

## Contents

### Intro

Chapter One - The first time inside.

Chapter Two - Back to school.

Chapter Three - I don't need this shit anymore.

Chapter Four - Gartnavel adolescent unit

Chapter Five - Gartnavel part two

Chapter Six - An adult in an adult ward

Chapter Seven – The two-year break

Chapter 8- Caged voluntary

Chapter Nine - On the right direction home

Chapter Ten - Football brought me back

Chapter Eleven – Proper routine

Chapter Twelve – The dream

Chapter Thirteen – Starting a family

Chapter Fourteen – The time to start writing

Chapter Fifteen – My thoughts

Chapter Sixteen – Doctor's notes

Chapter Seventeen – Family and friend's thoughts

Chapter Eighteen – The St Andrews day interview 2017

Chapter Nineteen – Lockdown tactics

Chapter Twenty – Social media

Chapter Twenty one – Lost the dressing room

Chapter Twenty two – 20 year anniversary

Chapter Twenty three – Fate gave me another chance

Chapter Twenty four – Bipolar scotland

Chapter Twenty five - The penultimate hope

The final chapter

Post script – My rock

## Intro

Five guys were forcing me face down against the rugged carpet. I could see grit and stains in each groove. The veins in my neck were popping from all the shouting I was doing. I could feel the needle injecting me in the ass with drugs to sedate me. All whilst screaming for help!

I watched as my dad broke down and said “it would be ok” as I was pushed through the double doors, then into the room that I would call home.

I was a Sixteen-year-old skinny boy who had never been in a serious fight in his life.

This was the beginning of the fight against my own mind.

Monday the 4th of February 2002 my life came to an abrupt halt.

Throughout this book I will take you on a journey of my bipolar (manic depression as first diagnosed) experience.

I will explain what it was like at each end of the bipolar spectrum during my most difficult episodes. I will try and portray my state of mind at the time was and try and paint you a picture of what it was like living through it.

I have managed to build this story from obtaining doctors notes and recalling my own memories. Playing music from those years seems to trigger memories and I found that useful for what you are about to read.

### *My character pre diagnosis*

Growing up in the years before 2002 I was always shy at school. It wasn't like I was stuck for words. It was like a restrained shyness. I just never had the confidence to project all my thoughts to people I didn't know very well.

It would be a different case with my close friends and family. I was more relaxed with them. I had confidence around them and wasn't afraid to express myself.

### **The first episode.**

The weeks leading up to that point in my life were tough. My first proper relationship had broken down. My friends were starting to drift away from me, and I was putting too much pressure on myself to do well in school.

The trigger point happened when I stayed up all night lifting weights. My grandma was watching over me and couldn't hear the constant crashing of the weights colliding against the floor and the bench. I was relentless with the weights. I seemed to have bags of energy stored up to keep going. The truth was that my mind was racing, and it didn't give me time to focus on how tired I was. For that whole night I didn't have one ounce of sleep.

While I was working out, thoughts were playing over and over in my mind that I had to look great to be better than anyone

else. I had to make myself look the best shape possible. Nobody was going to come close to me.

By the time Monday morning came I was so pumped up. It felt like my eyeballs were bursting out.

It was a crisp and fresh winters morning. But inside my thoughts were going at 100mph. One thought led to an explosion of other thoughts each going in different directions.

I got myself into an argument with one of the boys I had always respected. He was captain of my primary school football team, popular and always had that great air of self-confidence about him.

My cousin had heard the commotion that I had created around myself. She quickly took my arm and lead me away from the situation.

As I walked past a teacher at the RE base, she claimed that I must be on steroids!

The head teacher at the time was Mr King. He handled my situation brilliantly. He advised me that I had no option but to go home. He stated that other teachers had noticed a drastic change in me. I told him I was just trying show my true self. Maybe I was trying to be someone I always wanted to be.

Mr King drove me home and I could tell he was worried. His hands lock firmly on the steering wheel, looking straight at the road ahead.

My parents had been informed of what had happened at school.

At the house my mum and dad were waiting for me. I was standing in the living room of the family home when I switched on teletext (for those of a younger age, it's basically Sky sports news but just text on a black screen). I would always look at this first thing in the morning. It was routine, just like reading the morning paper or engaging in social media feeds today.

I went straight to the sports section.

I noticed the top header of Hammy ski champion. That was my nickname at school, which has never left me. What did that mean?! Was it my first psychotic thought?

I started to trip out a bit, thinking that people were talking about me. I asked my mum to take a picture of that header on the tv just to prove I wasn't dreaming.

My parents immediately took me to my local doctors.

My dad had some words with my GP while I was sat in the waiting area. Then, just as soon as we had arrived, we left, and I jumped into my dad's car again.

I pleaded with my dad just to take me back to school.

We set off and started to drive towards Paisley. I had thought that he was simply taking me to his work for me to calm down.

We drove past Kersland, my sister's old school and on to a part of Paisley that I was unfamiliar with.

As soon as I saw the sign "Dykebar hospital" that's when I really started to panic.

I had heard about that place in the school playground. “All the nutters went there”

This could not be happening to me. I wasn't crazy and I wasn't nuts!

We walked into the old acute building. Ward one B to be exact. The building was very dated and looked like something out of a horror film.

The long corridor with rooms on either side lead to a fire exit at the end. This fire exit door at the very end had a glass panel where the sun would rise, giving the look of some light at the end of the tunnel.

Unfortunately, the ward felt dark, and my lights were about to be switched off.

To begin with I was left outside waiting at one of the small interview rooms. These were situated just at the main entrance of the ward. I was stuck waiting for my dad to finish speaking with a doctor.

This seemed like an eternity, waiting on someone else to decide on my fate without me even being involved.

This set the standard, the standard of my involvement of my OWN mental health in the years to come. Doctors keeping me out of the loop. Only communicating with my parents with stuff that really mattered.

How do you think that effects someone's state of mind being shut out? Not being allowed to give my version of the events or participate in the plans for my development.

I was called into a room with my dad. The doctor placed a cup of water on the table along with a blue pill in a shot glass next to it. The doctor advised me to take the pill. I was told it would help. Help what?!

I didn't believe in taking pills to get better. I would rather ride out any illness and fight it on my own without any intervention. Who knows what could be in that pill anyway?

I thought back to an old film I had seen. The matrix. The main character Neo was offered the red or blue pill. One of the pills would take him out his reality.

I drank the water and used the bottom of the empty glass to smash the pill up on the table. Not a chance in hell was I taking that.

It's at that point I was given my marching orders. The heavies appeared, and the double doors to the ward opened to close off my world as I knew it.

## Chapter one - The first time inside.

*“Walking down corridors like the walking dead,  
No energy to break bread or even lift my head.  
With my mind in a daze, all that I see is haze,  
I am struggling to face these days,  
But they are telling me it’s just a faze.”*

Rewind to the moment I was brought inside that room kicking and screaming from my lungs.

The dust had settled, and the medication had kicked in. I was alone in that tiny room. Suddenly my loud outburst was drowned out by other patients.

After all this was an adult ward and there were plenty of others who could shout louder and longer than me.

As I sat on the bed and looked out of the window, I could hear screams and moans coming from other rooms. A guy was pacing the corridor with his steel toe capped boots on. His stomps smashed against the floor with each over exaggerated step.

I was terrified, my door wasn’t locked, and I thought at any moment someone was going to burst through that door. (not knowing it would be a member of staff)

After a few hours (which seemed like days) went by I was asked by one of the nurses if I wanted toast. She took me down and sat me in a chair at the nurse's desk. A few of the older nurses gasped when they saw how young I was.

I will always remember a nurse named Sandra looking deep into my eyes and saying, "we won't keep you here any longer than we need to".

After getting toast I was free to walk about the ward and mix in the different lounge areas. One room was a smoking room, this was the place the older inpatients spent most of their time.

As soon as the door opened to that room, you could see a cloud of smoking circling around the ceiling. Together with the unpleasant smell of smoke it had a damp smell to go with it.

It was in this room the next day where I had my first "major" psychotic thought. Rangers were playing Celtic and it was live on tv. I thought I was able to control the players movement in my mind, much like playing a FIFA computer game with a controller. I genuinely felt I made Bert Konterman's score that wonder goal.

Later, in that first night as darkness crept in, I made my mind up to get out. A button at the end of the corridor marked "exit" this was the obvious escape.

I pressed the button and pushed the door open. I was immediately out at the main entrance. I pushed the final door open and I was out, but I had no idea where to go. I ran into the field directly behind the main building to keep out of sight. However, I was closely followed by the on-rushing staff.

At this point I was still on a high and my energy levels were still good, even after the sedation injections. I sidestepped a few lunges and danced through other advances. But, in the end I was rugby tackled to the ground and then lifted by my arms and legs back into my room.

This attempted escape must have been rubber stamped in my notes for everyone to see.

I was prescribed a drug called olanzapine and was told that I must take this. I would get home sooner by taking it they said. Anything to get out of this hell hole I thought.

This medication was far too easy to go down as it melted on my tongue.

The side effects were like nothing I had experienced in my short life up to then. I was constantly hungry, and my thought process was clouded.

I found it hard to focus or keep my eyes away from looking at the floor.

My vision was distorted, much like tunnel vision and I started to feel tired all the time. My balance was all over the place. I felt like I was on a boat at sea when I stood up.

I guess my tiredness was a mixture of the medication kicking in and the start of the come down from the high of the manic episode. This was also coupled with the lack of sleep and of course my mind working on an emergency back-up mode after being burned out.

It's not hard to see the reasons why I started to balloon up. The amount of food being consumed together with the lack of movement was starting to show.

One of the main memories I have from that period was when my sister with down syndrome visited. I gave her a drink from my sink, a mixture of cold and hot water. This was “a cure” for her, a fucking cure for down syndrome, what the hell was I thinking of??!

Throughout my life I had become very protective of my sister. Growing up she was just my sister and I looked at her no different to my other sister.

However, when I was out of the house with her, I could see how most people would react to her. The looks she got would break me every time. On a few occasions, after some sniggering out loud by other people, I would want to go and fight with whoever did it. I would never want to show my sister how it affected me, so I would just walk on and leave it.

The times I walked on I would always regret I didn't say anything. Half of the time those people would have just been plain ignorant to her condition. The others would just be showing off to their friends.

One day I was getting the bus to school. This bus stopped outside my house at the same time my sisters bus picked her up.

A few boys at the back of the bus started to mock her. I kept my mouth shut throughout the whole 2-mile journey but when I was in the school grounds, I couldn't hold back any longer. I approached the main instigator of the chat and called him out straight away. I gave him the look where I would have

immediately knocked him to the floor. The guy backed down and he never behaved like that in my presence again.

The other main memory which still bugs me was one of the male staff members.

He was a heavy-set guy with short fair hair untidy facial hair. On one occasion as I was looking out my door window when he walked past. I got a fright and launched my bottle of Lucozade into the air. He then barged in, griped my thumb in a lock behind my back and started to twist. I felt some excruciating pain and tried to get loose. In doing so he held on tighter and pushed his knees on my legs. I was sure my wrist had snapped.

Looking back, not at one point did he call for any assistance. And I knew he liked the pain he inflicted on me. The look on his face was pure evil.

If I was his build and age would he have done that to me?  
Bully springs to mind.

Cutting back to the story, during this episode I was hypomanic. My confidence was sky high. It's the best feeling in the world. This huge self believe is something that I craved to get back ever since.

I could turn my hand to anything, my great passion of football was now the simplest thing I could do. I could see the game so simply. I knew exactly how I could achieve my dream. I am naturally two footed. I was going to be a legend. I appeared to have this great self-belief in myself. I believed I could excel on the world stage.

One of the main tell-tale signs of bipolar is grandiose ideas or flights of fancy. Was my idea of becoming a professional footballer a grandiose idea? Was it so impossible to achieve? Or was this the correct frame of mind to become an elite player?

**Monday 4th February 2002-**

**Wednesday 27th February 2002**

**23 days in total spent in hospital**

**Age 16**

**Medication: Olanzapine**

*I feel the rain on my skin, as I stand on the inside looking out.*

*This pain hurts my brain when the tablets kick out.*

*The envy of passers-by freely walking about.*

*Time ticking by with my feet nowhere near the ground.*

*I am lost in here, and I'm never going to be found.*

*Those profound thoughts slowly being downed.*

*Another dose of medication with a shot glass on the tray. My thoughts barely at bay.*

*Again...*

*Again...*

*Again, my heart's slipping away.*

*Will someone take me away.*

*I've had too much. Please don't make me stay.*

*Medication again... when will this stop.*

*The hour hand has jumped and fallen from the clock.*

*When will this stop?*

## **Chapter two- Back to school.**

Words can't describe how nervous I was on the first morning going back into school. I knew I had to get the first day out the way.

After spending 23 days in a mental hospital, I wanted to forget that experience very quickly and get back to "normal" life.

I knew that someone would have said where I had been and by now everyone would have known. These things spread like wildfire especially at schools.

My biggest fear was coming back to school. With all the stigma attached to someone who was "Mental".

I was worried what people would think of me. Would my school friends treat me differently than before?

Would they mock and goad me for being unwell?

The moment arrived for me to walk through the school gates.

The walk up-hill seemed extremely daunting going up to the school building. This was a huge step for me. Whilst walking along the tech corridor I saw pupils double taking at me. Without saying a word, I made my way through to the back area where I would usually meet my friends before registration.

Before I could catch a breath, the bell rang to go to reggie.

That was me. I was back and I just tried to keep my head down.

But at that point I was over self-stigmatising what people thought of me.

At the time, I was the type of person who cared what people thought of me, maybe that's why I was shy around people that I didn't know very well. I wouldn't want to make a fool of myself and be ridiculed for it.

Looking back, I shouldn't have cared what others thought. But as a kid in that situation this was going to be harder than facing up to the illness itself.

Outside of school I was always at my happiest with the group of friends I had whilst growing up. I wasn't shy around them, and I never thought about what they would think of me.

#### *Self-pressure and external*

I always thought I should aim for the best academically.

Generally, at the time I was more practical than academical.

My sister had smashed her exams and had done really well at university.

My older cousin Ally had also done well, and he was someone I really admired growing up.

Ally is the son of my mum's sister. The weekends I spent with him playing championship manager and watching Italian football at its peak helped with my love affair with football. It was one of his birthday football parties I remember playing my first game of 5 v 5.

#### *Rory's raps song*

One of my friends was experimenting with his music and had written a rap that included me in it.

I still remember the words to this day. Even-though I only heard it once. I remember those lines clearly.

*“mate locked in Dykebar, man I’m feeling you.*

*Fell my presence so called adolescent*

*Manic depressive, teach yourself some happy lessons”*

What would my happy lessons be?

### **Chapter Three - I don't need this shit anymore.**

School had settled down and everything seemed to be back to 'normal'.

Naturally, in my eyes that if everything was back to normal, medication wouldn't be needed.

I moved bipolar to the back of my mind. So far back it was almost out of sight.

In addition, I hated what I saw in the mirror. The boy staring back wasn't me. My belly was getting huge. I blamed it on the medication.

This was the moment I started to self-medicate.

To start, I would skip a night's dose, this followed by two nights until I had missed a full week.

I was starting to feel less tired. I spent less time in bed. When late nights started to coincide by the early rises, and I felt like my thoughts started to run clearer.

In truth I was losing control. The problem with mania in bipolar is when it starts to grip, it's the best feeling in the world to experience. I never stopped to think why I was feeling so good. Why would anyone question having an elated state of mind?

Family close to me would start to see the subtle differences in me that I wouldn't have recognised, and in all honesty wouldn't want to. I would have given anything to feel like that again, the on top of the world feeling was creeping back in and I was loving it.



## Chapter Four - Gartnavel adolescent unit

### The 2nd episode

The build up to this episode may have seemed like any other teenage problem, rebelling against my parent's authority.

However, the moment I was locked in my house unable to leave I knew this would become a tipping point.

Being forced to remain in one place never sits well with me. It gives me cabin fever, and with bipolar those feelings become intensified.

An ambulance was called when my Dad again asked doctors for help. I started to literally bounce off walls to get out of his house.

Instead of going in the ambulance when it arrived. I asked my mum to take me. Driving her Peugeot 206, which I would later share and modify her stereo.

Instead of spending time in Dykebar I was transferred to Gartnavel adolescent unit as they finally had a spare bed for me.

Not for one moment could I have imagined the length of time I would need to spend in there.

The T-shaped unit was locked with a key from the inside, instead of those very helpful buttons marked with an exit.

No escaping this place. Unless it's out a broken window or through the unlocked doors.

The rubber stamp from my notes must have been in full force in this unit. I was given no fresh air and couldn't even get out with supervised time. This effectively made it a prison for me and would lead to greater strain and mental anguish.

I remember having a conversation with one of the staff members in the ward saying that he was faster than me, and if I did try to escape from the unit, he would catch me. He was a cocky wee bastard if I remember right. And a trainee for the police force.

The first week and a half was spent like a caged animal. No fresh air or any room to exercise.

Being confined to one room with only my own thoughts to occupy my mind was a head fuck itself.

Looking back on the doctor's notes it clearly shows how I was being kept in a room and then held against my will in the adolescent unit which I feel affected me more than the actual illness. The aggression I was displaying was intensifying with every moment locked in there.

If someone had taken the time to get to know my interests, what I did outside school, my hobbies and what makes me happy, maybe just maybe a quicker recovery would have happened.

I had no means to blow off any physical energy which would then come across as reckless behaviour and aggression.

During most weekends I would gaze out of my bedroom window and stare at the guys playing football at the bottom of the grass hill. Longing so desperately just to be involved.

One day, I wrote a “help me” note with toothpaste on the window. This could be read clearly from the other side. I wanted out that badly.

However, with no help coming any time soon and a visitor to the unit pointing out the message to staff I was made to clean it off.

On the flip side to this unit, it had some genuine staff that were very good with me. Jen, Robert, Barry and Chris notably helped me immensely.

I was prescribed lithium, the mood stabiliser, to take. I initially struggled with lithium as I had to give blood frequently. The blood tests checked that the levels were correct in my system.

On the first occasion my eldest sister joined me in the doctor’s room to get the first drop of blood out of my veins. In my head I didn’t want this to be the norm, having to go out of my way to check blood levels for the correct dosage of medication. Eventually the notion of this and the fear of strangers putting a needle into my arm disappeared. I suppose with four tattoos to date prove I have overcome that fear.

Weekly meetings were held with doctors. I felt that there should have been some level of trust with doctors. How can I be expected to speak to a random person openly about what’s going on in my head?

I struggled with this sort of communication. And often refused to speak.

During these times, again, I was waiting on the outside of meetings and not getting the chance to say my side. When I got my five mins to shine, I was unable to find the words to describe how I felt. This led to more time spent in hospital.

Although I was a child, I never recall any doctors sitting down with me and getting my thoughts on what was happening. Opinions always came from other sources.

Later, I would meet that doctor who I could trust.

Apart from being given a short booklet on Manic Depression, which seemed to be my only real insight to what was going on.

I wasn't told about the daily struggle, what signs to watch for and stuff I really needed to know.

I sometimes wonder. How would someone with no mental health issues react to being locked in a unit with a order above their head to remain act to this situation. Would it have been any different to mine?

Was there a stage where I was on a level playing field mentally and then being told I would have to spend more time in hospital. Did this have a detrimental effect on me?

In hindsight I should have kept all my thoughts down on paper and presented them to the doctors at each meeting.

***Friday 10th May 2002 -***

***Wednesday 18th Sept 2002***

***131 days in total***

***Age 16/17***

***Medication Lithium***

## Chapter Five - Gartnavel part two

Third episode

My first part time job was in JJB Sports. This was the scene of my first hallucination.

I managed to convince myself that the shops radio loudspeaker was speaking about me. I can't remember exactly what or who was the voiceover but that caused me to break down in tears in-front of a customer.

The shift was a blur and as it finished, I looked up and saw all the staff at the back wall. They were huddled in a group. I was standing alone down at the front of the store.

In my mind they were all plotting against me.

That night I had to leave the family house. I took dog Chelsea, a chocolate Labrador up to my aunt and uncle's house.

I didn't want to stay with my mum and dad, I needed to be in a different environment.

I slept on the couch in their living room with my uncle sleeping on the opposite couch keeping an eye on me.

I always held my uncle in high regard and for him to watch over me calm me down made me feel safe.

Outside of their front living room window was a hill in the distance with random trees clustered together. When I was young, I always thought they looked like an army of soldiers.

This is when everything started to go weird. I looked out the window during the night and saw loads of different colours up on the hill.

My mind was playing tricks on me and whenever I closed my eyes, I could see flashes of bright colours. I needed help!

The following morning, I was picked up by my mum and dad along with the dog. We drove home and parked in the driveway.

I put one foot out of the car to set myself. A hop, skip and a jump and I was halfway down the drive verging into a full on sprint away.

I didn't know where I was going to run to until I heard a voice calling my name. A familiar voice, the one voice that I listened to. It was my cousin Louise. She was driving past the cycle track while I was sprinting up the hill. She sounded knackered while telling me to slow down because I was running too fast.

I listened to everything she told me. But I still needed some sort of release from my thoughts.

What was happening to me? I was tripping out, a lack of sleep, and my thoughts were racing again. I had lost contact with reality. I started to believe people weren't who they were.

*The Truman effect*

For anyone who hasn't seen the Truman show, the leading character (played by Jim Carrey) is born into a tv show. The life he lives is 24/7 in front of a live tv audience and his whole world is manufactured around him.

Before I knew, I was back in Gartnavel. I had a room to myself with constant supervision, but it was just me and my thoughts, I started to believe the Truman effect was happening to me. Whilst in this head space, complied with no fresh air and the beginnings of being institutionalised, my thoughts had drifted to points where I questioned everything. I questioned my life, my family, my whole existence and even live itself.

Why was this happening to me? What sort of twisted experiment was I part of?

The reason in my head was obvious. The Truman show must be about me. I firmly believed everyone in the hospital were actors! Those actors being hospital staff, patients and then when my family came up to visit, I believed they actors too. Any rational thoughts were gone at that moment in time.

At one point I was advised to go for a shower to freshen up. That's it I thought, this was going to be the big reveal. They were finally going to tell me about the tv show I was the star of.

I remember taking some time in the shower, composing myself.

I went into the shower thinking I was the messiah.

Then I emerged from the shower with a smile on my face. Quickly, that was wiped away and I realised nothing had changed. I was told to go straight back to my room.

Wait, I wasn't the messiah?! Turns out I was just a very naughty boy! (*Monty Python's Life of Brian*) And probably stinking to! I had neglected the daily routine that I would normally do at home.

It took me a few days to snap out of this state. The comedown and burnout were approaching.

During that time, I had stopped taking the medication the staff were giving me. I thought the drugs would stop me from knowing "the truth". I would put the tablets in my mouth on one side, and as I drank the small shot of water, I would spit the tablet into my finger which held the cup. As I gave the shot cup back, they would look in my mouth to see the tablet gone. I would proceed to shove it behind my back and then dispose of it later.

And they thought I was daft?!

So, back at Gartnavel again, I had barely been away from the place. Some of the familiar faces were still in.

### *Michelle*

One of the girls I had met in the unit was someone who had the same sort of issues as me. She had deeper issues with her relationship to food, I couldn't understand that as a grubber myself. I wish I did understand.

In Michelle's case she was strongly opposed to authority figures, and she always wanted to be popular with her peers. Like me in a sense.

She understood me and left a lasting impression with me. Her thoughts were deep and meaningful, and I understood her methods of thinking.

Years later about 2007 I heard from her mum about what happened in a couple of years later. It was terrible news.

Trying to be popular with her peers made her take risks that she shouldn't have. One of those risks ended up being her last. I hope she found peace in all her darkest moments.

Whilst still in hospital I still aspired to sit my higher exams. Mr King my head teacher from school remained in close contact. He was genuinely sincere in how he spoke to me. You can tell from a person by the way they look at you, making eye contact if they are being serious or not.

He had offered me the chance to repeat 6th year at school and get my qualifications that way.

For me to drop down a year and have no friends was one of the main reasons I declined.

The embarrassment of repeating the year with guys the year below me was a definite no go for me.

*Years later I found out Mr King was taken early. I never got the chance to say thank you for helping me. I would like to take the opportunity to do that now. Thanks sir.*

The main reason was of course my state of mind and wanting to take it slowly this time.

Being stuck in the unit, one way for me to combat my boredom was to eat. My weight started to yoyo again. A constant fight in years to come too.

I started to sink lower into a depressive state and accepted my fate that I would in the hospital for a prolonged period.

But then when I accepted that I would need to stay longer, did that show a more cause for concern? Thus, keeping me in even longer?

That dream of waking up at home and it's all been a nightmare, then actually waking up and having to come to terms that I am still locked away.

Eventually, I would start to get day passes home. These were step by step and then started to include overnight stays home. The sense of relief when allowed to go home a day at a time was unreal.

***Sunday 27th November 2002- Tuesday 15th April 2003***

***139 days in total***

***Age 17***

***Medication Amisulpride***

## Chapter Six - An adult in an adult ward

4th episode

Saturday the 15th of November 2003 Scotland 1-0 Holland

A deflected James McFadden goal sent the tartan army into raptures. My Dad and I had our arms round each other as we celebrated.

The elation of that night with my dad, brother-in-law Neil and his dad Bob. This memory sticks out for me. The noise that night. And of course, the company around me. Neil is someone I look up to. The Scottish tattoo on my leg inspired by Neils own Scottish tattoo. He was the big brother I didn't have. Although we have never really been that close. We have had our moments where we did have a deeper connection. More so in 2022 when his mum had sadly passed away. I felt like I could offer so insight on how your mind takes you to places you don't want to go. Bob had sadly made a choice on his own life in the mid 2010's and his mum had never recovered from the loss.

Back to the game and these special nights when Scotland become giant killers. Hampden was the celebration before the heartbreak.

The high that I was experiencing was starting to manifest into a full on bipolar high.

The warning signs were there but I chose to overlook them.

To start with I bought an 8k car and took out a grand loan to pay for Christmas presents. From the grand loan I managed to squander away £750 within an hour.

I booked a holiday for around 6 friends, and I was going to pay for it all.

Bearing in mind I didn't have a job to fund these repayments.

All of these were triggers I didn't take notice of.

That reckless money spending was a major trigger. If I had the disposable income to afford it, that would be no problem. In my head I was getting a job yesterday to pay for it all.

The morning of Wednesday 19th November 2003 I had dressed in suit with a training top under my shirt.

The training shirt was a St. Mirren training top which I had bought while doing voluntary coaching at Love Street.

I left the house armed with my football folder. This was filled with autographs, match programmes, ticket stubs and my ideas/philosophy for how I thought football should be played.

I arrived at Love Street to speak to the head of youth development, David Longwell, who was my main point of contact while gaining voluntary experience. I wanted to demonstrate to him how much I wanted a job after already taking part in these voluntary sessions at the club. I hoped to show him how much I loved football and why I would have been a great member of staff.

I felt if I was involved in coaching and around the club, I would be noticed and hopefully I would be able to work my way up to play for the club.

When I went to speak to David, he informed me that police were looking for me.

My nose started to bleed, and my heart sank. Yes, I had been acting strangely recently but surely this must have been a huge misunderstanding.

I couldn't stem the flow of blood. I glanced out of David's glass windowed office and saw two policemen walk in. I kept my head down trying not to be noticed. This made the drip worse.

David asked me if I was ok and to talk to him, I couldn't bring myself to tell him what was really going on with me. No way could I explain to him (who I had high admiration of) about my deep underlining issues.

The two policemen came in and grabbed my upper arms to escort me out of the building. I had a quick look back over my shoulder where I could see everyone looking at me. "That's that fucked" I thought to myself.

The policemen still had a tight grip round my arms, which was evident with the deep bruising days later when my friends came to visit. That left another lasting imprint of policemen. I get they are many policemen in the job for the right reasons. On the other hand, they are some in it for the power it gives them.

Was it necessary for them to do that? I relaxed my body a bit and felt them clutching tighter. Cheers boys.

I wasn't a criminal or kicking off with them to merit those actions on me.

The officers initially drove me to the RAH. However, when I was asked to sit in a wheelchair to go down to be assessed in

the ward, I point blank refused. They wanted to put me in a fucking wheelchair! Why?!

Is mental ill health a physical injury that prevents me from walking?? Maybe I should have rolled myself up into a ball on the floor.

After that refusal I was then put back in the police car to be assessed in Dykebar.

The policemen then began to discuss how to get to Dykebar to which I butted in by saying I would give them directions.....  
how long have you been on for? What time do you finish at?...

As the new taxi drivers dropped me off at the recently built acute east ward. Again, my life was about to come crashing down, much like Scotland's second leg payoff defeat in Holland. A cruel hammer blow and kicks while I was down.

So, there I was, back at the Mental health hospital and yes you guessed it I was waiting outside of a room while a doctor gathered information on me without speaking to me.

What seemed like hours passed by, then as quick as a lightning bolt I was told I was being sectioned.

I was given the room next to the nurse's station and put on constant observation.

A couple of familiar nurses appeared and gave me the low down.

Sandra, Dougie and Sheena were some friendly faces I remembered.

On one occasion I remember having a full-blown argument with my dad. The nurse's station was shaped like the front of a

court room, and I was the judge. I remember at the time I felt like I was looking down on this happening, much like a bird's eye view, the words quickly flowing off my tongue, they were being blurted out with no thoughts or control over them.

Unlike the previous admission, after a few days I felt like I could have conversations with fellow in-patients.

After all I was now an adult in an adult ward, I felt more relaxed in exchanging conversations with people that were in with me.

I was amazed at the wide spectrum of people's background that had been admitted alongside me.

From Doctors, servicemen, teachers, father's, husband's and people with recurring issues.

One of the boys my age, Paul, and I developed a great bond together.

He had very similar interests as me. From his music tastes to his youth spent at the boy's brigade.

We would spend hours in the music room chilling out with our favourite music which happened to be hip-hop at the time. From American stars such as Kanye West (before I knew he had bipolar too) then me introducing Paul to homegrown Scottish rappers in Loki and my mate from school Tanky.

He would show off his dance moves and we would imagine being out at night clubs performing them. This was a far cry from the reality we were in.

Paul had told me of his failed attempt at the Erskine bridge, it was always in the back of my mind about his safety.

When walking in and around the ward I noticed other patients with wrist supports on. I asked one lady how she came about the injury.

The girl said it was due to a heavy restraint she received from a certain member of staff. Funnily enough it was the same member of staff, Sam, who gave me a huge grin before restraining me by himself in my room away back at my very first admission.

How many other people did his grip snap tendons and break bones in his apparent role of care?

***Wednesday 19th November 2003 -***

***Tuesday 27th Jan 2004***

***69 days in total***

***Age 18***

***Medication quetiapine***

*All the times that we had spent, under the same roof not paying any rent.*

*You were like a brother to me,*

*One apple falling not far from the tree.*

*You took matters into your own hands,  
And stopped a future wearing the same brands.  
If I could rewind time. And commit one crime.  
I would break down that wall and made sure you didn't fall.  
Rest easy Paul.*

## Chapter Seven - The two-year break

28th Jan 2004 to 21st December 2005

### *Hypersensitivity*

Coming out of hospital after being institutionalised was difficult at the best of times. After Gartnavel all my senses seemed to be heightened. The smallest sound around me would explode like a firework set off in my ears. My environment seemed new. It was like being born again and opening my eyes to this huge world in front of me.

I had always loved the buzz of the town at peak times during the day and night.

However, seeing so many people at once after very little was frightening.

I would normally skip through the crowds, managing not to bump into anyone.

During that time, I just seemed to get in everyone's way, which would just add to my feelings of worthlessness and deepened my low mood.

Meeting my friends socially in the city centre's pubs and clubs was so difficult. I couldn't have face to face conversations with my friends. This was due to the fact I couldn't tune into their words. I was being drawn away by background noise around me. I could start to hear ringing sounds and at those points I would need to leave the situation.

I could never explain to my friends what was happening. Looking back, I fucking wish I did. Instead of thinking that it would be weak for me to tell them what was happening.

I should have told my friends why I was acting weird. I should have been honest with them. It still hurts me today that I didn't.

My first objective when I left hospital was to get my provisional licence back and sit my driving test. I passed first time in May which was a huge step for me. The freedom to get up and go whenever I wanted.

My main goal when I left hospital was to make it my mission to chase my dream of playing professional football.

I sent letters and emails to all professional clubs within one hundred miles radius of my house and my favourite English premier league team Newcastle.

Newcastle was the only team who came back to me. They offered me a chance to go down and train in partnership with premier skills.

The weeks trial programme with premier skills was a great insight in what I had to do to become an elite footballer.

I was given the number 69 which I thought was symbolic as I had just finished 69 days in hospital. Could this be some sort of sign of great things to come.

However, it was obvious from the start the different fitness levels required to be at the top. The athletic guys weren't necessary the best footballers, but these guys excelled and excited the coaches and scouts watching on. Those guys

would sprint pass defenders and chase runners within seconds.

Ultimately it wasn't my time and was told to come back next summer and go away to work on my fitness.

Coming back up the road I realised I had to be playing football regularly.

I looked in the local paper and found a local team in the Westend of Glasgow. Before one of teams training sessions, I arrived early and watched a session that was on before us.

I recognised one of the guys playing as I had met him whilst playing football on holiday. His name is Adam. After this chance meeting we ended up starting a "bromance" playing football and pool every other day.

Ad invited me to play with his mates on a Sunday. The first time that I turned up, I quickly realised which grass park they played on. It was the spare grass area at the bottom of the adolescent unit. I real clarity moment for me. Well charity after the tears had left my eyes.

I was finally on the other side of the glass to where I had spent so long looking out. I took five minutes in my car after the kickabout to take in this moment. Wow.

Come the summer of 2005 I was flying! I was on such I high. I had two weeks abroad with the boys for the first time.

Zante, the strip, , 10 of us. Thrown out the club for winking at the barmaids.

This was followed by a weekend at T in the park with school mates. A weekend of camping. Music and more cider...

The T in the park weekend ended for me on the Sunday night by watching my favourite band Kasabian. I jumped on the first bus back home on the Sunday night to be ready to drive down the following morning for the next premier skills trail.

My body had taken a battering, but my mind was still racing.

Before I went on holiday the “great” idea I had was to be high as a kite for this trial, that would mean I would be ultra-confident with endless amounts of energy, and I would be able to showcase my full potential.

The trail began and as expected I was flying, smashing all the fitness tests and in charge of the ball.

As Tuesday morning hit, I had slept in, I could barely open my eyes and couldn't move my body, the come down from the high was like a sky dive, I had hit rock bottom over-night.

I couldn't believe it, I forced myself to get up and ready to head over to the briefing room which was in full flow.

I had bought baggy basketball shorts to wear while relaxing in a room down there. I'm glad the basketball shorts drew the most attention and not the fact I was late.

My legs were like jelly and I had the motion feeling again like I was on a boat.

I wanted to shut myself out, I wanted to chuck it there and then. How could I have been so naive to think that missing medication would have done me any favours.

One of the coaches Rodger Wilkinson always said about living your life in little inches. I wondered what the hell he was talking about at the time. I understand now. Makes sure you focus on steps in front of you first before thinking of where you want to be in the long term.

I managed to scrape my way through to the Friday but left before any feedback was given.

My dream was over! In my eyes at least. I was in no fit state mentally to drive myself on any further.

I packed my stuff and left. Eyes sunken on the floor. Not saying bye to Stuart Rome who had helped me over the two trials was a regret I held for a while.

On the drive back up the road I stopped at Gretna Green.

I parked up at a football pitch, took a ball out, put my boots on. I proceeded to kick the ball high into the sky several times, then on the final kick, booted the ball far into the opposite field. I was done. Game over!

At this point I was in a crossroads in my life. I had no idea what I wanted to do next. Football was all I had ever dreamed of doing.

A few months would pass by before I would find out what was in store for me.

## Chapter 8 - Caged voluntary

Wednesday 21st December 2005

As Christmas was approaching, I was on high again, the medication I was taking seemed to have little or no effect anymore.

My world was about to take another nosedive.

Coming to terms with the realisation that I have a problem. A problem that had to be fixed. The realisation came to me suddenly in my mum and dad's old house.

I was standing at the front door looking back down the hall. My CPN (community psychiatric nurse) Scot was halfway down the hall with my mum and dad behind him at the living room doorway.

I was about to storm out of the house after Scot had come to see me.

This meeting was called for from a family member who had been worried about me.

I used to always blame my family for going behind my back to seeking help for me. I guess they were only looking out for me. Maybe, too much help was a bad thing. The slightest thing that I did would have been scrutinised as being part of the so called, illness.

So back to my Scot's appearance. The look he gave me told me what I already knew. He didn't need to say anything. I could see it in his eyes. The look told the story.

I knew I had to get help. I needed to face up to my "illness".

It was at that moment I admitted I had a problem. I took accountability there and then. Although I never said it out loud to anyone, it hit me hard and resonated throughout me.

I made up my mind to go into Dykebar voluntary. Scot said he would drive me up. I felt safe around him, he was like that big brother figure I never had. I suppose that just highlights how good he was at his job to be able to make me feel at ease during what was another stressful moment in my life.

Not long after I admitted myself into the adult ward, I found out that a section was slapped over my head, again! I was livid. I had come in voluntary of my own accord. Fuck them! I had become so angry at that point, I wanted to leave, they just wanted to mess with my mind again. Cue the alarm bells buzzing from the belt packs strapped on to the members of staff, as my hulk face took over. When I kicked off, I would never hurt anyone, however the fixtures and fittings didn't feel any pain.

I had come in to fight my illness, now I felt like I had to fight the whole world again.

On top of being in hospital I knew along with the section being place on my head, my driving licence would have been suspended for at least 3 months from that point. You might

think 3 months isn't a long time, a short time is always long time in young man's mind.

After spending Christmas in the ward, I found out I would still be an inpatient at Hogmanay too.

As the countdown to the bells started, I went to my room alone. Radio One's Scott Mills was blaring from my phone. With ten minutes left to the bells and I ran myself a shower. As the year drew in, I jumped in the shower. I was fresh for the New year. A fresh mindset and a clear understanding to promise myself that I would never end up back inside these walls again.

### *Transfer to the Rah*

After spending just over a month in that ward I was given the chance to go to the more familiar surroundings of the RAH, the hospital where I was born. The same place I went to fix a broken leg and wrist. You know, those physical injuries that people can see at face value.

A few days after arriving I was given time to go to the hospital physio room, or the small gym. That little bit of time to exercise was great.

I started to build up my time getting out of the ward. I would use this time to go jogging around the area.

The patients who were in with me were a great help too. Everyone with a common goal of overcoming their issues within a relatively short time scale.

For this period in hospital and every other period the constant by my side was my mum and dad. My mum came to see me twice a day without fail and my dad would try his best to do the same, but work prevented that.

However, with my family visiting me, it made it hard to stay in the hospital and not want to go home with them.

But I managed to get through it, it was fucking hard, I won't lie.

As the old saying goes. Fifth time's lucky, eh? A total of 452 days had been notched up at that point in and around hospital care. That's 10,848 hours, surely, I've served my time by now.

***Wednesday 21st December 2005 to Thursday 26th Jan 2006***

***Dykebar***

***Thursday 26 Jan 2006 to***

***Tuesday 21st March 2006***

***90 days in total***

***Age 20***

***Medication Depakote and Risperidone***



## Chapter Nine - On the right direction home

In my mind, going from Dykebar to the RAH was a huge step in the right direction.

The stigma of being in a mental hospital had been lifted, granted that I was in ward two for acute mental health.

Stigma was always something I used to be very self-conscious about.

I refused to disclose my bipolar to people and would make up stories rather than tell people the truth about me.

A clear time of not telling the truth was when I was working “voluntary” at a sports centre where I was advised that I should have been getting paid.

Instead of me saying why I was working there and explaining I was taking part with support from a charity to help me get back into work, I simply said “yeah” I should be getting paid.

I would take the easy route out. Too ashamed to admit I had a mental health issue. Would they have looked down on me? Probably not, maybe they would have respected me more. I still couldn't face explaining what was wrong with me and why I was working voluntary.

I felt as a man I shouldn't show any sort of weakness.

### *The looking good factor*

As a young man in my mind to attract the opposite sex I would need to look attractive physically. I would push my body to

extreme conditions. That was never any good for my mental health. These “extreme” diets and exercise would involve little or no appetite, a lack of sleep and long-distance running. These runs would often be at full pelt. Or as fast as my current fitness would allow.

Over the years I have learned that to stay in a good mind frame I must have good rest days and try and get the minimum night sleep required to re-energise.

I know the saying of a healthy body equals a healthy mind. However, I know I can't push myself too far to achieve this perfect physical image or I will suffer from the manic side of bipolar.

*Canteen staff in Dykebar -v- same people at a night club in town*

One night I remember queuing up at a Glasgow's Garage night club. Two girls who had served me in the canteen in Dykebar were standing in front of me in the queue. One of the girls had recognised me and began to ask where she recognised me from. She seemed to be interested in finding out where she knew me from. Before I could get the chance to reveal the information, the other girl looked at me, she must have instantly known where and pulled her friend away before point blank ignoring me.

For someone to stop talking to me because of where I had been extremely difficult for me to take in. It broke my confidence and from that point I knew I wasn't going to enjoy my night. I made an excuse and left half an hour later to go home alone.

I was still coming to terms with being back at home, I was anxious about going to my local pharmacy to collect medication.

It really bothered me seeing someone face to face to collect bipolar tablets. Years down the line that's not a problem, it was just my attitude back then.

The foundations of my life had been ripped up and I was slowly starting to find my feet again.

Continuing with the forward momentum was my CPN with his great support.

An A4 cheat sheet was created. This included signs to watch for. These consisted of irritability, increased talking, excessive exercise, lack of sleep, over thinking, overspending, rapid thoughts and increased social scene for mania. The depressive side of it would almost be the exact opposite thing of each item to watch for.

## **Chapter Ten - Football brought me back**

The weeks after my final hospital spell my motivation and energy levels were at rock bottom.

I was stuck in a rut with nothing on the horizon.

A chance meeting with an old school mate (on one of the rare days that I made my way to a local shop) would change that rut completely.

He played for the local amateur football team and invited me to come along to training. This is when I started to gain back control mentally and physically.

I was the most unfit guy at my first training session, but I knew I had to push through it.

I was around the 15 stone mark, well overweight from my usual fighting weight of 12 stone 7.

The manager Brian who I will be forever grateful to must have seen something in me, because I think that if it was anyone else, he would have told me to beat it.

After about six weeks of hill sprints and the killer square I had lost 2 stones.

I felt amazing.

Rewind to six weeks earlier to the first session. I had gone straight back to bed and couldn't move.

The next morning and mornings that followed were tough to get out and about, but I had set my target for the next training session. A step at a time. Something to focus on.

Football was again my focal point in life. You can always tell how my mood is based on my enjoyment with football. If I'm out of love with it you need to worry.

Depression is not just feeling sad, and the no motivation factor, depression feels like your being strapped down with a heavy weight. Try all you want but nothing will get you up. Even if you find some amount of energy to sit up, the energy you have just used vanishes and you fall back down again.

You close yourself off to the whole world. You don't want to speak to anyone, and when anyone does try it's a strain and sometimes unbearable to even contemplate talking back.

The struggle is fucking real!

Fast-forward a few months and I am back! My friends are around me again, I have started a new job, I am doing well socially, physically and most importantly mentally.

And I have a size 5 ball at my feet.

Monday 7th April 2008 at 6.30pm. Ibrox stadium. The dream becomes a reality. I am playing football for Rangers. Number 8 on the left side of midfield. It might only be a charity game, but this is the moment I had dreamt of since I first started playing with a ball.

It was only 45 mins of the first half in the game and it felt like 5 minutes, but it was the best thing that ever happened to me up to that point in my life.

The build up being shown around by the late Sandy Jardine was incredible. Then our manager was the late Ally Dawson, a

former pupil who went to the school I went to years earlier. Another Rangers great.

### *Soccer circus*

The new job that I had started came about after I asked to work for free at Kevin Keegan's Soccer Circus. The assistant manager said "Free. No, you can have a job here".

To be accepted like that was a great feeling, and to work with one of my footballing heroes growing up was a chance in a lifetime.

Kevin Keegan's brand of football with Newcastle was one of the reasons I started following them.

The exciting football they produced from the likes of Faustino Asprilla to rocket finishes from Alan Shearer drew me in.

I was in there for about a year before sales started to decline and staff levels were cut. This was the best working time I had ever had. Playing football, coaching kids, and working with other people with the same interests as me, it was the dream job.

The boys and girls I met in there were all brilliant with me.

I still speak to a lot of them over a decade later. It's great to see their life's moving forward with their careers and family. Love to see it.

## Chapter eleven Proper routine

After I left the dream job of working with Kevin Keegan, I asked my dad if he had any jobs going at his company.

That was supposed to be a short-term fix to get back in full time work.

Fast forward over thirteen years and I'm still at the same employment.

The company has been good for me in terms of making me more confident and a more grounded person.

I'm positive I would have been sacked in any other job for falling asleep at my desk due to high doses of medication. Or nights I had endless energy that my thoughts were racing well into the early hours of the next day, which lead me turning up the next day with huge bags under my eyes.

This lifestyle gave me the correct balance in which to stay stable all these years.

In 2015 I started voluntary work for Bipolar Scotland. This was a local self-help group. I was the chairperson for this group. While it was an eye opener to an extent, I feel like I would have been more suited to a sort of front-line role. A role where the person has just had a diagnosis, or where their family member is new to the situation.

I left that position in the weeks leading up to my first-born arriving. When things settled down, I found out the group closed with the lack of numbers attending.

## Chapter Twelve

### The dream

Picture the scene. I'm looking down at my hands holding a microphone. The curtains open and I'm faced with hundreds of eyes on me...

The noise is deafening as I reach the centre of the stage. The cheers die down and my story starts from a video behind me projected on a huge screen.

My life story plays out and then I narrate through the bipolar experience, recovery and the progression.

That's when I woke up in a hot sweat. I hate public speaking....

After a couple speeches with decent crowds and finding the heart to read a poem about my grandma at her funeral makes me think maybe it could be possible one day.

The dream, the possibilities of talking about this very book and the reasons for doing it make me think that it could be a reality. The reality would most likely be in front of a small classroom but, shoot for the stars, eh? Why not.

## Chapter Thirteen

### Starting a family

I thought that I had a good outlook and perspective on what life should be like.

All of that changed on a Monday night in July 2016. 7:53 to be exact. Again, I was left in a corridor with the hands on my clock stuck in position. Another type of section this time.

Once I saw my daughter's face and heard her cry it was in that very moment I knew my life would never be the same again.

Seeing the world through a parent's eye has brought a whole new ball into the game of life.

Throughout my childhood I had always been around kids through my forever extending family.

I love seeing young kids grow up and develop. Watching their own wee characters come out.

In early Autumn 2019 another ray of sunshine came into my life.

Again, another corridor spent waiting together with another section.

My boy was born at 12.28pm. Again, like his big sister, when I saw his face and heard him cry, my heart melted with pride and joy.

I hope the mistakes and lessons I have learnt can shape the way I will bring my children up in this world.

Hopefully those experiences that I went through gives me a major advantage on what advice to pass down advice towards them.

I hope they will gain a huge grasp of mental health and how important it is to be open and honest with others regarding it.

I know they must make their own mistakes, but I will always be around to support them and do my best to guide them.

I hope they will look up to their dad and be proud of what I am trying to do.

Even when daddy had to leave the family home. I hope one day you will both understand why I had to. For my own happiness. But also, for your mothers.

Bringing up children requires a happy and supportive relationship.

## Chapter Fourteen

### **The time to start writing**

Although I have laid pen to paper numerous times throughout the years trying to piece this story together. Nothing seemed to click before. I was missing the key link to put it all together.

Maybe the time just wasn't right, maybe I wasn't focused enough or maybe just maybe I have only now managed to express how I feel and why I had felt certain emotions times.

You might call it growing up, I grew up with this illness years ago. But to have confidence in my own skin to finally lay it all bare in front of my own eyes (and anyone else's) has taken me to new depths that I didn't think were possible.

I have had to stop numerous times during this process because I dived far too deep and had to think about my own health suffering again.

### **Reading Frank Bruno's "let me be Frank".**

Franks story is quite remarkable.

The man must be truly admired for his grit and determination.

Reading his book "let me be Frank" gave me flashbacks to a lot of memories and made me realise it wasn't just me who felt all that emotion.

It's the one of a very few books I have managed to read from cover to cover and feel connected with it. Not once wanting to wander mid story.

Most books that I have ever bought I tend to not go the distance. I tend to get distracted from them and never go the full 12 rounds.

That book had me gripped. Mainly due to knowing his back story and wanting to find out how he coped.

He too felt betrayed. His active lifestyle like mine (in some sense) had to take a back seat. He too was sectioned and forced back into a corner. No bell would ring to take him out of that fight.

### **Aidan Martin's *Euphoric recall*.**

Another book I read cover to cover without putting down. Instead of a physical copy, it was the digital version which arrived first before the book.

I was only going to glance at the digital version on my phone but when I first started to read it, I was immediately hooked. A rollercoaster of emotions. And a lot I could resonate with.

2-3 hours later I was done. Wow. I must have taken some number of "Guts" to lay that on paper. A very impressive read to say the least. The strength of the man and his desire to change and grow. Through heart ache and pain gives hope and light. I could really resonate with loads throughout.

Upon finishing Aidan's book it gave me a path to view the other authors that brilliantly put their own stories across.

### **Grandma**

One key role model in my life was my Grandma. She was well respected and stood up for what she believed in. She had that strict look, and whenever you saw it you knew you had done something wrong or had to toe the line. Being able to look at someone without ever laying a finger on them was an art form. She had mastered that over many years.

She believed in the underdog. And always backed that person, no-matter what.

For me to be hit with this illness I knew myself that I was the underdog. My Grandma believed in me. She had told me numerous times throughout the years. More so when it was just me and her together. Invariably, when I picked her up in my car to drive her about, in that moment she would tell me, not making eye contact but just looking straight ahead. I often wondered why at those moments she would tell me. I think it would probably be the time I was focused, and I would be listening.

It was my granma who taught me to tell the time. It's now my time to help others.

The poem a read at my Granma funeral

*As We Look Back*

*As we look back over time*

*We find ourselves wondering..*

*Did we remember to thank you enough*

*For all you have done for us?*

*For all the times you were by our sides*

*To help and support us..  
To celebrate our successes,  
To understand our problems  
And accept our defeats?  
Or for teaching us by your example,  
The value of hard work, good judgement,  
Courage and integrity?  
We wonder if we ever thanked you  
For the sacrifices you made  
To let us have the very best?  
And for the simple things  
Like laughter, smiles and times we shared?  
If we have forgotten to show our  
Gratitude enough for all the things you did,  
We're thanking you now.  
And we are hoping you knew all along,  
How much you meant to us.*

Papa

Marble kiss

The marble kiss is something I won't miss.

The early moments in time. Sharing a story and beginning to rhyme.

Visualising that stare and realising it was only through care.

Seeing “the look” in my own reflection, not to judge, it’s only an expression.

Sharing those last moments in a place where I was born, holding my newborn to feeling deep sadness as I start to morn.

Reading that poem was my last gift to you, I hope those words will always ring true.

The marble cold kiss is something I won’t miss.

His walks with the dog, the beaming smile and almost into a jog.

Teeing off over some fella’s, then telling me it’s time to hit from the yella’s.

Sitting alone on his “nothing day’s”, passing the bay window to his smiling face.

The jaffa cakes in his final years, from the moment he wakes until the night breaks.

Mentioning my book on his final day. Turing around to look showed me the way.

Those marble cold kisses, I didn’t miss.

## Chapter Fifteen

My thoughts

### *Mental illness*

Your mental health is like a balloon with the knot tied.

Mental ill health is squeezing more air in. The more it takes in, with every squeeze, one day it's going to explode or deflate and buzz off into the atmosphere.

It can be prevented if you release some air. You need to learn how to do this.

It has taken me years to come to terms with it.

First, I had to come to terms with the fact that I have a mental health condition. I never wanted to believe I did.

Talking is the ideal solution for this, or just writing your thoughts down on paper. A physical injury can be diagnosed then fixed by someone else. Only the individual truly knows what thoughts are going on in their head, these thoughts need to be discussed.

Secondly to find the solution to help maintain a good state of mind, whether it be through a good routine or taking time to focus on yourself.



## Chapter Sixteen

Doctor's notes

"David shows signs of depression, I advise further time in the ward"

What a crock of shit that is! This is supposed to be a professional.

Who wouldn't feel down at being kept in hospital with no fresh air and being told you can't leave the building?

Doctors called it intrusive thoughts without explaining what they meant by saying it. A lot of medical jargon thrown around, and at the time sailed right over my head. Added to the fact the medication slowed my thought process down. Anything a doctor would say would take a while to grasp, and when I did realise what they were actually talking about I was out of the meeting, heartbroken in my room after being told I had to remain for another set amount of time.

I feel the doctors should have got a better understanding of me, not just through my close relatives but also with my friends.

My friends would have been able to see things in a better perspective of how I live my life. And how I am when at ease.

I was told I had grandiose ideas.

These were.

- Wanted to be a professional footballer
- An artist
- Clothes designer
- Rapper
- Have my own community sports hub

I never had the correct frame of mind to be a professional footballer in my younger years. Even at the age of 37 I still want that dream.

An artist, I drew the artwork for this very book, its up to the individual looking at the cover to distinguish if that's art or not.

For [letsgetgr8again.com](http://letsgetgr8again.com) I had an idea for a logo and a close friend Willy Stewart helped me bring that to life. I then spoke with lion clothing who helped me get the logo on clothes I wanted to wear.

The rapper, I recon I have the tools and skills to be that, if I wanted.

The community hub.

Before my mum and dad moved house. I had an idea/dream of building a sports/community hub in Kilbarchan bog park.

The park is surrounded by trees anyway and a hub inside it would be great for the community. My idea was to have an indoor pitch and outdoor 5's that would be available for free to anyone who wanted to use it.

My parents' house now look out over the said bog. And I wonder, is this possible? Would the village people kick up a fuss at this version of the YMCA for anyone who wants to use it.

The doctors tried me on 4 different medications before a mix of two different types finally worked for me.

#### 1. Olanzapine

**Olanzapine** is an antipsychotic medication that affects chemicals in the brain. **Olanzapine** is used to treat the symptoms of psychotic conditions such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder (manic depression) in adults and children who are at least 13 years old

Source – drugs.com

#### 2. Lithium

**Lithium** compounds, also known as **lithium** salts, are primarily used as a psychiatric **medication**. This includes the treatment of major depressive disorder that does not improve following the use of other antidepressants, and bipolar disorder. In these disorders, it reduces the risk of suicide.

Source – Wikipedia

### 3. Amisulphrate

sold under the brand name Solian among others, is an antipsychotic medication used to treat schizophrenia. It is also used to treat dysthymia. It is usually classed with the atypical antipsychotics.

Source Wikipedia

### 4 Quetiapine

**Quetiapine** FUMARATE. ... This medication is used to treat certain mental/mood conditions (such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, sudden episodes of mania or depression associated with bipolar disorder). **Quetiapine** is known as an anti-psychotic drug (atypical type).

Source - webmd

### 5 Depakote and risperidone

Depakote (divalproex sodium) affects chemicals in the body that may be involved in causing seizures. ... Depakote is also used to treat manic episodes related to bipolar disorder (manic depression), and to prevent migraine headaches

Risperidone, sold under the brand name Risperdal among others, is an atypical antipsychotic. It is used to treat schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and irritability associated with autism. It is taken either by mouth or by injection into a

muscle. The injectable version is long-acting and lasts for about two weeks.

Source drugs.com and Wikipedia

## Chapter Seventeen

### Family and friend's thoughts

I asked these questions to my family and friends who knew me during those difficult times.

1. What was your initial thoughts on my diagnosis?
2. Did you relate the illness with any behaviour as a kid?
3. Did you understand what the diagnosis meant? Did you go away and read up on it?
4. Were you worried about my long-term health?
5. Did you think I shouldn't have been in hospital at the times I was in?
6. How did you feel about the "mental hospital" tag on me?
7. Was there a point in my "illness" that could have been misrepresented by normal youth rebellion behaviour?

### Dad

1. *What was your initial thoughts on my diagnosis?*

Mostly fear, worry and confusion. It was several weeks, months before we were eventually advised by the hospital Consultants that you had "bipolar." Several friends and family

talked about Schizophrenia. Of having a split personality and all the theatrical images that this threw up. No one really described you as bipolar but referred a lot to manic depression. My early thoughts and hopes where that you had taken “something” and that you would eventually return to normal! All we wanted was our wee boy back!

*2. Did you relate the illness with any behaviour as a kid?*

No. You were always a quiet, shy, caring and loving child. I was always concerned that you were not outward enough but there was nothing in your behaviour that gave us any indication of what was about to happen.

*3. Did you understand what the diagnosis meant? Did you go away and read up on it?*

Initially no. Yes. we were told what the likely effects were. We were also told that you could have one episode in your life and or never another one for years to come. Our worst fears were when we were told that your illness was cyclical and was likely to re-occur rapidly.

I spent days, weeks and months, reading health articles in journals and books, on health authority websites and on google searches, looking for an answer or a “cure”. Some articles gave me hope whilst others shattered any illusions of “normality”.

*4. Were you worried about my long-term health?*

Extremely worried. Once we knew what the illness was and how you were reacting to it, we knew that we were in for the long haul. We were of course hopeful that after the first episode and with the correct medication you would be fine,

but we were to quickly learn that this illness was not going away. Mum and I had numerous conversations with your CPNs most of whom were hopeless apart from Scott Little, who by the time he came on the scene we were becoming more knowledgeable about the illness. When you were at home and out at your work or with your friends, I constantly worried about you, wondering if you were ok and hoping that you had not harmed yourself or bought something expensive like a new car or a holiday. You were never sleeping during your manic episodes and tearful and withdrawn during your depressed state. During that period, I worried about your future, in education, in work, in marriage and in fatherhood. I honestly thought at that time that there would be no more grandchildren and if there was, would they be bipolar as well!

*5. Did you think I shouldn't have been in hospital at the times I was in?*

When you first presented your manic side on my return from England on the 3rd February, there was no doubt in my mind that you were seriously ill. Granma had phoned to say that you had said that I allowed you and your mates to take alcohol from the drinks cabinet and I put that down to teenage exuberance. Little did I know what was about to explode within the next few days. On the 4th of February I have never felt as hopeless, helpless and terrified, as we went from the house to the GP and subsequently to the "mad house." Dykebar hospital was familiar to me through my professional life as I had to serve Curator Bonis petitions on mentally ill patients in locked wards. I thought that you would see a doctor, be given medication and come home with me later once the meds had kicked in. Dykebar was an old Victorian

Hospital, which has admitted by the healthcare authorities was not suitable for keeping young people in but since there was no other place available and given how ill you were, there was no choice. We were at the mercy of the professionals and although we were extremely upset about it, on the first occasion we had no choice. Neither did we have a choice on the occasions you were sectioned but we visited every day, most of the time with my shiny shoes on, and constantly continued with our dialogue with consultants, the legal agents and mental health organisations. We were told on numerous occasions that our frequent visits were not helping and that we should cut down the time we spent with you, as it was felt that this would eventually stop you from getting overanxious and sometimes aggressive when we did. This was a very difficult concept to accept.

I think that you should have been hospitalised on each occasion but not necessarily sectioned or detained for the period that you were. Particularly the time that you spent in Gartnavel.

*6. How did you feel about the “mental hospital” tag on me?*

Initially, I think everyone thought “what must people be thinking” Oh! how embarrassing having a son in the “nut house.” You and we were no doubt the talk of the town, but our thoughts quickly turned to you and how you would be affected. It was so hard but so brave of you going back to school, personally I don’t think I could have done it. You also faced up to life, strongly and resolutely during those 5 years of trying to be “normal” whilst working with the knowledge that this was going to be a lifetime struggle. Your Mum and I

desperately struggled with our shared thoughts, often bursting into tears, worrying about you and your future. Eventually the “tag” faded and became unimportant. Even during those lost 5 years you showed strength and endurance and a determination to prove that you would not be beaten. You have used the “tag” to your advantage to show everyone that mental health illness can affect anyone, and it is through you that the world is beginning to accept and embrace this fact.

*7. Was there a point in my “illness” that could have been misrepresented by normal youth rebellion behaviour?*

Sorry but no. I only wish that it had. Certainly, on the 4<sup>th</sup> February my explanation of your strange behaviour was that you had obviously taken “something” but was soon to realise that the effects of Cannabis do not last for 5 years.

*Feel free to add in any other points.*

As a father my only regrets are what we missed doing during those 5 lost years. Going to the pub, the football and just doing generally what fathers and sons do during the teenage and adolescence years.

I have watched you grow into a remarkable, caring and loving young man and father. Yes, you missed out on university and many other teenage opportunities but the education of life which you have had, is in my opinion, made you what you are today.

As I said to you earlier, there are many more thoughts which your Mum, Lynne, myself and even Laura could add to this courageous auto biography but perhaps we should leave them to be included in the second novel.

## Mum

1. *What was your initial thoughts on my diagnosis?*

At the beginning I hadn't a clue what was happening having never come across anything like this. After being told what it might be. I went and looked online and that made it even more confusing.

2. *Did you relate the illness with any behaviour as a kid?*

Not at all. You were always very quiet as a child apart from when you were annoying Laura. If we went out anywhere you hardly said a word.

3. *Did you understand what the diagnosis meant? Did you go away and read up on it?*

No, I didn't understand what was wrong as at the beginning they weren't sure either. They thought you had an episode of some sort. One minute you were high then low. Reading up on it made me feel worse wondering what else was to come

4. *Were you worried about my long-term health?*

Yes. I thought he would get medication and that would fix him. As time went on and with different medication nothing changed. Visiting every afternoon and evening was very draining. When they put you on Lithium, we thought it would help but with your fear of needles having to get blood tests all

the time you were getting more stressed, so they took you off that.

5. *Did you think I shouldn't have been in hospital at the times I was in?*

I didn't think you should have been in Dykebar at the beginning as you were only 16 and everyone in there were much older. When you went into the Adolescent unit, I thought it was a much better place for you with people your own age.

6. *How did you feel about the "mental hospital" tag on me?*

At the time I never thought about that just wanted to get you better and out of those places and back to you leading a normal life.

7. *Was there a point in my "illness" that could have been misrepresented by normal youth rebellion behaviour?*

No, I don't think so. You had always been a quiet child and never been any trouble so when you started acting strangely, we knew something wasn't right.

*Feel free to add in any other points.*

Just wanted to say how proud I am off how you are now after everything you have been through and how Karen has helped you and of course my two Beautiful Grandchildren Neave and Ben. Love you. Mum xx

## Lynne

At the time of the initial onset of David's illness, I had been living away from home for a few years in Milton Keynes after going travelling. Over the course of a couple of weeks my mum had spoken to me on the phone, voicing her concerns about David's behaviour. David had always been a 'good boy' but had split up from his first serious girlfriend and was taking it quite badly. His strange behaviour was out of character and had caused the teachers to suspect he was using drugs.

There had been a couple on minor incidents and David's relationship with my dad seemed to be deteriorating. This could have been put down to 'normal' teenage rebellion, but it all came to a head in February 2002 when I got a phone call at work. My mum was crying and all I could hear was my Dad and David screaming and fighting in the background. It felt like this call went on for hours, but it was probably only a few minutes until the police arrived. I felt completely helpless being miles away and my initial instinct was to jump in the car and drive home - but I wasn't sure what I could do to help.

The next few days were a bit of a blur and it felt like the doctors didn't really know what was wrong. David was sectioned and there was talk of drugs and schizophrenia. Mum and Dad were mentally and physically bruised but also feeling guilty as to whether there was anything they could/ should have done differently. Combined with my sister's Down Syndrome and me now living 350 miles away, they felt like

they were being punished for something. I felt guilty too, thinking maybe if I hadn't moved away, he may have confided in me about how he was feeling and maybe prevented him being sectioned.

I eventually decided to drive up and see David for myself rather than hearing second hand. I remember nervously entering the hospital and really wasn't sure what to expect. I almost didn't recognise him – it was like a different version of my brother. He'd lost a lot of weight and was clearly agitated. At times he was quite hostile to my dad and seemed to hold him responsible for the situation.

His behaviour varied wildly from day to day, and I wasn't sure how much was down to the drugs they were administering or whether it was his illness. Sometimes it was like someone had sucked all the life and energy from David. His eyes were glazed, he wasn't washing, and he seemed like he had given up. At other times, he became like an artist, channelling his creativity to write poetry, songs and doing drawings. He talked constantly and described scenarios and situations which we knew had never happened or were never going to happen.

Eventually the doctors started discussing an illness called bipolar disorder. It wasn't something that I had ever heard of, but it certainly sounded less scary than schizophrenia. I immediately started reading up on it to understand more. Manic depression was mentioned in most articles which was a more familiar term. I could understand the depression side to

the illness, but the descriptions of the manic episodes were scary.

With hindsight, we can now laugh at some of the things David did during his manic episodes, but these are what concerned me most, in terms of affecting his long-term future – both in his career and financially. He would go on spending sprees - booking holidays, buying cars and even went to the Rangers football ground, convinced that he had a trial. He later downgraded his expectations and went to St Mirren instead, which still makes me chuckle! My dad spent a lot of time trying to reverse the purchases and commitments that David had made using all his legal knowledge and local networks to overturn these.

Despite how poorly David was during his periods in hospital, I wasn't overly worried about his long-term health. I'm an optimist anyway (or perhaps naive) but everything I read suggested that the illness was treatable.

With regards the stigma of a 'mental health' label, this wasn't immediately a concern of mine. To me, David was just ill, whether it was mental or physical illness, didn't really matter. It was only when he was moved to a hospital called 'Dykebar', that it hit home a bit more. This hospital was the place that we joked about as kids as the place where the 'nutters' go. I could imagine David's peers talking and joking about it, and it worried me how he might be treated when/ if he went back to school.

In 2020, the stigma of mental health is reducing but there is still a long way to go, especially for men. Hopefully this book can help to increase awareness and open people's eyes to the reality of living with mental illness – not just for those with the mental illness, but also their friends and family. It also shows that there is light at the end of the tunnel, despite how long and dark that tunnel can seem at the start.

Laura

I thought hard about this, I didn't want to upset my sister by asking for her opinion on her wee brother during what would have been extremely an extremely difficult time for her.

Laura has down syndrome. She still has a voice. I recorded a chat I had with my sister and here are her thoughts.

Take it away Laura...

1. What was it like seeing your wee brother in hospital?

I was scared seeing you in hospital and worried. Mum brought you up Brussel sprouts and I thought that was very funny.

I remember you gave me hot water to drink, but I like hot water.

You were in hospital at hogmany and Mum was crying at the bells about you.

When mum and dad went to see you, I stayed with Granma. Did you know she stayed at number 18 on my street.

2. What was my behaviour like?

You were very angry with Dad and didn't act yourself.

You were still my brother, but you were acting crazy. I saw you in hospital and you were skinny. I saw you in hospital and you were bigger.

3. What do you think about in the future on how I will be?

Now you are on tablets for the rest of your life now.

You are calm now. You are happier with "your rock" around.

Rory's response

What was your initial thoughts to diagnosis?

I don't I remember thinking about you having a diagnosis at the time, it was all very confusing and at that age it didn't really make sense to me. What I did think about, over time, was that something was serious going wrong for you and wasn't changing after being in hospital the first time. I don't recall you ever having the diagnosis label, at the time for me and the rest of the boys, it was more about trying to keep you involved in things and part of the group. We were all young, so the diagnosis wasn't the big thing for me, we were all at that age of being daft and trying to have a laugh, living in each other's pockets daily, so having you with us and trying to be as normal as possible for you. In hindsight, which is killer, we probably didn't do things that you needed, as in, we tried to keep it as the usual, but it was obvious that you struggled at time, and we all knew you felt you were missing out.

Did you relate the illness with any behaviour as a kid?

I mean, we were kids at the time, and you and the others were a year older and hadn't been in your primary class etc. I didn't really become proper friends with the group, bar

Graeme, until late primary so I couldn't say about when you were young. I think you always had a quiet side and at times weren't massively confident, but I wouldn't relate that to your illness, no. Our group of pals were all positively different personality and interests wise, so we all had different "roles"... you were the quieter one of the group who loved football but always trying new things with us, Paul was the over confident, smug one, Chris was the funny one actually before he became a leccie, Youngy was the dumplin', moaning one, Ross was the nervous-around girls, smart, adventurous one, Graeme was the focused, driven one, and I was the total rage. So we all complimented each other in that way...I'm sure as a child you were stupidly lovely. (Do you mind that home video you had? You were a wee kid in it, in your conservatory, you made some comment to Chelsea, "bad dog" or something? We sat and laughed at that for ages one night...no idea why but it's a vivid memory).

*Authors note; my mum had recorded on film my chocolate lab running over wooden floor beams while the flooring was up. My mum said "acrobatic dog" In my pre broken voice in a high pitch I said "no, acrobatic David" as I proceeded to run across the beams myself.*

Did you understand what the diagnosis meant? Did you research?

Absolutely not, didn't have a clue. At first we were told manic depression, I knew what depression was but the manic bit I had no clue. Obviously, my mum was a nurse and I did ask her; she explained it more but I didn't truly understand. I think at

that time, I would have been 14 or 15 years old, so you feel invisible and you're just focused on having fun with your pals, trying to understand something so complex and raw wasn't possible. I do think it was too difficult to engage with it at the time, it was hard to conceptualise what was going on for you and as it became more severe or pronounced it was scary, not in the sense you were scary, but it was the unknown and a totally different experience to deal with.

When you wrote the first book, I took a long-time to read it as I thought latterly at the time and do now, that as a group of friends we didn't deal with it very well or as compassionately as we would today. I dreaded reading what was going on for you then and I do feel guilt for not knowing or being more supportive at first. We weren't cruel or took the piss, but we didn't know how to understand it, and maybe didn't want to be vulnerable to it, so it led me to minimise it or shrug it off. Initially anyway, after a 6 months to a year of you not really being around then coming back and definitely being more docile, it changed for me and I wanted to know more and change how I thought about how it was affecting you. It made us more aware, and worried, about what was going on for you. That time and the guilt, I feel anyway, can't speak for the others, was partly that we were having fun and we didn't want to change that, for obvious reasons being 16/17, and partly because we couldn't do anything about it. We could hardly visit in hospital, and in honesty, it was brutal to do so. I didn't want to do it, it was hard to see you in manic periods and unable to connect, and that's where I feel my guilt comes from most looking back. Would have changed anything? I'm not sure but it wouldn't have meant you being disconnected from

us for such long periods of time then to try and just slot back in.

Were you worried about my long term health?

At the beginning, I didn't consider any long-term impacts at all; not really understanding it meant I couldn't think like that, it was a shock. One minute you were crumbling then away to hospital, we hadn't experienced anything like this, it wasn't a tangible crisis like breaking a leg or getting a kicking, we didn't talk about mental health. As teenagers you shouldn't have to, you're supposed to be creating memories and testing the boundaries; obviously, it is much better young people don't go silent with mental distress like we did, the problem in society is that it creates conditions for young people where they struggle, but it shouldn't be what we think about. That's a big shouldn't and unrealistic, I know, but we should have been revelling in the utter nonsense we got up to. Sadly, you had to experience something we didn't know how to conceptualise or grapple with.

As time went on, year on year etc. I think we all started to worry about what would happen for you. Some of the boys were away to uni, others working, I was still in high school! So when we were starting to think about, "what am I going to do after school?" yeah, I think we all did worry that, firstly, you missed out on some important times and years, and secondly, we were moving onto our interests as potential careers, so it felt like you were stuck. That's the health element for me that

worried me, that the psychological impact of losing the similar trajectory as the rest of the group would make you more isolated. As well as that, I do remember that when you were changing medication, it definitely had a noticeable impact on you that we could see and I wondered what it was doing to you and how long that would last. For instance, we were all into sports and at one stage, you lost a lot of energy and enthusiasm, put on a lot of weight. For me, it was more about the uncertainty of what the future held, not the mental distress factor.

Did you think I shouldn't have been in hospital at time I was in?

This is difficult to look back on, especially as I've went to become a social worker and have more knowledge now, however, at the time we had no idea what was right or wrong. I knew I didn't want you in hospital but I couldn't say it was wrong for you when I was younger. After reading your book, it was heart breaking to think about how you were treated and your struggles in hospital, again, hindsight is a killer. I do remember visiting you in Dykebar and I was really upset and angry, you were talking about gods and random things, and I couldn't handle it at all. That was definitely a time I didn't know what to do or suggest or think; we did jokingly plan to break you out as I thought it was the hospital that was the problem but looking back it was the right think at that time. Could you have been better supported at home, probably, I think that now with my knowledge of services, but there were periods where you needed to be hospitalised to get proper

assessment and support. I can't comment on how your parents dealt with it but I'm sure they didn't know what to do either; it's daunting sitting in a room with a young person and their family and recommending hospital, I've had to do it, but it is brutal for parents as they are so helpless while you've got professionals making judgements.

How did you feel about the mental health tag on me?

We live in different times now so I don't think the tag is problematic, I actually think the problem is that people don't acknowledge their mental distress enough. I don't refer to you as Hammy with the mental health, Davie who has problems; you are just Hammy, who supports an awful football team. In reality, we don't even think about that element in you any more than any one of us who struggles at times. I mean you've "managed" your Bi-polar so well for a long-time that we trust you to be honest with us when things are getting difficult but I suppose it does just give us context if those periods do happen again. Let's be honest, it's a really horrible time right now for you and I do worry about how things are affecting you. Not that it's the "tag" means I have to be additionally worried, rather that it means there's an additional context around it. Mental distress is a lonely affair, the difference now, is that you have a group of close friends who have been through it with you to an extent, understand, and really care about you. We all make decisions in difficult periods that are off cuff and stupid, and I am worried that you might be doing that right now. Essentially, your periods of difficulty affect you differently or more acutely, so as we speak

today there may be some choices you're making don't add up to me as you coping or rational. Does that mean you are having an "episode" maybe not, but because you do have an additional factor in relation to mental distress, I do consider those choices concerning. In that essence, the "tag" helps me understand a bit more, so it is positive rather than being random behaviour. But I don't like or use the phrase mental health tag as it touches us all at times, some just hide it more so or can be vocal quicker.

Was there a point in my illness that could have been misrepresented by normal youth rebellion behaviour?

I don't think you did anything massively risky or stupid, or anything that people would label you as a misfit back in the day to be honest. Obviously, there was time when you had a set to with your dad and I was there, which was out of character but we all have contentious periods with our parents. There was one time where you were determined to fight Graeme for some reason and it was period where you were deteriorating, which was out of character. You were at his front door and I was behind you, Graeme and I were just confused. But then again, me and Paul love to almost get in fights with one another; and I slap Youngy any chance I get, so it is not like fighting didn't happen between us, Graeme slapped me with a belt once!

What I remember more vividly is that you would become more inward and isolated, you said some delusional things at

times, but it was more an isolating behaviour I remember. Like you were around us but not present, you were trying to be in the moment and have comradery with us but couldn't. Obviously, there was underage drinking and I, and others I shan't grass on, liked to smoke dope, which wasn't good for you, but there was nothing that outwards rebellious that I would have mistaken for mental distress. Your behaviour was very different to the person you were, fantasy thinking, erratic, chaotic type behaviour, the rebellious stuff, looking back, was pretty average and normal. And, we were all doing the same rebellious behaviour really so it was in tune with the group. Yours weren't even the most rebellious! Paul is going to have a hell of a type at the pearly gates explaining his youth!

Any other comments?

David, look where we all are now...some really important years got taken from you, and from us with you not being there, yet, we're still a really close group of friends. Even though we didn't manage it well at the time or opted out of meeting up in pubs, you never drifted away and became a friend from the past. I think that's something to really hold on to, because as things get tough, for all of us past, present or future, we have a something that some people who experience mental distress don't have, which is a group of mates who we trust to rely and lean on. We all have had to do it in our own ways and no doubt will; it is a shite time right now for you, I hope it doesn't take over you and becomes too difficult to reach out or seek that support, either from us or professionals to get through it. When you were younger and

sitting looking at boys playing football from a hospital window, you wouldn't have thought you would have two glorious kids. Keep them as your focus the now, get yourself set up and settled by yourself so you can be there for them. It's a difficult and confusing time for them too, I'd be proud to have a dad like you to help me through it. Someone who isn't scared to write a book about the worst time in your life and speak about it openly, someone who has overcome a lot of challenges and taken control over your life, and someone who at any time can easily switch that horrible blue top for lovely green and white hoops.

I know we all spoke to you individually when you wrote your first draft of your book but we were all incredibly proud of you doing it, and it really taught us something about that time we didn't get the magnitude of. I don't think I say any other word than proud to attribute to you.

## Youngy's thoughts

1. Initial diagnosis thoughts - I guess initial thoughts were more concern for you and shock really as I didn't really see it coming, i.e. that you weren't quite right rather than either knowing or understanding what Bipolar diagnosis actually was. I didn't really know what had gone on until one of the boys said that we were going up to visit you at Dykebar (not sure who, guess it must have come through somebody's parents initially). It was then the gravity of the situation really hit me with the secure environment you had been put in and the fact that you were surrounded by people of all ages who were clearly not quite right, I remember thinking this environment can't be good for anyone and you would leave worse off than when you went in. You called me from the hospital one time and told me about playing for Rangers which really scared me as it was clear that you weren't really in control of your thoughts. When we came to visit you (Think Ross drove and might have been Chris and Rory as well?) you were in a small basic room and had really deteriorated since the last time I saw you, talking about understanding the meaning of life and god complexes generally. I remember we all discussed breaking you out as we didn't think you should be there, but I guess when we left we we're all a bit shell shocked as the harsh reality of your situation and what you were having to go through was tangible to us. Ultimately we just wanted to stick by you and help where we could by trying to distract you from whatever was going on and trying to involve you in normal things like playing footy, 'visiting' golf courses and generally hanging around and talking nonsense, to hopefully provide you with an outlet.

2. Relating illness to behaviour as a kid – What I remember is us all hanging about at yours a lot, playing footy, basketball, computer games, hanging in your conservatory and just general teenager stuff. We did drink and smoke too, but to me this seemed like par for the course and what most folk our age were up to. What I did see if that after the first episode you did seem to loose a lot of confidence and became quieter. I read in Rory’s response that you would meet us but sometimes would seem like your mind was elsewhere and didn’t engage as much as you did when we were younger. When I first met you I always remember you having girlfriends and always being up for playing sports and generally doing stuff, so this was a tangible change in character. We all had our own trials and tribulations in our youth, and I did worry and feel guilty that the underage drinking or smoking might have instigated what happened to you and to be honest don’t know to this day if something did cause it, or if it was inevitable and would have happened at some point anyway?
  
3. Understanding of diagnosis – I didn’t understand the diagnosis and don’t recall the ‘bi-polar’ diagnosis being confirmed until much later on, just understood that something was seriously wrong at the time, to the extent that you had to be taken away from home for your own safety. With my mum and sister both being nurses they were aware of the general issue, but I don’t think they knew exactly what was going on and so weren’t much help when it came to understanding your situation and the prognosis. What I did think is that as your friends, somebody could have explained this to us a bit better at the time and keep us updated, but after initially thinking that your parents may not have helped the situation, I now understand the pressures and uncertainty they must have

been under, especially with Laura being younger as well. I do think that given the better awareness generally these days, that things could have been less difficult for you had we been teenagers now.

4. Long term health – There was always so much pressure at school to do well at frequent stages (exams) and if you messed one up then you were immediately on the back foot and ended up in classes where there was a mix of folk that just didn't care and ultimately held you back as the engagement was poor. I remember thinking, shit, he's missed all of his exams, what is he going to do after school!?! I thought that we were all quite intelligent and similarly academic thereabouts, so I remember feeling gutted for you that you didn't have a chance to prove that. I remember you came back to school at one point and I think some of the teachers did what they could to give you a chance to sit what exams they could which was good of them. I don't know what you eventually got to sit in the end but in hindsight personally I think these are not so important and that general life experience trumps this anyway, but at the time it was the be all and end all in so far as the pressure my folks and teachers put on me. It seemed to take ages for you to be on some sort of an even keel with medication and I can't remember exactly how long you were away, but it was great that you were able to come back for prom. I remember you had put on a bit of weight and that it was going to be a tough day not having seen so many folk from school in such a long time, and the fact that teenagers that age could be brutal, but glad you got to do that and hopefully helped with awareness of mental health issues. I continue to be concerned about your professional outlook and how Bipolar affects your ability to apply for jobs, however it's great that you have

recently been afforded the time to gather your thoughts and I'm thrilled that you are putting your experience to good use and to help others who might be going through a similar experience to you.

5. Should have been in hospital? – At the time I didn't really understand why you were in hospital, but when I got the phone calls from you and visited you at Dykebar, it was clear that you needed help. I did think that the type of place with other patients roaming around wasn't a positive influence at the time, and wonder what this would be like nowadays. Reading your book was harrowing and until I read it I didn't really appreciate the extent of what you had been through and also the timescales which really struck me as longer than it seemed and probably at complete variance to your experience which must have seemed like a lifetime in hospital. Within the book there seemed to be a lot of rage against how you were treated and generally how things panned out, and I can't help but agree that while I think it was important that you were fully diagnosed in a safe place, the timescales for this seemed far too long.
  
6. Mental health tag – At the time there was stigma in that something was wrong with you and people forgetting that you were just a person who needed help, but nowadays there is so much awareness that I'm content that you don't need to hide it and have lot's of support so no real concerns about the tag. It's great how open you are about Bipolar and your experience which allows me to be able to ask questions which otherwise I might be nervous about asking.

7. Misrepresentation of illness – I don't think so. There was a clear change in behaviour and character which I saw from before your first episode to when I saw you in hospital. Might be my rubbish memory, but I don't recall a gradual decline or any significant behaviour changes within our group that was obvious. We all got up to stuff that was rebellious and from what I saw there was nothing unusual about the stuff you did in the period leading up to your first episode.
  
8. Other comments – I think the way you have embraced your illness and turned into a positive is inspirational. I was really surprised that you wrote a book, laying out your story to benefit others and hopefully helping yourself in the process. I think that out of all of our group that's the singular bravest and most amazing thing any of us have ever done (even if the grammar was atrocious)! You seem to have had things under control for so long now that Bipolar isn't something we immediately even think of and it's just something we are aware of in the background, I think were all so grateful that you have had this stability.

## Chapter Eighteen

The St Andrews day interview 2017

On November 30th, 2017 I had a skype interview with a researcher from Manchester University.

It was the first time I felt like I could really open to a stranger.

The interview came about after answering a post that “Bipolar Scotland” had put online.

“To interview twelve people who have had a diagnosis of any bipolar disorder. To ask them about their experiences of working towards being able to live the life they want.”

The interview was done in two one-hour slots over a couple of weeks.

Whilst being interviewed I felt completely at ease and could describe everything I felt at each point in time. As the questions moved deeper into the condition, I could feel myself holding up that same guard I always held up. You know that guard you hold up when someone asks you how you are and your go to response is always “fine”.

Well, she was able to smash through that guard, I had only ever let people close to me in until that point.

I relaxed and got deeper into the conversation. Her leading questions started to open my memories and it became a lot

easier to discuss the things that happened to me over those key years.

She went on to interview another 9 people and some of the findings were very similar to my experiences.

The study was as follows:

“We wanted to further understand what people once diagnosed with bipolar disorders felt was important in them changing their life to make it more the way they wanted it to be. We hope that increasing our understanding of what is involved will help shift current negative attitudes and assumptions about the long-term nature of this diagnosis”

The keys things that I feel matched my thoughts with other people are:

1. Acknowledging that there was a problem which was described as a turning point for many. It allows access to treatment and further support.
2. Everyone showed a willingness of trial and error of medication until something worked.
3. Everyone had taken medication. The majority still take medication today.
4. Following recognising the problem, people had an instinctive curiosity in then finding out more about the diagnosis. People said that they wanted to learn more about bipolar disorder and knowhow to manage it. Some people read about how others with the diagnosis had made changes. Many people wanted to help others now by talking about

what they had found helpful about bipolar disorder and things like that

5. Taking control of your own lives was important. People started to feel more in charge of their recovery.

6. Changing how I think included thinking about what things were like in the past. Looking back to see the progress we had made. It helps to identify dark thoughts.

7. Accepting who I am and how I feel.

8. The largest category was described as looking after me. This included people understanding themselves more and how bipolar disorder affected them. They identified what things made them feel worse. People started to do more things that they loved and prioritised their own needs more. These things helped them feel and stay well.

Upon looking at those findings from the interview I took part in. It started to give me a greater sense of not being alone with bipolar. Something that I really struggled with at the beginning.

## Chapter Nineteen

### Lockdown tactics

March 2020 feeling of being sectioned with covid.

The whole world had a glimpse of how I felt being told to stay inside one place. The world had effectively just been given a section.

I've been there and done that. My saving Grace were my children. They could keep me going through anything.

The time allowed outside for exercise. Really? People were allowed to go out to exercise? Huh? That was new to me.

Being away from my friends and family was extremely difficult. Not playing football which was and will always be my release from everyday stress.

When some restrictions were lifted and the ex in laws were allowed to come close really drilled it into me how much I missed my own family.

It was May before I got to see my mum and dad. With their birthdays so close together it was nice to bring a birthday cake

over to there front steps. Still not hugging at that point, living in fear that “the virus” would pass on to them. I needed to hug them. However, I ended up driving away from Churchill in tears.

Slowly the restrictions began to ease and eventually full contact with society came back.

On August the 15<sup>th</sup> 2020 by Papa house sold. It just happened to be his birthday. I reminder that things happen for a reason in time.

For me the damage of lockdown would leave a lasting impression on my life. The good, the bad and the ugly.

## Chapter Twenty

### Social media

Not being able to socialise with anyone, pushed everything online.

Zoom calls, podcasts, twitter, Instagram connections became a great source of contact.

I had a telephone conversation with Michael Bryne on the telephone about Facebook groups he runs. My idea to start a website came from this conversation.

I built my website [letsgetgr8again](#) with a great bit of guidance from the ever-knowledgeable Willy Stewart. Willy even gave me his own microphone to help reduce static during my audio recordings. It goes to show the kindness he has to go out his way to help others. What a man!

The website I set up covered my story and I hope to add loads of others stories from others based on their own recovery and continued methods of staying well.

I hope the website will help the individual mainly, but then give friends and family the insight to discovered why they feel or act a certain way.

One of my mates Aaron Connolly from time to tackle asked me on to his time to talk podcast. That was the first time I ever shared my story in my own words.

The guy who gave me the inspiration to tell my story on paper gave me the platform to air my story in my own words. I will forever hold gratitude for that.

Listening back to the podcast recording its clear my mood had dipped at that point in time. My speech was slow and I had clear pauses in my thinking.

Twitter and Instagram gave me the connections which branched out to some truly amazing people.

Twitter helped me find some amazing people and their books. Aidan Martin's Euphoric recall and the Guts family Jillian Halket's Blade in the shadow and John Gerard Fagan's Fishtown helped shaped the way I think about people's own individual life experiences. I have learned so much from all three. Trauma and recovery with loads of inspirational things following Aidan's book release. Even a chance for me to spend a day with him.

Jillian's book helped me open my mind on OCD and its very real difficult which imparts people's life's. OCD isn't just putting things in order, its hugely complex.

John's book, starting from the way it was written, I though was genius. The way he tells the story made me feel like I was right next to him going through the motions too.

Through to Time to tackle I have made some friends that I feel like I will have for a lifetime.

I started to enjoy running for the first time without a ball at my feet from doing the Ally Bingham challenge. Ally from kick mental health shared his challenge with Time to tackle and during the month of July 2020 I challenged myself to run 100km in that month.

Another one of those friends for life is an amazing guy called Campbell Ramage, a top photographer and creative person, he included me in his Nutmeg magazine project and got a average face looking good in a glossy monthly football magazine. Campbell also put in the WhatsApp group about a run he would do in 19/6/21. While I have my new found love for running I said I would join in too. It would be my first competitive 10km street run in Glasgow city centre. I managed to do it in a record personal best time of 47mins 38secs.

## **Chapter Twenty one**

### Lost the dressing room

After missing the first 6 weeks of work on furlough I was called to get back into work. The new routine of working from home gave me the opportunity to see my kids every day. The hardest of times for some gave me the best of times with my children.

Building that bond with my kids was amazing. I would bath them every night and put them to bed every night. I love making up stories in my head to tell the kids.

Most nights my mind flows quickly so I helped me to blurt out that steady flow of consciousness to my kids through these made-up rhyming stories.

Neave would eventually go back to nursery then later that year start school. My wee girl was growing so fast. I didn't want to blink and miss it.

The relationship I had with my kids mother was rapidly going down hill to a point we would pass on the stairs when I had put the kids to bed. I was then by myself for the rest of the night. I would mostly go out running or catch up on podcasts.

What I did know was this lifestyle wasn't making me happy. I had needs and I wasn't getting them.

I applied for new jobs and throughout lockdown I planned a way to get out of my marriage.

Or latterly think about my exit strategy whilst bringing myself to tears thinking about how I would need to tell my children that dad wouldn't be around like he wants to be.

How could I do that to my kids. Eventually I decided I would make the change. I just didn't know how or when to approach it.

The running joke with ex had with my kids is she would say oh look your daddy's he's smiling. Saying it sarcastically ofcourse.

I don't think they realised how much that hurt me. I was so unhappy.

## Chapter Twenty two

20 year anniversary

I set the 4/2/22 date in advance to compete a challenge to mark my 20<sup>th</sup> year with bipolar.

I like setting myself challenges to see how far I can push myself. All or nothing type character now adays.

The original challenge I wanted to do was to walk for 20 straight hours. On second thoughts I thought about how important for me it is to stick to a routine.

The new plan was to run for 20km then walk for 20km and end with a 20km cycle.

I mapped my route to cover all points of interested throughout the years which shaped my like.

The day arrived and it was absolutely pissing it done. The first minute of jogging and I was “wetter than a knackered fridge. My pockets like otter’s pockets.”

The run to begin with took me from my home at the time to Dykebar and then onwards under the Clyde tunnel walkway and end at Gartnavel hospital. I took a few minutes to rest on the bench that overlooks the hill I spent many days looking down at. Being outside those grounds in the fresh air with freedom is so refreshing. I can’t lie. I like going back and being outside it. No constraints.

The next part to the challenge was to walk to Ibrox, still pissing it down. A brief moment rest at the place that dreams are made. Well for one half of Glasgow at least.

A few months later I made another appearance on that pitch. Days before one of my favourite players growing up would lead the team out at Europa league final. This second time I have played. Unfit though as I will explain now.

To finish the 20km walk I walked to where my papa's ashes were scattered at the end of February 2022 then a few more miles down the road to where my granmas gravestone is.

My mum then collected me and drove me back to hers for a quick shower and change then back out on my dad's bike.

To complete the 20km cycle I went on the cycle track down to Lochwinnoch and reached the place I played football with Kilbarchan AFC. The team I feel saved my life. Or at the very least, put me back on track.

The cycle finished in Kilbarchan in front of the steeple. That's the complete circle of my bipolar struggles.

Speaking of struggles, I picked up a leg injury after the challenge and began to blow up in weight.

It wasn't until April it my heaviest again I knew I needed to help myself again. My second game at Ibrox feel in May.

I lost my confidence and self-drive. I quit my football team and started to spiral down. I was conscious of my weight and felt ashamed in front of the mirror.

I had to change that and the only person who would change that would be me.

The summer of 22 was fast approaching and I was so unhappy.

Unhappy in my marriage, which I had been since before lockdown. Unhappy at my job. Unhappy about the lack of smile on my face.

The planned holiday was about to happen, and I wanted to stay at home alone.

My kids were the only thing that brightened up my day during that time. They are my shining light when I am unhappy and feeling sad.

## Chapter 23

Fate gave me another chance

A girl liked a post that I had put on Instagram. I liked one of hers. She followed me and I followed her back.

She put a story up about doing first aid training during her work, that got me thinking.

I needed to do some first aid training, why not ask my new friend.

After a brief chat we were soon chatting every day. Ten days later was our first real encounter.

From that moment I knew she was the girl I had been looking for my whole life. Caring, funny, unbelievable cute and an edge to her.

Her family values align with me and her love of animal's rubber stamp with mine.

She takes me for who I am and doesn't judge me. In fact, she inspires me to be the best version of me and I can't thank her enough.

She is the type of girl that when I am not with her I breathe differently. If she ever has a problem my gut tells me to fix it.

To have someone in your corner who will fight with you is something that everyone should have. Never try and change who you are to fit how you think others would like you.

## Chapter twenty-four

### Bipolar Scotland

I spoke previously of my dream, of standing out in a crowd of people looking at my hands with a microphone.

In 2022 as I was marking my 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Bipolar Scotland marked their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of being an organisation. Like me progressed from the manic-depressive label.

On the 6/11/22 I spoke about my story in the best setting possible. In venue I spoke in for Bipolar Scotland 30<sup>th</sup> year anniversary had a panoramic rooftop view of Edinburgh castle

The excited but nervous feeling started weeks before the event.

I created two videos. One to intro me and the other to tale of the story.

The morning before my talk I finished writing the part I would speak about. I was sat next to my kids that morning. It was fireworks morning. I was ready to send my thoughts into the sky for all to see.

I laminated two a4 print outs and cut them up to use the next day. 7 little slips were made. My daughter reading through them with keen interest. She is 6 and growing up so fast.

So my talk in between the two videos tells the story of being 16 scared and alone with no grasp of mental ill health. How

challenging the 5 hospital stays were. Followed by my continuous journey to the present day.

At the time of writing, I have started my role as a peer support worker with Bipolar Scotland and my passion of helping other people has become real.

The 16-year-old kid that I was, alone and scared, has the tools and knowledge to make sure other 16-year-old kids won't be alone, they won't be scared and they will have someone to fight their corner.

The project I am part of is for newly diagnosed people with bipolar. They are not being tossed away with a wee leaflet to read.

They are not being left to their own devices. They ARE getting the help that should be in place.

On the 21/10/22 Nigel emailed me with the role I feel like I was born to do. The closing day for the job was the 7/11/22 the day after my first even bipolar talk. On the 8<sup>th</sup> I got the job interview.

The application to be a fully paid peer support worker is something that I feel I will be incredibly good at. I not only

want to help others. I feel passionately about change within society.

It's my goal to make sure nobody ever feels alone.

## Chapter Twenty five

### The penultimate hope

The aim of the putting these open and honest feelings laid to paper is to try and help anyone effected in the way I was. As the old cliché goes, if one person can take inspiration from my story then I job is done.

I hope my experiences will help the kids of today. The teenagers that going through that change of life, who are trying to find who they are in this world.

To the adults who haven't managed to understand and grasp the demons that have been locked inside all these years.

To anyone else trying to obtain knowledge of bipolar and mental health as a whole. I hope this can go a long way in trying to eliminate the stigma of having an invisible condition (is it a condition) that word doesn't sit right with me.

I hope the recurring nightmares I have about waking up in a psychiatric ward never happen to anyone else.

A psychiatric ward filled with other people struggling is a recipe for disaster.

## **The final chapter**

The conclusion.

I have spent over two years creating this book. Starting from St Andrews day 2017. While piecing together the story of my bipolar years, I managed to obtain my doctors notes. These helped me recall memories and situations I found myself under. Those memories were moments that crushed me at the time. These are the times I felt powerless and mentally boxed in a corner.

How I went from an outwardly shy boy to a grown adult.

The key points of my story which I tried to get across were these:

- Being diagnosed with bipolar at the age of 16. With no understanding of mental health conditions.
- Having four sectioned hospital admissions and one voluntary stay which ended up as a section.
- Extreme highs with psychosis and an endless supply of energy.
- Extreme lows with feelings of worthlessness.
- How playing football helped me come out of my depressive state after my final stay in hospital.

- Staying with that football peer group helped build up social skills and confidence.
- How the importance of a balanced lifestyle with rest and a decent amount of physical activity.
- How important it is to take ownership (the realisation step) of your own mental health and seek professional help.

### *The disorder*

Looking back over my early years I could see stages of bipolar. Days of full energy and days with no energy. Some reckless thoughts and daydreams. Some nights where I wouldn't go to sleep until very late/early morning.

I was sectioned three times before my 18th birthday. Maybe the fact that I was so young and slightly naïve enhanced those episodes occurring more frequently.

Possibly the notion of wanting to feel high again wouldn't have mattered what age I was at the time.

I have been asked before "if you could take a magic pill and bipolar will disappear would you take it?"

My answer is no! I believe it was meant to play out the way it did.

I firmly think I would be a different person today if I didn't go through it all. It has opened my eyes up to whole new side of life, to things I never thought possible. It has given me a clearer picture of what is important and what I should stress about.

Everything I have experienced has shaped the way I think today. To feel more empathy for people than I already did. To not look down on anyone and see the best in them.

The experience of the “high” is something I will never forget. The sense of greatness, over self-confidence, high energy, and rapid thoughts.

In all honesty I miss feeling like that. I mean who wouldn't want to feel great about themselves all the time?

The “high” was the main reason I ended back up in hospital a few times. I had stopped taking medication because I wanted to feel like that again.

I have always wondered about the person you become with a bipolar high. Is this the reflection of the person you wish you really were?

This was the situation that I couldn't grasp. When in the cusp of an elevated state, how could I be ill when I felt so good?

However, when you are that high ultimately there is only one way you can go. And that's down. That's the opposite effect. The longer I was high the more of a crash I got. The fall back down to earth. The flip side to bipolar was the depression.

The great depression, the ones with no self-confidence, no energy and dark thoughts. Feelings of worthlessness.

A blank mind staring up at the ceiling. No focus. No drive. Nothing!

Things that stress people in day to day life doesn't bother me, because I know there is a much harder place I could be. I'm

lucky I managed to get through all the episodes in good shape. I am almost horizontal now when it comes to dealing with stress.

The bipolar state of mind will always be in the back on my head though.

Sometimes I wonder if today, will be the day when it starts to bite back.

However, it will take a momentous situation for me ever to go backwards.

With the help of years practicing good health and recognising my triggers has made my life easier. Together with the good support network I have around me.

I have memorised the A4 sheet of paper I worked on with my CPN.

This A4 sheet split in two columns highlighted early warning signs and things to do to get help.

I have promised myself that I would catch whatever gets thrown at me. And never let anything fester inside me.

My normal/rational thoughts may vary with whatever life throws at me.

Trying to block out mental ill health will never happen. I can forget about it during course of the day by being busy, but at night it's the routine medication that keeps me focused. It's always that reminder to stay grounded.

Some nights my mind is going faster than it should when trying to wind down, but that is dependent on the day I have had.

## *Hospital life*

Looking back to times where I was isolated a room to myself with nothing but my own thoughts. That's just a mind fuck. These times when I was at my extreme high. Instead of leaving my mind to its own devices, my mind should have been stimulated then gradually wound down.

On the other hand, bipolar affects people in many ways. Doctors action plan's must be tailor made on each individual person.

However, if gave the doctors all my thoughts, they would literally have been blown out the stratosphere.

I used to always wonder how I was supposed to act in an environment where everything you do is written down or relayed for some else to interpret. Do you act like you are happy to stay in this environment? Should you be content with the situation you are in, locked up in unit against your wishes?

On occasions I would get day trips where I would go home and visit my friends. Sometimes after weeks spent away from them. After longer weeks apart it was more difficult to adjust to seeing them again. Sometimes I wouldn't recognise them due to hair growth.

After spending copious amounts of time in hospital the feeling of being institutionalised was very real. I feared going home.

Being home was the only place I had felt safe. But now I was scared going places, interacting with people outside the unit and that made me feel about two feet tall.

### *Education*

To start with. I missed out on getting my qualifications and going to university. I thought that was the benchmark at the time and something I must achieve.

The social side of uni ended up being no issue as my friends would invite me to the events they went to. On these occasions I would invent up some wild stories to strangers who asked me what course I was on.

But back then that's what I wanted. It's what I thought I should be doing with my life.

All my mates were at Uni and I was in and out a fucking mental hospital!

### *Exercise*

Keeping active has been a vital part of keeping the lid on my mental health. Doing things I enjoy such as playing football regularly, running short to medium, walks and lifting weights.

### *Medication*

I drew up a list on the doctor's notes part of the different medications I have taken. I am currently I am on the lowest dose of Depakote. I am still holding on to the fact it works for me and wouldn't want to part from it. Well not just yet.

### *Current climate*

I have often wondered what it would be like if I was that skinny 16-year-old today. Would social media play a major role in my situation?

Would my meltdown have went viral? Would I have suffered from people trolling me about my mental health?

Back then we only had dial up internet connection at home and snake on our Nokia 3210's!

Right now, it would be a harder to deal with it what I went through?

I know stigma is on the decrease in society, but that doesn't stop kids being kids and indirectly damaging someone else's character.

Although in 2022, a lot of mental health issues are being spoken about. People are still throwing phrases like he's having a bipolar day around the office. Going on my experience alone.

### *Motivation*

I have always been motivated to keep going forward. Even during the times when I struggled and felt I was never going to

get out hospital. In my head this was never going to be the path I was going to stay on.

### *Proving the doubters wrong.*

After all the negative comments to my face, or more times than not, behind my back. I have always proved that those comments were generally unfounded. It gives me great pleasure in facing up to these challenges which are thrown in my way.

The setbacks and the mistakes I have made have helped me grow into the person I am today.

### *Tackling stigma*

Times are changing! More and more mental health charities are coming to the fore front.

Brilliant set ups such as Aaron Connelly's Time to tackle initiative. This joint group set up with Siobhan gives participants an hour of football. Followed by a relaxed environment to chat and be supported from within the group.

Other groups mirror this group, such as Kick mental health in Livingston and Kickin'on in Linwood. Each very good at what they do and growing all the time. These groups doing exceptionally well growing and helping in their own communities.

Other groups offer much more other than football based, but these would have appealed to me.

These types of initiatives would have helped me immensely at the time I was struggling in the early noughties.

Playing football, keeping fit, and surrounded in a supportive peer group. Pass, shoot... back of the net!

Mental health stigma is slowly being eliminated. More and more men and women are speaking up about Mental Health issues in the public eye and I couldn't be happier.

### **Tailored approach to every individual.**

As everyone is different. A tailored approach to every individual's mental health needs to be done going forward.

I took part in DNA testing for lithium in November 22 and it aims to highlight what medication works for a person based on their DNA.

Maybe in the future when a baby is born their DNA will be taken to see if they have the genes which might trigger something later in life. That's a long way off.

My tailored approach would have been finding out what makes me happy. What works for me. At no point was I ever asked what would work for me. I had to fit a certain box.



## **Final statement**

I used to look over my shoulder to see if bipolar was going to attack me. Right now, I have a firm grasp of it in front of me, held tightly in my own hands.

I know that it will be a constant battle and that I will never stopping going toe to toe with it. I won't turn my back on it. However, I might need to lean on the ropes(support) if I must have that inch of space.

I am prepared to fight. It will never be time to take those gloves off or throw in the towel.

My bipolar story will never finish, this fight-back has been for that skinny 16-year-old kid back on the Fourth of February 2002.

From being stuck in the darkness to emerging into the bright lights of hope.

## **Post prescription**

The rock by my side.

From the moment I saw you I knew you were the one.

Being serious and through fun.

You heard my story that's from my heart.

And you didn't run...what a great start.

Those first few days I dreamt of you

And then my dreams started to come true.

We met and walked around the Vicky.

We talked, laughed and I found you witty.

But my god how bloody pretty.

The first time you came to see my play.

I was out of position, being led astray.

Subbed off and in a huff.

Feeling and looking like the buff.

However, my mood quickly lifted,

I looked at you and my mindset shifted.