have to take responsibility for that.

At the same time, I am aware that there have been other problems in his family life—Karen and her ex-husband broke up and there was a good deal of acrimony, which may well have impacted upon Shaun. I hope that Shaun learns to deal with his problems and that my relationship with him strengthens over time.

#### **4. Looking back**

When I look back, I think there were two best times in my work-life. The first time was before I started using drugs, when I was working on my friend's father's farm. If I had the opportunity to go back to that job today, I'd go and do it in a heartbeat. I like the idea of being way out there in the middle of nowhere, just doing my job with no one looking over my shoulder. Mind you, if this situation ever arose, I would also want to do some voluntary work.



The second time I really enjoyed myself at work was when I was volunteering with RAFT in 2011 to early 2013. This work was enjoyable and rewarding, and I believed that I was helping change something very important. People from all walks of life who had experienced addiction and related problems were coming together under one roof, in a safe environment, and having a good time, a relaxed time. They were away from the madness of the drug-using world.

Every week at RAFT was very busy, and every week I got a real buzz. I didn't have to be there; I chose to be there. I was repeatedly being told that I was doing a good job and all of this helped cement my recovery. I've been chasing that buzz ever since that time. I'm not sure if I will ever experience that buzz again, but I know that I will always feel very proud of what I did at RAFT.

RAFT was the pioneering foundation of the current Recovery Café scene in Glasgow today. There are now Recovery cafes all over the city, places where people with addiction and related problems can come to chill out and be safe, get involved in Fellowship or other group meetings, and engage in various social activities. These Recovery Cafes are contributing significantly to a strong recovery environment in Glasgow.

I'd like to say a few words about my great friend Eamon Doherty. Eamon and I first met at SEA in Glasgow in early 2010. We used to play football together in the Gorbals Leisure Centre every Tuesday. There were four of us who became close friends and later helped create RAFT and formed part of the management team—Eamon, Gibby, Desie and I.

Eamon and I later worked together as part of the Wired In Away Team that was working in Scottish communities to facilitate the creation of recovery conducive environments. Eamon helped me in my own recovery, as I was still at an early stage and he had a wealth of experience. We just bonded, even though he was a Celtic fan and me an Aberdeen fan, and we had really good banter. He became Harvey's godfather. However, we then drifted apart when I moved away from Glasgow.

On Monday, 14th May 2018, Eamon was found dead in his apartment. His death is quite raw for me, even to this day. We were so close for a number of years. His passing was the first time someone significant in my life had died since I had stopped using drugs. In the past, I had used drugs to deal with the upset of someone close dying. Now I had to face the raw feelings of grief. And of guilt, that I had allowed us to drift apart. I carry that feeling of guilt still today.

Eamon was such a well-known person, well-liked by so many people. He did so much for the Recovery Movement in Glasgow and further afield in Scotland. It was bad enough that Eamon had passed away, but the fact he had done so in his flat ALONE made it ten times worse. Recovery is all about Connection—it is so poignant and ironic that Eamon died alone, Disconnected. At his funeral I could not stop myself crying.

In the past, I used drugs to deal with the negative elements in my life, as I viewed them then, and with my emotions.

## **5. Today and beyond**

Today, over ten years since I last used drugs, my life is so much more positive and I am so much stronger than I have been at any time. I have a loving relationship with a wonderful woman, three boys who I care for deeply, my loving parents, sister and her family, and a number of good friends. I am very content with my personal life and I continue helping people in my job in the recovery field. It is over ten years since I used an illicit drug and I now consider myself recovered. At the same time, I am aware what might potentially happen if I lose my way in life.