

RECOVERY

A Guide to Overcoming Major Trauma



A book written by:

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Recovery:

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BY

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Introduction

This book is a beacon of hope for anyone struggling to recover from a major trauma. Whether it's an illness, surgery, a broken relationship, loss, or any other life-changing event, recovery is a tough journey that affects both body and mind. I'm sharing my personal story and the strategies that helped me through my darkest times to help others find their way.

In 2017, my life changed forever when I collapsed in Manchester and needed emergency brain surgery. The 12-hour operation was just the start - I faced seizures, a coma, a collapsed lung, and sepsis. I was exhausted, but I made a promise to my dad that I'd get through it. This book is my journey from rock bottom to finding strength and purpose again.

I'm sharing my story because I know how it feels to be alone and overwhelmed. I want to reassure others that they're not alone and offer practical advice to help them face their own recovery. What I've learned about acceptance, resilience, and setting goals can inspire others to find their inner strength. This book shows that with determination, anyone can heal and thrive, no matter what life throws their way.

Chapter 1

A Sneak Peek Into The Background

One day in Manchester, something unexpected happened that changed my life drastically. I collapsed out of nowhere, which was just the beginning of a journey I never saw coming. The collapse was sudden and scary, and the rush to the hospital was a blur. The doctors acted fast, running tests to figure out why I had such severe symptoms all of a sudden. I was shocked to hear the news: I had a tumor in my brain that needed an urgent and extensive surgery. It was a heavy blow to realize I was facing a serious condition when I had always thought of myself as being healthy. At this point, I needed immediate treatment to save my life, and the medical team at Salford Royal Hospital responded quickly and with precision.

In December 13, 2017, I had a 12-hour neurosurgery, one of the most complex surgeries a person can have. The surgery involved removing a mass from my brain, which was risky and required great precision. The doctors warned me about possible complications, but I had no choice than to put my trust in them and go through with it. There were 23 skilled professionals and specialists in that operating room, each with an important role to play together like a finely tuned machine. I couldn't help but think about the challenges ahead and the promise I made to my father to keep fighting.

Despite the surgery going well, the days after were filled with serious complications that put my recovery at risk. At first, I experienced seizures that led to a coma to prevent more damage. Being in this unconscious state was a mixed blessing, shielding me from immediate pain but also leaving me in a risky situation. Upon waking up, I found out I had a collapsed lung, adding to my already delicate state. And just when I thought things couldn't get any worse, I was down with sepsis, a dangerous infection that quickly spread through my weakened body.

Each day was a struggle for survival, as I dealt with extreme weakness and pain. I felt overwhelmed by the seriousness of my condition and feared I might never fully get better. The toll emotionally was just as big. When I first found out about the diagnosis and all the problems that came after, it made me feel mentally and emotionally exhausted. I felt very vulnerable and scared, emotions that I wasn't used to feeling before. The hospital room suddenly became a place where I thought a lot about my feelings of hopelessness and despair instead of a place of healing and hope.

I thought a lot about what the future might hold for me, if I would ever be able to be independent again, and how this experience would change my life. The promises I made to my father was what kept me from drifting away, but the road ahead seemed really hard. Each day had some little victories and big setbacks, and I struggled to find a

sense of normalcy in all the chaos. My body showed signs of the trauma it had been through. The scar on my head reminded me of the surgery I had, and I had marks from various medical procedures. Even simple tasks felt extremely difficult; I needed help just to sit up in bed and it was very painful. I was always tired, as my body was fighting battles on multiple fronts.

The seizures had left me confused, and the infection had drained any little energy I had left. Breathing reminded me of my collapsed lung, and moving around was very crippling. I felt physically weak, which was a huge switch from my active lifestyle before that. It was obvious that my recovery would be a long and tough journey, needing lots of patience and strength. The process of getting better began with taking small steps forward. The healthcare team was great and ensured the best of treatments, but a lot of the progress depended on me. It all kicked off by coming to terms with my new reality, which was extremely difficult. Coming to terms was a struggle. I felt the urge to point fingers at someone or something for my situation, even though logically, I knew it was a genetic problem. My thoughts were stuck on how unfair everything seemed. The mark on my head served as a reminder of my battle, attracting attention and comments from strangers and people I knew.

With time, I started to see it not as a symbol of tragedy, but as a sign of my resilience. I went through a lot of ups and downs emotionally. The beginning was particularly tough. Losing my driver's license was a huge hit to me psychologically. Driving had been a big part of my life for a long time. It represented freedom and independence, both of which I was now unsure about. Not knowing if I would ever drive again made me constantly anxious. This loss was about more than just being able to get around; it also impacted my ability to live a normal life, go to work, and visit loved ones without needing help from others. I was determined to not let my condition control me mentally. Even though I was in physical pain and emotional distress, I was determined to start over. It was a slow and difficult process, but achieving small victories helped me stay focused. I started with simple goals and worked my way up as I regained my strength. This method made me feel like I had control over my recovery, something I had been longing for since I was diagnosed.

The support from my loved ones was vital in keeping me motivated and encouraged. The following months were focused on recovering. The exercises in physical therapy were tough, but necessary for getting back my strength. Healing mentally and emotionally took even more time. I had to accept that my life had changed forever, but that didn't mean it couldn't still be good. Going through this experience showed me the importance of cherishing the little things and not taking anything for granted.

Every day was a chance to move forward and decide what recovery meant to me. Overall, my journey from a sudden illness to getting better was filled with many challenges and important lessons. I was shocked by the diagnosis, had a challenging brain surgery, dealt with complications after the operation, and faced emotional and physical struggles. This difficult times tested my faith, emboldened my adaptability and shouldered my ability to bounce back, and inner strength. As I keep moving forward in my recovery, I wish that by sharing my experience, I can give hope and advice to others going through similar struggles. The path to healing is not easy, but with perseverance, help from loved ones, and a positive attitude, it is possible to overcome even the most challenging obstacles.

Chapter 2

The Role of Acceptance in Recovery

Acceptance is often the most challenging part of any recovery experience, yet it is also the most essential. Without acceptance, it becomes impossible to move forward, to heal, and to rebuild. In my case, accepting the reality of my condition was a long and arduous process, fraught with emotional struggles and constant battles with my own mind. However, it was this acceptance that eventually laid the foundation for my recovery.

The Importance of Accepting the Situation

When I was first diagnosed, I found it difficult to grasp the gravity of my situation. The idea that I had a growing mass in my brain that had been there since birth was surreal. It felt like an alien concept, something that couldn't possibly be true. Denial became a coping mechanism, a way to protect myself from the overwhelming fear and uncertainty. But denial is a double-edged sword. While it may offer temporary relief, it ultimately prevents progress and prolongs suffering.

Acceptance, on the other hand, is about acknowledging the reality of the situation, no matter how painful or unfair it may seem. It means understanding that some things are beyond our control and that we must work with what we have. For me, acceptance began with small steps. I started by listening to the doctors, understanding the nature of my condition, and acknowledging the challenges that lay ahead. It wasn't easy, and it didn't happen overnight, but gradually, I began to accept my new reality.

Acceptance also means letting go of the need to blame. Initially, I wanted to blame someone or something for my condition. I questioned why this had happened to me and searched for reasons. But blame is unproductive and draining. It keeps us stuck in the past, preventing us from focusing on the future. Once I let go of the blame, I felt a sense of liberation. It allowed me to direct my energy towards healing and recovery instead of dwelling on the injustice of it all.

Emotional Struggles and Coming to Terms with Reality

Emotionally, the journey to acceptance was disruptive. The initial shock of the diagnosis was followed by a rollercoaster of emotions. Fear, anger, sadness, and frustration became daily companions. There were days when I felt completely

overwhelmed, wondering if I would ever feel normal again. The emotional burden was heavy, and it took a toll on my mental health.

Coming to terms with reality required a deep emotional reckoning. I had to confront my fears head-on and allow myself to feel the pain and sadness that came with them. This process was neither linear nor easy. Some days were better than others, but each step forward, no matter how small, was progress. I found solace in journaling, which allowed me to express my thoughts and emotions freely. Writing became a therapeutic outlet, helping me process my experiences and gain clarity.

Support from loved ones was also invaluable. My family and friends provided a safety net, offering encouragement and understanding. They listened without judgment, allowing me to express my fears and frustrations. This support reminded me that I was not alone in my journey. Their unwavering belief in my ability to recover was a source of strength and motivation.

Dealing with Visible Scars and Public Reactions

One of the most visible reminders of my surgery was the large scar on my head. It was a constant, tangible mark of what I had been through. Initially, I was very self-conscious about it. I felt as though it was the first thing people noticed about me, and I worried about their reactions. The stares and comments from strangers and even acquaintances were sometimes hard to bear.

However, over time, I learned to embrace my scar as a symbol of survival. It was a proof of my strength and resilience. I realized that people's reactions were often a reflection of their curiosity or lack of understanding, rather than judgment. By adopting a positive attitude towards my scar, I was able to shift my perspective. Instead of seeing it as a blemish, I began to see it as a badge of honor.

Barbers would often comment on the scar when I got my haircut, and instead of feeling embarrassed, I used those moments to share my story. This openness not only helped me accept my new reality but also raised awareness about brain surgery and recovery. It turned potentially uncomfortable interactions into opportunities for connection and education.

The Psychological Impact of Losing Independence

One of the hardest blows to my sense of independence and normalcy was the loss of my driving license. Driving had been a significant part of my life since I was a teenager. It symbolized freedom and autonomy, allowing me to travel, work, and engage in activities without restriction. Losing that ability felt like losing a part of myself.

The psychological impact was profound. Without my license, I felt trapped and dependent on others. Simple tasks like grocery shopping or visiting friends became logistical challenges. The uncertainty of not knowing if and when I would regain my license added to the stress. It was a constant reminder of how drastically my life had changed. However, this challenge also became a catalyst for growth. I had to find new ways to adapt and maintain my independence. Public transportation became my new reality, and although it was inconvenient at times, it taught me patience and resilience. I also had to rely more on my support network, which strengthened my relationships with friends and family.

The experience of losing my driving license ultimately taught me that independence is not solely defined by physical abilities. It is also about mindset and adaptability. I learned to appreciate the small victories, like successfully taking a new bus route or coordinating rides with friends. These experiences reinforced the importance of flexibility and perseverance in the face of adversity.

Starting Over with a New Mindset

Starting over after such a significant life event required a complete shift in mindset. It was about rebuilding not just my physical health, but also my mental and emotional well-being. This new mindset was rooted in acceptance, resilience, and a commitment to moving forward, no matter the obstacles.

The first step was setting realistic goals. In the beginning, my goals were small and focused on immediate needs, like regaining basic physical strength and managing daily tasks. As I made progress, I gradually set more ambitious goals, such as finding a job and regaining my driving license. Using the SMART system (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound) helped me stay focused and motivated.

Resilience played a crucial role in my recovery. There were many setbacks along the way, moments when I felt like giving up. But each setback was an opportunity to learn and grow. I developed a mantra that became my guiding principle: "Failure is not an option." This mindset helped me push through the toughest times and keep my eyes on the ultimate goal of recovery.

Another important aspect of my new mindset was gratitude. I learned to appreciate the small victories and the support of those around me. Each day was a chance to make progress, no matter how incremental. Gratitude helped shift my focus from what I had lost to what I still had and could achieve.

Building a support network was also essential. I re-evaluated my relationships and focused on those who genuinely supported and encouraged me. This meant letting go of toxic relationships and surrounding myself with positivity. Friends and family who understood my journey became pillars of strength, offering emotional support and practical help when needed.

Also, I made a conscious effort to redefine my identity beyond my condition. I refused to be defined as disabled or limited by my past experiences. Instead, I focused on my abilities and potential. This shift in perspective was empowering and allowed me to reclaim my life on my terms.

Acceptance is the cornerstone of recovery. It requires a deep emotional reckoning, a willingness to confront and embrace reality, and a commitment to moving forward. Dealing with visible scars, the loss of independence, and starting over with a new mindset are all part of this journey. By accepting my situation, I was able to turn challenges into opportunities for growth and resilience. This chapter of my life taught me that true strength lies in our ability to adapt, persevere, and find hope even in the darkest times.

Chapter 3

The Blessing in Starting Over

Starting over after a major trauma is an overwhelming task, filled with several challenges and uncertainties. For me, it began with the necessity of securing a job in challenging conditions. With my health in a fragile state and no driving license, I had to face the job market with limited options. My first opportunity came in the form of a job at a fish factory. It was far from ideal, but it was a start.

The job at the fish factory was as demanding as it was unconventional. The environment was harsh—cold, wet, and filled with the smell of fish. The work was physically grueling, involving long hours of standing and repetitive tasks that tested my endurance. On my first day, the trainer informed me that most local people lasted only a day at the job. This stark warning underscored the difficulty of the work ahead.

Despite the challenging conditions, I was determined to succeed. The job represented more than just a paycheck; it was a crucial step in my recovery process. I needed to prove to myself that I could handle the physical demands and regain some semblance of normalcy. Each day was a battle against fatigue and pain, but with every shift completed, I felt a small but significant sense of achievement.

Working in the fish factory provided unexpected benefits, both physically and mentally. The physical labor, though exhausting, helped rebuild my strength and stamina. Each day at the factory was like an intensive workout, pushing my body to its limits. Over time, I began to notice improvements in my physical health. My muscles grew stronger, and my endurance increased. The factory work was an unconventional form of physical therapy that played a vital role in my rehabilitation.

Mentally, the job offered a sense of structure and purpose. The routine of going to work every day provided stability and a sense of normalcy that I desperately needed. It also served as a distraction from the constant worry and anxiety about my health and future. Engaging in productive work, even in such a demanding environment, gave me a renewed sense of self-worth and accomplishment.

The camaraderie with my coworkers also had a positive impact on my mental health. Despite the tough conditions, the people at the factory were friendly and supportive. Their resilience and work ethic were inspiring, and their companionship made the hard days more bearable. This sense of community and mutual support was a vital aspect of my recovery, reminding me that I was not alone in my struggles.

After three months at the fish factory, I transitioned to a job at a call center. This move was a significant milestone in my recovery journey. The call center job was a stark

contrast to the fish factory. It was warm, clean, and allowed me to sit down for most of the day. While dealing with customer complaints could be stressful, it was a different kind of challenge, one that was less physically demanding.

The transition to the call center job brought immediate relief to my physical state. No longer did I have to endure the cold, wet conditions of the factory. The reduced physical strain allowed me to conserve my energy and focus more on my overall recovery. Mentally, the new job required a different skill set, one that involved communication and problem-solving. These tasks were engaging and helped keep my mind sharp.

The logistics of getting to the call center were challenging, involving four bus rides a day. Despite the inconvenience, I viewed it as another step towards regaining my independence. Each bus ride was a small victory, a proof of my determination to lead a normal life despite the setbacks. The call center job also provided a more stable and predictable schedule, which helped me establish a healthier routine.

The social aspect of the call center job was another positive change. Interacting with coworkers and customers provided opportunities for socialization and connection. While some customers could be difficult, the majority were understanding and appreciative of the help I provided. These interactions helped rebuild my confidence and communication skills, further contributing to my mental and emotional recovery.

The Journey of Regaining My Independence and Driving License

Regaining my driving license was one of the most significant milestones in my recovery journey. The process was long and filled with uncertainty. Losing my license had stripped me of a vital aspect of my independence, and the road to getting it back was fraught with challenges. Each medical check-up and evaluation felt like a test of my progress and patience.

The journey to regain my driving license involved rigorous medical assessments to ensure that I was fit to drive. These evaluations were thorough, examining not only my physical abilities but also my cognitive and motor skills. Each step in the process was nerve-wracking, as the possibility of being deemed unfit to drive loomed over me. However, I remained determined and worked closely with my medical team to meet all the necessary criteria.

The day I finally received my driving license was one of immense joy and relief. It symbolized more than just the ability to drive; it represented the reclaiming of my

autonomy and a return to a semblance of normal life. Being able to drive again meant I could take control of my mobility, travel independently, and engage more freely in social and work activities. It was a crucial step in rebuilding my confidence and sense of self.

Current Status and Job Satisfaction

Today, I am still working at the call center, and I find a great deal of satisfaction in my job. The stability and routine of the work have been instrumental in my ongoing recovery. The environment is supportive, and I have built strong relationships with my colleagues. The job has not only provided financial stability but has also given me a sense of purpose and achievement.

The challenges I faced and overcame have endowed me with a unique perspective on life and work. I have learned to appreciate the small victories and to take nothing for granted. Each day at work is an opportunity to contribute, to connect with others, and to continue my journey of recovery. The satisfaction I derive from my job is not just about the work itself but also about the personal growth and resilience it represents.

Reflecting on my journey, I realize that each step, no matter how difficult, was necessary for my recovery. The job at the fish factory, though grueling, helped rebuild my physical strength and endurance. The transition to the call center provided a more comfortable and stable environment, allowing me to focus on my mental and emotional healing. Regaining my driving license was a significant milestone that restored my independence and confidence.

Starting over after a major trauma isn't easy, but it's definitely possible. It takes determination, resilience, and adaptability to get back on your feet. From finding a job despite the challenges, to discovering the benefits of hard work, and eventually landing a job that's a better fit - every step counts. And let's not forget the little wins like getting back behind the wheel! Looking back, I'm proud of how far I've come and what I've learned along the way. This journey has taught me that with perseverance, supportive people, and a positive attitude, you can overcome even the toughest obstacles.

Chapter 4

Key Lessons for Recovery

Recovering from major trauma requires not just physical healing but also mental and emotional fortitude. Through my journey, I have learned several key lessons that were instrumental in my recovery. These lessons are not just about surviving but thriving despite the challenges. Here are the seven crucial lessons that guided me through my recovery and can help others on similar paths:

1. Find Your Inner Strength

Recovery demands true grit, determination, and hard work. When faced with overwhelming odds, it is essential to dig deep and find that inner reservoir of strength. This strength is not just physical but also mental and emotional. It involves pushing through pain, fatigue, and doubt. The mindset that failure is not an option became my mantra. Every day, I reminded myself that no matter how tough the circumstances, giving up was not an option. This mindset fueled my perseverance and kept me moving forward, one step at a time. The journey was long and often grueling, but finding and harnessing my inner strength was crucial to my recovery.

2. Set Goals

Setting goals is vital to staying focused and motivated during recovery. I used the SMART system to guide my goal-setting process. This approach involves setting goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound. For instance, my initial goals were small, such as regaining the ability to walk unaided or completing daily physical therapy exercises. As I achieved these smaller goals, I set more ambitious ones, like securing a job or regaining my driving license. The SMART system provided a clear plan and measurable milestones, which were essential for tracking progress and maintaining motivation. Achieving these goals, no matter how small, provided a sense of accomplishment and forward momentum.

3. Never Take Anything for Granted

Before my trauma, I took many things for granted—luxury holidays, cars, meals at the best restaurants. However, post-trauma, my perspective shifted dramatically. Shuffling along was all I could manage after surgery, and I realized the importance of appreciating the simple things in life. This new perspective taught me to value every small victory and cherish moments that I previously overlooked. The ability to walk, the independence of driving, and the support of loved ones became precious gifts. This shift in mindset helped me stay grounded and grateful, reinforcing the importance of not taking anything for granted.

4. Treat Each Day as a Bonus

Adopting the mindset of treating each day as a bonus was essential in my recovery. During my fight with sepsis, I genuinely felt I was slipping away. The experience was profoundly humbling and taught me the value of life. Once I recovered, I made a conscious effort to treat every day as a new opportunity and a new challenge. This approach helped me stay positive and motivated, even on the toughest days. It also reinforced the importance of living in the moment and making the most of each day. Embracing this mindset can transform how we approach life and recovery, instilling a sense of hope and purpose.

5. Respect Others

Respecting others is fundamental, especially during recovery when perceptions of you might change. I always believed in treating people the way I wanted to be treated, and this principle became even more important post-trauma. Friends, family, and even strangers might view you differently after a significant health event. It's essential to understand that this is their problem, not yours. Maintaining respect and treating people with kindness and understanding, despite their perceptions, is crucial. This approach fosters positive relationships and helps build a supportive network, which is invaluable during recovery.

6. Evaluate Relationships

Evaluating relationships and categorizing them into A, B, and C lists was a significant part of my recovery process. List A included friends and family who would be there for me no matter what. These were my core supporters. List B consisted of those whose support was uncertain, and List C was people who reciprocated only for obligatory

occasions like birthdays. I focused on strengthening relationships with those in List A and gradually let go of those in Lists B and C. This process helped me surround myself with genuine, supportive people who contributed positively to my recovery. It's crucial to have a strong support system, and evaluating relationships helps ensure that you are surrounded by the right people.

7. Refuse to Be Defined as Disabled

One of the most empowering decisions I made was to refuse to be defined as disabled. I went to great lengths to maintain my independence and not use my condition as an excuse. For example, I needed to take four buses per day to get to work, but I made sure I was always on time, often arriving an hour early. This effort had a profound impact on my mindset, reinforcing my belief in my capabilities. Even after regaining my driving license, I continued to push myself, proving that my condition did not define me. Maintaining this perspective helped me stay motivated and focused on my abilities rather than my limitations.

These key lessons were instrumental in my recovery journey. Finding inner strength, setting goals, never taking anything for granted, treating each day as a bonus, respecting others, evaluating relationships, and refusing to be defined as disabled are principles that guided me through the toughest times. These lessons are not only applicable to recovering from trauma but also to handling life's challenges. By adopting these principles, anyone facing similar obstacles can find the strength and resilience needed to overcome and thrive.

Chapter 5

Moving Forward After A Traumatic Experience

Moving forward after a major trauma is a journey that requires resilience, adaptability, and an unwavering focus on the future. While acknowledging the inevitability of certain conditions and embracing each day as a bonus, it is also crucial to maintain a positive outlook and overcome the inevitable setbacks that will arise along the way. In this chapter, I will share the strategies and mindset shifts that have helped me to move forward and build a fulfilling life after my surgery and recovery.

Focusing on the Future

Focusing on the future means setting aside past difficulties and looking ahead with hope and determination. This forward-looking approach involves setting new goals, seeking new opportunities, and constantly striving to improve oneself. After my surgery, I realized that dwelling on what had happened would not change my situation. Instead, I needed to channel my energy into shaping a better future for myself.

The first step in focusing on the future was to establish a clear vision of what I wanted to achieve. This included both short-term and long-term goals. Short-term goals were about immediate needs, such as regaining physical strength, securing employment, and rebuilding daily routines. Long-term goals, on the other hand, were about my overall aspirations, such as career advancement, personal development, and creating a balanced and happy life.

Creating a vision board helped me visualize my future. I filled it with images and words that represented my goals and dreams. This visual representation served as a daily reminder of what I was working towards, keeping me motivated and focused. It also helped me break down my long-term goals into actionable steps, making them more attainable.

Another key aspect of focusing on the future is maintaining a growth mindset. This involves viewing challenges as opportunities for growth rather than as obstacles. Each setback was a chance to learn and adapt. By approaching life with a growth mindset, I was able to remain optimistic and proactive, continually seeking ways to improve and overcome difficulties.

Acknowledging the Inevitability of the Condition

A significant part of moving forward is acknowledging the inevitability of the condition and understanding that some aspects of life are beyond our control. My brain surgery and the subsequent complications were events that I could not have prevented. Accepting this reality was essential in allowing me to focus on what I could control—my response and attitude towards the situation.

Acknowledging the inevitability of the condition does not mean giving up or resigning oneself to fate. Instead, it involves a pragmatic acceptance of reality, which enables one to redirect energy towards positive actions. For me, this meant understanding that while I could not change the past, I could influence my recovery and future well-being through my actions and choices.

This acceptance also required a shift in perspective. Rather than viewing my condition as a limitation, I began to see it as a part of my life that I needed to integrate and manage. This meant making adjustments to my lifestyle, such as prioritizing rest and self-care, being mindful of my health, and seeking support when needed. By integrating my condition into my life, rather than resisting it, I was able to create a more balanced and sustainable approach to my recovery.

Seeing Each Day as a Bonus

Embracing each day as a bonus is a mindset that transforms how we experience life. It involves appreciating the present moment and finding joy in the simple things. After my surgery, there were times when I was uncertain about my future. This uncertainty taught me to value each day and to make the most of the time I had.

This mindset shift required a conscious effort to focus on the positive aspects of life. I started each day with a sense of gratitude, acknowledging the things I was thankful for, no matter how small. This practice of gratitude helped me cultivate a positive outlook and reinforced the idea that each day was a gift.

Embracing each day as a bonus also meant being present and fully engaged in whatever I was doing. Whether it was spending time with loved ones, working, or pursuing hobbies, I made an effort to be mindful and appreciate the moment. This mindfulness not only enhanced my enjoyment of daily activities but also reduced stress and anxiety about the future.

This mindset encouraged me to take opportunities and try new things. With the understanding that life is unpredictable, I became more open to new experiences and challenges. This openness led to personal growth and enriched my life in ways I had not anticipated.

Overcoming Setbacks and Maintaining a Positive Outlook

Setbacks are an inevitable part of any recovery journey. Overcoming them requires resilience, patience, and a positive outlook. Throughout my recovery, I faced numerous setbacks, from physical complications to emotional lows. Each setback tested my resolve and pushed me to find new ways to cope and move forward.

One of the most important strategies for overcoming setbacks is to maintain a flexible and adaptable approach. This means being willing to adjust goals, plans, and expectations in response to changing circumstances. Flexibility allowed me to face the ups and downs of recovery without becoming discouraged by setbacks. Instead of viewing them as failures, I saw them as part of the process and opportunities to learn and grow.

Another key strategy is to build a strong support network. Having friends, family, and professionals who can provide encouragement, advice, and practical help is invaluable. During difficult times, my support network was a source of strength and motivation. They reminded me of my progress, helped me stay focused on my goals, and provided the emotional support I needed to persevere.

Maintaining a positive outlook also involves practicing self-compassion. Recovery is a challenging and often slow process, and it is important to be kind to oneself along the way. This means acknowledging your efforts, celebrating small victories, and not being overly critical of setbacks. Self-compassion helps build resilience and keeps you motivated during tough times.

Engaging in activities that promote mental and emotional well-being is another crucial aspect of maintaining a positive outlook. This can include physical exercise, hobbies, meditation, and spending time with loved ones. These activities provide a sense of normalcy and joy, helping to balance the stress and challenges of recovery.

Finding meaning and purpose in the recovery journey can significantly enhance resilience and positivity. For me, sharing my story and helping others facing similar challenges became a source of purpose. It gave my experiences a broader significance and turned my struggles into something constructive. Finding a sense of purpose can provide motivation and a deeper sense of fulfillment, making the journey of recovery more meaningful.

Remember that moving forward after a major trauma involves focusing on the future, acknowledging the inevitability of the condition, embracing each day as a bonus,

and overcoming setbacks with a positive outlook. These strategies are interlinked, each supporting and reinforcing the others. By adopting this approach, anyone facing significant challenges can face their recovery journey with greater resilience, hope, and fulfillment.

Chapter 6

The Role of Therapy in Recovery

Therapy plays a crucial role in the recovery process, especially after experiencing significant trauma. It provides a structured and supportive environment where people can explore their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, gain insights into their experiences, and develop strategies to cope with and overcome challenges. This section will examine the importance of therapy in recovery, how to find a suitable therapist, how to prepare for a therapy session, and the profound beauty in letting go.

The Importance of Therapy in Recovery

Therapy is an essential component of recovery because it addresses the psychological and emotional aspects of healing. While medical treatment can address physical symptoms, therapy helps people process the emotional impact of trauma, develop coping mechanisms, and build resilience. Therapy provides a safe space to explore and understand the complex emotions that arise after trauma. It helps people make sense of their feelings, which can include fear, anger, sadness, and confusion. By talking through these emotions, people can begin to process and integrate their experiences into their lives.

Therapists teach coping strategies that can help manage stress and anxiety. These strategies can include mindfulness, relaxation techniques, cognitive-behavioral techniques, and problem-solving skills. Learning effective coping mechanisms is crucial for navigating the challenges of recovery.

Therapy helps build resilience by fostering a sense of control and empowerment. Through therapy, people can develop a greater understanding of their strengths and learn how to leverage them to overcome obstacles. This increased resilience can lead to a more positive outlook on life and a stronger ability to handle future challenges.

A therapist provides unconditional support and validation. Having a professional who listens without judgment and acknowledges your experiences can be incredibly affirming and healing. This supportive relationship can help people feel less isolated and more understood.

Finding a Therapist

Finding the right therapist is a crucial step in the recovery process. Here are some steps to help you find a suitable therapist:

- 1. Determine Your Needs:** Before starting your search, take some time to reflect on what you need from therapy. Consider the type of therapy that might be most beneficial (e.g., cognitive-behavioral therapy, psychodynamic therapy, trauma-focused therapy), and think about any specific issues you want to address.
- 2. Research:** Start by researching therapists in your area. You can use online directories such as Psychology Today, TherapyRoute, or GoodTherapy to find profiles of licensed therapists. These directories often include information about the therapist's specialties, approach, and contact details.
- 3. Seek Recommendations:** Ask for recommendations from friends, family, or healthcare providers. Personal referrals can be valuable because they come from trusted sources who may have had positive experiences with a particular therapist.
- 4. Verify Credentials:** Ensure that the therapist you choose is licensed and has the appropriate credentials. Check their qualifications, training, and experience. You can verify their license through state or national licensing boards.
- 5. Consider Compatibility:** It's important to find a therapist with whom you feel comfortable and understood. Many therapists offer a free initial consultation, either in person or over the phone, to help you determine if they are a good fit. Use this opportunity to ask questions about their approach and see if their style aligns with your needs.
- 6. Evaluate Practicalities:** Consider practical factors such as location, availability, and cost. Make sure the therapist's office is conveniently located and that their hours align with your schedule. If cost is a concern, ask about sliding scale fees or inquire if they accept your insurance.

Preparing for a Therapy Session

Preparing for a therapy session can help you make the most of your time with your therapist. Here are some tips on how to prepare:

- 1. Set Goals:** Before your session, think about what you want to achieve. Setting specific goals can help you focus on what's important and guide the conversation. Your goals might include understanding a particular emotion, learning a new coping strategy, or addressing a specific issue.

2. **Reflect on Your Experiences:** Take some time to reflect on your experiences since your last session. Consider any significant events, emotions, or thoughts that have arisen. This reflection can provide valuable material for discussion and help you track your progress.
3. **Write Down Your Thoughts:** If you find it helpful, write down your thoughts, feelings, and questions before your session. Having a written record can ensure that you don't forget to mention anything important and can help organize your thoughts.
4. **Be Open and Honest:** Therapy is most effective when you are open and honest with your therapist. Be prepared to share your true feelings and experiences, even if they are difficult to talk about. Remember, your therapist is there to support you without judgment.
5. **Practice Self-Care:** Engaging in self-care before your session can help you feel more grounded and present. This might include activities like deep breathing, meditation, or a short walk. Taking care of your physical and emotional well-being can help you approach the session with a clear and focused mind.
6. **Manage Expectations:** Understand that therapy is a process, and change takes time. Be patient with yourself and the process. Each session is a step towards healing, even if progress feels slow.

The Beauty in Letting Go

One of the most profound aspects of therapy is the process of letting go. Letting go can refer to releasing negative emotions, unhelpful thought patterns, or unrealistic expectations. It is a transformative process that can lead to greater peace, acceptance, and freedom.

1. **Letting Go of Control:** Trauma can make people feel out of control, leading to a desire to control every aspect of their lives. Therapy helps people understand that it's okay to let go of this need for control. Accepting that some things are beyond our control can reduce anxiety and stress, allowing us to focus on what we can change.
2. **Releasing Negative Emotions:** Holding onto negative emotions such as anger, resentment, or guilt can be detrimental to recovery. Therapy provides a safe space to express and process these emotions. Through this process, people can release these feelings and replace them with more positive and constructive emotions.
3. **Changing Thought Patterns:** Unhelpful thought patterns, such as catastrophizing or self-blame, can hinder recovery. Therapy helps people identify and challenge these

thoughts, replacing them with more balanced and realistic perspectives. Letting go of negative thought patterns can lead to improved mental health and well-being.

4. Embracing Forgiveness: Forgiveness, whether of oneself or others, is a powerful aspect of letting go. It doesn't mean forgetting or excusing harmful behavior, but rather releasing the hold that anger and resentment have on us. Forgiveness can be liberating and can lead to greater emotional freedom and peace.

5. Accepting Imperfection: Perfectionism can be a significant barrier to recovery. Therapy helps people understand that imperfection is a natural part of life and that it's okay to make mistakes. Letting go of the need to be perfect allows people to embrace their humanity and be kinder to themselves.

6. Embracing Change: Recovery often involves significant changes in one's life. Therapy helps people accept and embrace these changes rather than resist them. Letting go of the past and being open to new experiences can lead to growth and transformation.

7. Finding Inner Peace: Ultimately, letting go is about finding inner peace. It's about accepting what is, rather than what could or should be. This acceptance leads to a sense of calm and contentment, allowing people to live more fully in the present.

Therapy plays a vital role in recovery, providing the tools and support needed to navigate the emotional and psychological challenges that arise after trauma. Finding the right therapist, preparing for sessions, and embracing the process of letting go are all essential steps in this journey. Through therapy, people can process their emotions, develop effective coping strategies, and build resilience.

Letting go is a beautiful and transformative process that can lead to greater peace, acceptance, and freedom. It involves releasing negative emotions, unhelpful thought patterns, and unrealistic expectations. By letting go, people can embrace their true selves, find inner peace, and live more fully in the present.

Recovery is a journey that requires patience, determination, and support. Therapy provides a solid foundation for this journey, helping people heal and grow. As you get deep into your recovery experience, remember that you are not alone. With the right support and mindset, you can overcome the challenges you face and live a fulfilling and meaningful life.

Chapter 7

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements are an essential part of any journey, especially one that involves overcoming significant trauma and hitting the road to recovery. Throughout my experience, numerous people and institutions played pivotal roles in my healing process. Their expertise, care, and support were invaluable, and this chapter is dedicated to expressing my profound gratitude to them.

Expressing Gratitude to Medical Professionals

First and foremost, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the medical professionals who were instrumental in my recovery. Their dedication, skill, and compassion were the bedrock of my healing process. From the initial diagnosis to the post-operative care, these professionals displayed unwavering commitment to my well-being.

The journey began with the medical team who first attended to me when I collapsed in Manchester. Their swift response and accurate diagnosis set the stage for the critical interventions that followed. The neurosurgeons who performed the delicate and extensive brain surgery deserve special recognition. Their expertise and precision were crucial in ensuring the success of the operation, and their calm demeanor provided much-needed reassurance during a highly stressful time.

The nurses who cared for me post-surgery were nothing short of angels. Their round-the-clock attention, patience, and empathy made an immense difference in my recovery. They managed my pain, monitored my progress, and provided comfort during the most challenging moments. Their ability to balance professional care with genuine kindness is a proof of their dedication and humanity.

I also owe a debt of gratitude to the physiotherapists and occupational therapists who worked with me to regain my strength and independence. Their tailored exercises and encouragement helped me rebuild my physical capabilities and regain confidence in my abilities. They pushed me to persevere, even when the progress seemed slow, and celebrated each milestone with me.

The support from mental health professionals was equally vital. The psychologists and counselors who guided me through the emotional and psychological aspects of my recovery provided invaluable insights and coping strategies. Their sessions helped me

navigate the complex emotions of fear, anxiety, and grief, and they empowered me to rebuild my mental resilience.

Specific Thanks to Teams at Salford Royal Hospital and Ninewells Hospital

Two institutions played particularly significant roles in my recovery: Salford Royal Hospital and Ninewells Hospital. The teams at these hospitals went above and beyond in their care and support, and I am profoundly grateful for their contributions.

At Salford Royal Hospital, the neurosurgery team performed the intricate surgery that was critical to my recovery. Led by Dr. Ward, their skill and dedication were evident from the moment I was admitted. The surgery itself was a marathon 12-hour procedure, requiring immense concentration and expertise. The team's ability to navigate such a complex operation with precision and success speaks volumes about their professionalism and competence.

The post-operative care team at Salford Royal was exceptional. The ICU staff, led by Dr. Smyth, provided meticulous monitoring and intervention during the critical early days of my recovery. Their vigilance in managing my seizures and other complications was crucial in stabilizing my condition. The nursing staff, including Andrea and Helen, were a constant source of comfort and support, managing my pain and providing encouragement during those tough early days.

The physiotherapy and occupational therapy teams at Salford Royal also played a significant role in my recovery. They designed a comprehensive rehabilitation program tailored to my needs, and their persistent encouragement helped me make steady progress. I am particularly grateful to Melanie, who was my primary physiotherapist, for her patience and motivational spirit.

Ninewells Hospital in Dundee was where I continued my recovery journey, particularly during the critical phase of managing sepsis. The infectious disease team at Ninewells, led by Dr. Thornton, provided expert care in treating the sepsis and preventing further complications. Their timely interventions and thorough monitoring were vital in my recovery from this life-threatening condition.

The nursing staff at Ninewells were incredibly compassionate and attentive. Nurses like Kelly and Page ensured that I received the best possible care, providing both medical support and emotional comfort. Their ability to make patients feel valued and cared for is a proof of their professionalism and dedication.

I also want to thank the rehabilitation team at Ninewells, who helped me regain my strength and independence. The sessions with my physiotherapist, Georgina, were challenging but incredibly rewarding. Her innovative approach and relentless encouragement were key factors in my physical recovery.

Acknowledging the Support of Family and Friends

No recovery journey is complete without the unwavering support of family and friends. Their love, patience, and encouragement were the pillars that sustained me through the darkest times and the brightest milestones.

My family was my primary support system, and their presence was a constant source of strength. My Father, James, was by my side from the moment I was diagnosed. His unshakeable belief in my ability to recover gave me the confidence to face each challenge. He provided emotional support, coordinated care, and made countless sacrifices to ensure I had everything I needed.

My extended family were also instrumental in my recovery. They provided a sense of normalcy and joy, reminding me of the importance of family bonds. Their visits, calls, and messages of encouragement kept my spirits high and motivated me to keep pushing forward.

My girlfriend, was my rock throughout this journey. Her unwavering support, love, and understanding were vital in navigating the complexities of recovery. She was there to celebrate my victories and to comfort me during setbacks. Her patience and dedication was remarkable, and I am eternally grateful for her presence in my life.

Friends also played a crucial role in my recovery. Their visits, calls, and messages provided much-needed distractions and emotional support. Friends like Scott and Gillie offered practical help, whether it was driving me to appointments or helping with daily tasks. Their willingness to step in and support me in various ways made a significant difference in my recovery experience.

I would also like to acknowledge the broader community of support that surrounded me. This includes extended family members, neighbors, colleagues, and even strangers who offered words of encouragement and support. Their kindness and generosity were heartwarming and provided a sense of belonging and solidarity.

I'm so grateful to everyone who helped me get through my tough times. From the amazing medical team who gave me top-notch care to my family and friends who were always there for me, every single person played a huge role in my recovery. This chapter

is all about saying thank you from the bottom of my heart to everyone who supported me, believed in me, and helped me put my life back together. It just goes to show that when people come together with kindness, hard work, and compassion, we can overcome even the toughest challenges.

Conclusion

As I reflect on my journey from the unexpected collapse to where I am today, I am filled with a profound sense of gratitude and humility. The path to recovery has been long and arduous, marked by significant challenges and invaluable lessons. This conclusion serves as a recap of my journey, the key takeaways that have emerged, encouragement for those facing similar challenges, and final thoughts on the importance of resilience and determination.

My journey began with a sudden and unexpected collapse in Manchester, leading to the discovery of a brain mass that required immediate surgery. The diagnosis was a shock, and the subsequent 12-hour brain surgery was a daunting ordeal. Despite the successful operation, the road to recovery was complicated by post-operative complications, including brain seizures, a medically induced coma, a collapsed lung, and sepsis. These physical challenges were accompanied by emotional and psychological struggles, as I grappled with the fear and uncertainty of my condition.

Acceptance was the first and perhaps most difficult step in my recovery. It required acknowledging the reality of my situation, letting go of blame, and embracing the journey ahead. This acceptance laid the foundation for my healing process, allowing me to focus on what I could control and move forward with a positive mindset.

Securing a job in challenging conditions was a pivotal part of my recovery. Working at a fish factory, despite its harsh environment, provided physical and mental benefits that were crucial in rebuilding my strength and resilience. The transition to a more comfortable job at a call center marked a significant milestone, offering stability and a supportive environment that facilitated further recovery.

Throughout this journey, several key lessons emerged:

- 1. Find Your Inner Strength:** Recovery requires true grit, determination, and hard work. It's about finding a deep reservoir of resilience and maintaining a mindset where failure is not an option.
- 2. Set Goals:** The SMART system (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound) was instrumental in setting and achieving goals. These goals provided direction and purpose, breaking down the monumental task of recovery into manageable steps.
- 3. Never Take Anything for Granted:** Pre-trauma, it's easy to overlook the simple pleasures and conveniences of life. Post-trauma, every small victory is a cause for celebration, instilling a deep sense of gratitude for the present moment.

4. **Treat Each Day as a Bonus:** Adopting the mindset that each day is a gift helps in appreciating the present and finding joy in the simple things. This outlook not only motivates but also brings a sense of peace and fulfillment.
5. **Respect Others:** Treating people with respect, regardless of their perceptions, is crucial. This approach improves interactions and reinforces one's own sense of dignity and self-worth.
6. **Evaluate Relationships:** Focusing on genuine, supportive relationships and letting go of those that are not helpful is essential. This evaluation strengthens the support network and provides emotional stability.
7. **Refuse to Be Defined as Disabled:** Maintaining independence and not letting the condition define one's identity is empowering. This mindset helps reclaim control over life and demonstrates that abilities far outweigh disabilities.

Moving forward, I focused on the future, acknowledging the inevitability of my condition, and embracing each day as a bonus. This approach involved setting new goals, seeking new opportunities, and continually striving for personal growth. Overcoming setbacks with a positive outlook was a constant challenge, but flexibility, a strong support network, self-compassion, and finding meaning and purpose in the journey were key strategies that helped navigate these challenges.

To those facing similar challenges, I offer this: know that you are not alone. The path to recovery is not linear, and it is filled with ups and downs. However, each step, no matter how small, is a step forward. The journey may be long and difficult, but it is also a journey of growth, resilience, and self-discovery.

Embrace the power of acceptance. Acknowledge your reality and let go of blame. This acceptance is the first step towards healing and allows you to focus on what you can control. Set achievable goals and celebrate every milestone, no matter how minor it may seem. These small victories build momentum and provide the motivation to keep moving forward.

Surround yourself with a strong support network. Lean on family, friends, and professionals who can provide the encouragement, advice, and practical help you need. Do not be afraid to seek help and to express your needs and feelings. Support is a crucial element in navigating the recovery journey.

Cultivate a positive mindset and treat each day as a bonus. Gratitude and mindfulness can transform your outlook and help you find joy in the present moment. Embrace new experiences and challenges with an open heart, and be kind to yourself along the way. Self-compassion is vital in maintaining resilience and motivation.

Finally, refuse to be defined by your condition. Your identity is not limited to your challenges. Focus on your abilities and potential, and take control of your life. This empowerment will help you reclaim your independence and demonstrate your strength and resilience.

Resilience and determination are the cornerstones of any recovery journey. They are the qualities that enable us to face adversity, overcome setbacks, and emerge stronger on the other side. My journey has taught me that resilience is not about avoiding challenges but about embracing them and finding ways to grow and adapt.

Resilience involves a combination of inner strength, flexibility, and a positive outlook. It is about maintaining hope and optimism, even in the face of significant difficulties. This mindset allows us to see challenges as opportunities for growth and to find meaning and purpose in our experiences.

Determination is the driving force that keeps us moving forward. It is the unwavering commitment to our goals and the refusal to give up, no matter how tough the journey becomes. Determination fuels our efforts, helping us to push through setbacks and keep our eyes on the ultimate goal of recovery.

Together, resilience and determination create a powerful foundation for overcoming adversity. They enable us to navigate the complexities of recovery, build a fulfilling life, and inspire others facing similar challenges. These qualities are not innate but can be developed and strengthened through practice, support, and a positive mindset.

Remember: my recovery journey has been a proof of the power of resilience and determination. The challenges I faced and the lessons I learned have shaped me into a stronger, more compassionate, and more resilient person. I hope that by sharing my story, I can provide hope, encouragement, and practical guidance to others on their own recovery journeys. Remember that each step forward, no matter how small, is a victory, and with resilience and determination, you can overcome any obstacle and build a fulfilling and meaningful life.

-- Angus Carnie

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