



00:01 Hope.

00:03 Fear.

00:04 Love.

00:08 Millions are diagnosed with cancer every single year.

00:12 And the number is rising.

00:14 Yet, each number is a person.

00:17 And each person has a story.

00:22 We're also parents.

00:25 Friends.

00:26 Brothers and sisters.

00:28 Lovers and dreamers.

00:31 Thinkers and achievers.

00:34 We feel anger.

00:37 We show resilience.

00:39 We get lonely.

00:41 We grieve.

00:42 We deny.

00:44 We heal.

00:45 We are more.

00:47 More than a number.

00:48 More than a diagnosis.

00:51 More than a disease.

00:52 It's time to act.

00:54 Time to put people and communities at the centre of health systems and cancer care.

01:00 We're unique in our needs, but united in our goals, and united in our message.



01:06 To give people a stronger voice and a more active role in their own health.

01:11 Treat the person, not only the disease.

01:15 So that everyone, everywhere, can get the care they need.

01:28 Hi, everybody, and welcome to World Cancer Awareness Day.

01:33 Speaking today on our podcast, we have myself, Steve Philpott from the Fitness Team, Mr. Shane Earp from the Fitness Team, and our two special speakers, our guests today.

01:45 We have Watch Manager Iwan Jones and Firefighter Mike Edwards.

01:54 Both have had the horrible disease, cancer, and we're going to talk about their experiences over the last five to ten years suffering with and indeed conquering with disease.

02:07 So, we'll start off, we'll just go up to Mike and say, Mike, you know, could you just tell us your story?

02:15 My story began in probably November 2000.

02:21 So it's more than 10 years ago, so it's quite a while.

02:24 I initially was having problems with haemorrhoids, believe it or not, back and forth to the hospital, to the doctors, having a look at it.

02:36 And in the end, I went back in numerous times and he said, look, do you want to go private, to have it checked over?

02:41 Yes, okay, so I paid money to go down to Werndale in Carmarthen.

02:46 They then had a look at me.

02:50 And he said, right, okay, there's no sign of haemorrhoids, there's something else, it's the blood, he said.

02:55 Could you come and see me next week in the hospital, righto.

02:58 So, I went down to see the doctor, Dr. Lydon in Carmarthen, the following week, kind of magic eye, top and bottom, and he turns around and I come on to the question, have I got leukaemia?

03:10 And he said, no, and my missus turned around and said where the hell did that come from?

03:15 Well, you've actually got lymphoma, he said.

03:19 And the thing is, my missus asked, what is lymphoma?



03:21 And he explained to us it's a form of cancer.

03:24 And then over the period of, that was December of 2000, I was diagnosed with the cancer.

03:29 And then for the next three years then I had lots and lots and lots and lots of treatment and a stem cell transplant at the very end then to finish the whole treatment of what I had to go through.

03:44 It was a stage four cancer, it was literally the end of days for me.

03:49 Sorry, you were actually diagnosed stage four?

03:51 Stage four.

03:52 Can you just explain what the stages are?

03:54 Well, you've got stage one, two, three and four.

03:58 I couldn't tell you what the actual difference between one.

04:01 Obviously, one is a lot less than the four.

04:04 The four is coming to the end of terminal and literally the way I understand it, you know.

04:12 And it's literally having to go through all that process.

04:18 And coming out on the other end, I mean, you know, when we spoke earlier on, how many people that I have been going through that treatment with that didn't make it through.

04:27 That's the most interesting part of the matter is that why have they failed when I haven't, you know.

04:34 So when they said you used stage four straight away, did they give you a life expectancy or...

04:43 No, they just, it was just, it was just...

04:46 They just said to me it was at stage four.

04:48 At the time, I didn't have a clue what stage four meant.

04:50 Didn't look into it.

04:51 My missus did most of the dealings with looking into it more so than what I did at the time.

04:58 What I actually did, I found it quite negative where there was cancer research, places that you could contact in times of need and stuff like that and everything was coming back quite negative from these departments within the community.



05:16 So I said to Helen, look, I said, I don't want to know about whatever they're saying.

05:19 I'm gonna, I'm thinking differently.

05:20 And I just got on with it, literally.

05:23 How old were you then, Mike?

05:24 Thirty-five.

05:25 And you were married?

05:26 Married, two kids.

05:27 Two children.

05:28 Yeah.

05:28 How old were your children?

05:30 Tom was nine and Jack I think six or seven, something like that at the time.

05:35 So it must have had a huge impact?

05:37 More so for the eldest.

05:39 And did you tell them straight away?

05:41 Oh, they knew, they knew straight away.

05:42 They knew straight away.

05:43 We explained it, you know, back and forth hospitals for however long, we didn't know at the time, isn't it, you know.

05:53 But it was, I remember, I think it was two years into my treatment and I remember things were coming along good.

05:59 And I remember the doctor turned around to me and said, right, you can write off the next year now. You've got a year of intense stuff.

06:05 And I was devastated.

06:07 I thought, good God, more?

06:09 And I remember, okay, knuckled down, got on with it.

06:16 And I remember the day I finished my treatment in October in 2003.



06:24 And when I was picked up, I cried all the way home.

06:27 In the car and listening to Neil Diamond, believe it or not.

06:33 What song?

6:34 All of the Neil Diamond songs, the CD at the time, I just listened to that and I just cried and I said, I can't do that anymore.

06:41 It was horrendous.

06:43 I can see, you know, just looking at you now, you know, it's taking you back to that time, how emotional it was.

06:49 Just to jump to yourself, Iwan, if that's okay, how did you find out?

06:54 How did you realise what was going on?

06:56 So back in August 2018, I just noticed a small, I thought it was a spot to begin with on my neck, the spot turned into a lump.

07:09 I didn't really think anything of it.

07:11 Mrs made me go to the doctor, went to the doctor, looked at me.

07:15 He said, I probably had a throat infection or an ear infection.

07:20 Take some antibiotics for a week and you should be fine.

07:22 So there we are, no problem.

07:24 Wasn't feeling ill at all, nothing.

07:26 So, I took the antibiotics for four days.

07:29 Another lump on the other side of the neck and a few more lumps to the back of my neck.

07:34 Still feeling fine, nothing.

07:35 Back to the doctor and the doctor's like, right, there's something going on.

07:40 Sent me to Glangwili then for blood tests, had the blood tests, waited, phoned me up, yeah, bloods all clear, not sure what's going on.

07:49 So, then they managed to get me in for a CT scan.

07:55 So, they noticed from the CT scan like lymph nodes were up all around my body, really.



08:02 But still, I was still in work at the time.

08:04 Didn't take any time off at that time because I didn't know what was going on.

08:07 It's only seven years ago, so it's...

08:09 Yeah.

08:10 So, more blood tests.

08:12 So for about three, four weeks, blood tests, nobody knew nothing what was going on.

08:16 And then it was a Friday, last day of August, I just had severe pain in the side of the abdomen.

08:25 So, I knew something was going on, didn't really know what, projectile vomiting, sweating.

08:30 So, at the time I had an eight-month-old daughter.

08:35 So I said to my missus, look, phone your mother to come down.

08:37 You're going to have to take me to A&E.

08:39 Took me to A&E and then things just went from there really.

08:45 Stayed in Glangwili for the Friday night.

08:47 Blue lighted down to the Heath then on the Saturday.

08:50 What had happened was my spleen had ruptured because I had acute lymphoblastic leukaemia.

08:58 All the white blood cells weren't doing their job.

09:00 So, where a normal person should have between 4 and 11 counts of your white blood cells, I had 117.

09:06 So, they have nowhere to go, push against the spleen, spleen ruptured.

09:11 So, went to the Heath, stayed there for five weeks, but the heat stayed there for five weeks, had the spleen out and the first lot of chemotherapy then.

09:21 Sorry, what was the flash about from you having that spot on your neck, you going into the hospital, and then being there for five weeks? What was the time frame?

09:33 Yeah, maybe four weeks.

09:35 Wow.



09:36 Yeah, less than four weeks.

09:37 Life changing in four weeks.

09:38 Yeah and never been ill before in my life, nothing at all.

09:42 So yeah, it was a bit of a shock.

09:44 No family history, nothing, so yeah.

09:47 And how old was your child?

09:49 Eight months at the time.

09:50 I was 30.

09:53 Yeah, so then, so the next six months, I followed the treatment plan for the acute lymphoblastic leukaemia UK ALL 14 I think it was called.

10:04 Four rounds of different chemo for six months and then set me up with total body irradiation for my stem cell transplant.

10:14 I was very lucky to find a donor, some people don't find a donor, we found a donor for myself straight away off the DKMS register.

10:23 That's all I know, he was six years younger than me and German.

10:28 So, basically, it's thank you to him that I'm here today, yeah.

10:32 Wow.

10:32 So, there's people on that list who don't get stem cell.

10:35 Yeah.

10:37 Especially people maybe from different ethnic minorities and stuff.

10:40 So they've got much less chance of finding a match.

10:44 While we're on that subject now, I know it's something we spoke earlier that you want to get off your chest about people being stem cell donors.

10:52 Have you got any advice something that we could throw out on this podcast?

10:55 Yeah, so there's two there's two registers in the UK. You've got DKMS UK which is the one that found my match.

11:02 So, anyone aged between 17 and 55 from good health, really, can register.



11:08 So, all you need to do is get onto their website, put your details in, they'll send you a swab kit, you swab inside the cheek, send it back and then you're on the register.

11:18 Very similar then is Anthony Nolan. The only difference is you need to be between 16 and 30.

11:25 Yeah, so again, same thing, swab the cheek and you send it in.

11:31 So, what does that mean then if you were to become a stem cell donor?

11:35 Well basically since my diagnosis we held an event at the football club and DKMS UK came down and had everything there ready for everybody that turned up they could swap and just since then my brother-in-law, my first cousin and one of the football players have all been a match to somebody so they've actually gone and given their stem cells to somebody else who's ill.

12:01 What does that mean?

12:01 So when you say you give your stem cells, what are stem cells and what would that mean to me if I was to give you my stem cells?

12:08 So your stem cells really are needed when your bone marrow isn't working as it should.

12:13 So your white blood cells aren't fighting the infection.

12:16 They don't recognise the cancer cells.

12:18 They just leave the cancer cells, go around your body and do whatever, do the damage that they can do.

12:23 So, what you would do, I think it's just 90% of the donation are collected directly from the bloodstream as an outpatient, so there's no surgery involved, it's painless.

12:36 And then for the rest, whoever's having the transplant, basically they would have a total body irradiation, so they would get rid of your bone marrow altogether, so you've got nothing in your body to fight any infections.

12:52 And then once you're down to nothing, they will give you new stem cells and then hopefully the new stem cells will do their job.

12:59 So, for myself, I think it was 11 days in isolation until my new stem cells started working and my blood started to build up to do what they should be doing in a healthy person basically.

13:14 The difference with what Iwan has had to me, I had my own stem cells.

13:19 I had my own stem cells taken out.

13:21 I had a needle in here, a needle in there.



13:25 I was on there for about an hour or two.

13:28 And what they did was they injected something into my buttocks and actually created all the blood that's in my, the femur, which is the biggest producer of the bloods, to come out into the actual blood supply.

13:44 So, all of a sudden, they collect something like 100 million cells.

13:49 And once it goes around, it's like a washing machine or a tumble dryer or something like that, it goes on at very, very high speeds.

13:55 All the good cells go to one place and all the bad cells go down into the middle, I suppose.

14:02 I'm not sure exactly how it works.

14:03 And what it does, the most interesting thing is how I found was that is, like Iwan has mentioned, you've got no immune system whatsoever.

14:15 And what happens then, they come along with a small little square kettle, as they say, it's like a kettle which rises up to 37.5 degrees and your stem cells have been frozen now for the few weeks and it's like put into there for a few minutes to defrost and then it's pumped back into your body. You'd never thinking how simple that it is, that's what it was, so in essence to Iwan has had from the donor from Germany, I'd be my own donor

14:46 And I'm very fortunate that my stems, or stem cells, have been taken out.

14:51 There was a plentiful supply of good stems there to put back into me, you know.

14:57 And then obviously the rest is history then.

15:00 Gosh, I mean, you know, the strains that have been put upon not only yourselves but your family.

15:08 Yeah.

15:09 How do you cope with that?

15:10 How do your family cope with that?

15:12 You know, from day-to-day, I mean, I mean, 2018, you suffered with this, it's 2025 now.

15:19 When did you get the all clear?

15:21 It's a long process for your family to go through, for both of you.

15:25 How did this affect you?

15:28 I think that, yeah, it definitely affects your family.



15:30 Probably more than you, because you're just there doing what you need to do.

15:34 And they're worrying about your mortgage, you know, everything, your children, schooling.

15:39 Yeah, yeah, so...

15:42 How did they cope?

15:44 I honestly don't know.

15:45 I think I did have a good support group around me from family, friends, colleagues, I was blessed really.

15:52 So, I didn't use any of the charities or nothing.

15:57 I was happy with who I had and yeah, they kept me going really and yeah, just glad it all worked out.

16:04 How do you feel like it's changed like you in terms, like you're always in it, like your mind set, because like obviously, in the office now, we all know each other outside of this table right now.

16:15 Mike is like a very, very positive person in general and, Iwan, you seem to be as well.

16:19 Yeah, I am.

16:20 How has it changed you like that?

16:22 Massive, massive change, like just from overnight basically from basically having everything you wanted in the world.

16:30 And like without knowing, you're probably a millionaire in life because you've got everything.

16:33 You've got a good job, you've got a good family, everything.

16:36 And, just, the realisation is overnight that could all change for any one of us.

16:42 Yeah.

16:42 So, I'm much more just live every day for what it is.

16:50 Much more emotional.

16:51 Yeah, that's okay.

16:52 Yeah.



16:53 And yeah, probably much more positive as well.

16:56 More present in the day as well, did you feel that?

16:59 Yeah, I found the interesting thing for me in 2003, they pensioned me off from the Fire Service.

17:08 They looked after me for a number of years and they pensioned me off in the Fire Service in 2003 because, okay, we can't see this gentleman getting any better.

17:20 But I was very fortunate because I had a letter to say that if I was to get my health back, that I'd be welcomed back with open arms.

17:27 So, I knew there's a year in front of me now, not to worry about work and what have you.

17:30 So, I just got on with it for the next year.

17:33 And the interesting thing is that I just put my heart and soul into that event then, right.

17:42 This is what I've got.

17:43 And, you know, I can honestly say there was one spell of my treatment, it was eight months.

17:49 Because I had primaries initially in my groin, the secondaries came to my spine.

17:55 A lot of people aren't aware of primary and secondary cancers, where my initial one was a slow-growing cancer.

18:02 And what happened, slow-growing cancers are much harder to get rid of because they sleep a lot.

18:07 So, when the chemo goes in and they're sleeping, no cancer will be destroyed.

18:10 But once they're awake, mine rotated and changed into a different cancer with the secondaries and came onto my spine.

18:17 That was a fast-growing one.

18:19 Now, during that time, I suffered for about eight months.

18:24 I'd been given the all clear, but I suffered for eight months in absolute agony.

18:29 I didn't sleep for eight months.

18:30 People think that's impossible, right?

18:32 And that was genuine.



18:33 When you're taking morphine every day, like pop, and you can't take the edge of the pain away. It's unbelievable.

18:41 Lost a lot of weight.

18:46 And then I remember going for the scan down in Carmarthen on, say, a Thursday and I could hardly sit down on the CT scan because I was in so much pain.

19:00 And I don't know if any of you have had this scan in your life, it's very, very, you've got to stay still for everything to take a picture, right?

19:07 During this time, when I was having the scan, I was in excruciating pain.

19:13 And after the scan, they came up to us and they contacted Dr. Cumber in Carmarthen, can you come back straight away?

19:19 The cancer was back.

19:20 Believe me, after eight months of no sleep, the biggest relief I've ever had in my life, because all the doctors didn't think there's nothing wrong with me because they thought it was all psychological, right?

19:31 But my spine had been eaten away by the cancer.

19:35 So, when I was told that, I had all my notes and I was up in London the following day, I had a lumbar puncture into my spine where they took samples.

19:45 I had to do it under the CT scanner, put the needle in so far, because if they did one wrong move, I'd be a paraplegic.

19:52 So, they did that, they injected, they took it to do a biopsy, they took it out.

19:57 They went to the labs, obviously, to make a chemotherapy to suit it.

20:03 And I remember to this day, it is as if when I had that chemotherapy put in, it was the first time I had pain relief in eight months.

20:12 So, you knew there was something wrong?

20:14 Oh, yeah, I did.

20:15 It was horrible. It was horrible.

20:18 I was having counselling down in Ammanford.

20:21 I was in agony.



20:24 And when I came back into the job in 2004, I went to see all my counsellors, like local counsellors, and I went to see doctors and to see the doctor up in London asking for permission to give me a hand to get back into the Fire Service, right?

20:41 And when I went up to see the guy in London, the orthopaedic surgeon, he showed me a scan of my spine.

20:47 You've got all my spine and there's a big huge gap of about three inches.

20:51 There's no spinal bone there at all, right?

20:54 And then he showed me another photo then where it had all grown back, right?

21:00 Obviously, I've lost about three and a half inches of height since then, because it had obviously got smaller, right?

21:08 And you know, when I... in 2004, I'd applied to the job to come back into the job.

21:15 I'd been to see a lot of people.

21:16 I'd had the surgeon give me the letter and everything, a company letter.

21:21 I had an InSync medical in Llanelli with a doctor, not just the nurses, right?

21:29 And this was in the June, and I had my job back a year to the time they finished me, right?

21:34 Now, Iwan mentioned it now, you win the lottery.

21:40 I win the lottery every day, right?

21:41 But when I got my job back, I win a lottery every day, but get my job back was the bonus ball.

21:49 Yeah.

21:51 And it was.

21:52 That's really emotional, you know, to see it, you know, it's, yeah, it's powerful, powerful stuff.

22:00 That, touch wood, you know, none of us will ever have to experience, whether we're here today or listening to this podcast, you know, and the aim of this podcast, you know, to go away from it is to help other people.

22:11 Yeah.

22:12 You know, it's to share your experiences.

22:16 And, you know, if we can just help one person everything, you know, with advice.



22:22 You know, the only thing I can add to this, right, and, for me, it's the most horrendous thing I've ever gone through, but it's the best experience I've ever had.

22:34 I've got no qualms about what I had to go through.

22:38 I had to go through that to learn.

22:40 I had to go through that too, because I know I've got, I wasn't to go from this earth because I got work to do, and my work, and I do a lot of counselling, metaphysical counselling now for about 12, 13 years.

22:55 I've been doing a lot of healing for the last maybe 20 years, right?

22:58 The transformation in people is instantaneous.

23:02 And that's why I've been taken down this route on this new road of discovery then, isn't it?

23:08 Well, I've known you now, Mike, for about 10 years, you know, and I've seen, not to mention any other names, but I've seen the good work that you've done with people, you know, including myself, you know, words of wisdom, advice, you know, that you've given us.

23:22 Yeah, you know, I'd like to share the quote, right?

23:25 The quote is, Mike said to me one day, it was like, I wasn't having a great day at work.

23:30 Mike, Mike has just been like the top guy as he always is, and he said alright? I said, yeah, all right, and he goes, what's the matter? So, we talked about a few little bits and bobs, and he said, well we were sat in the van, Steve and I, obviously as we all know we work in the van, and he said, look out there now, what do you see?

23:42 I said, it's just like a terrible day, it's raining, and he said, well, it depends on how you look at it now, he said, I think, you know, is the rain, like the plants are getting fed, he said, you know, the fields are getting watered, he said, that's not a bad thing. And I was thinking, okay, and within seconds then Mike drops the line and he goes, the sun's always shining above the clouds, right?

24:00 And I swear to God, every time, if I'm speaking to someone and they're upset and I say that, they're like, oh my word, that's such a profound way to look at.

24:08 But Mike, as a guy in general, and Iwan as well, as in positive people, that is the implement of what you say to people makes such a difference.

24:17 And going on that point then, and it's quite a prominent question, but what advice or what information would you give to anyone now who happens to listen to this? That we are unaware of, or they may be seem to be unaware or whatever of what they're going through now.



24:31 What advice would you give to someone who's going through treatment right now, or they've maybe just recently had a diagnosis?

24:36 What would you say with your experience?

24:39 What kind of stuff would you ask for, do you think?

24:41 Don't be scared to ask for help. Definite.

24:45 You've got a lot of friends. Don't be scared.

24:48 Reach out to anybody.

24:49 Obviously, myself and Mike have been through it and come out the other side.

24:54 I reached out to Mike when I was going through it and, you know, brilliant, brilliant.

24:59 Only because I knew Mike had gone through it.

25:00 It might be other people in the Service that have gone through it.

25:05 I have no doubt there's people suffering in silence now.

25:08 And this podcast is going out to Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service. But there are going to be people, relatives of Firefighters, who are going to go through this.

25:16 So, what I would urge anybody who's listening to this podcast.

25:20 You might not be suffering with it, but if you know somebody, and I'm pretty sure I know that both of you would help anybody, so please get in touch.

25:28 You know the most interesting thing, and Shane just mentioned that there now, if you know somebody that's been recently diagnosed or somebody that's going through it.

25:35 But the one thing I'd say to any person, and a person that's healthy right now, one of the biggest issues in the Western world is this lack of water.

25:46 And the majority of the Western world is constantly dehydrated.

25:50 And that's when cells break down.

25:52 And that's when other things start going wrong.

25:54 And hydration, hydration, hydration.

25:56 I always overemphasise to people about how important.

26:01 You all hear the story of water is the essence of life.



26:06 And it is. It literally is.

26:08 And it's just the fact that we, as the human race, we are led by governments, we're led by all these things in the world right but we don't lead ourselves, we don't look at ourselves we don't you know you can ask the doctor to give you advice doctors going on what you've told them the symptoms are but you know you know it's only you that knows your body every one of us can do so much difference to ourselves, good hydration, good food.

26:42 Good food for thought in here.

26:44 That for me is a recipe for success every time.

26:47 That's brilliant advice.

26:48 Yeah.

26:49 So good thoughts.

26:52 Eat healthy.

26:54 Water. Lots of water.

26:57 Yeah.

26:58 Anything to add to that? Any advice you give anybody?

27:01 No, not really.

27:03 I mean, that's awesome.

27:06 Is there anything you know now that you wish you'd known then?

27:11 It's going on to the same sort of question, but if you knew now what you didn't know then, is there anything you would have done differently?

27:18 Any coping strategies, anything like that?

27:20 I think a lot of it's down to the fact that when we're younger, we don't tend to listen.

27:27 I think sometimes we need to experience something to grow from it.

27:32 And when you want us to think back and look back, you might have been told by people, but you didn't want to listen then.

27:40 And sometimes I've seen people come to see me and I'm only coming to see you because my wife has asked me to come to see you or my husband.

27:46 And I always tell them, don't offend me, you're not offending me one bit because you're not ready.



27:53 It's not your time to think about that way, like, you know.

27:57 And that's what you're going to look at, is that big picture, isn't it?

28:00 Because there's a lot of the things that I know now, the only things that I know now, and I can make a difference to other people, is I took the long way round to get better because nobody's there to guide me to do the short way.

28:16 And the simple way of thinking about it, if you can imagine, the road from Cross Hands to London and the A48 from Cross Hands to London is a lot longer.

28:27 And I always say to people, I took the long road, the A48, because I didn't know small things like forgiveness, small things about letting go, small things about loving myself.

28:41 And that's what I found.

28:42 And that's one of the concepts of healing is all down to loving yourself.

28:47 And that's the hardest part for anybody to do.

28:51 You know?

28:52 It's on your face, I know.

28:55 And it is, isn't it?

28:57 And that counts for a lot of people.

28:59 But you, you know, I give people little tasks.

29:02 Sometimes it could just be talking to somebody.

29:05 I say, do me one favour, look in the mirror three times a day for the next month and compliment yourself unconditionally.

29:11 And I have people texting me back after three days, can't do that, it's impossible to do.

29:16 I can't get Shane out the mirror.

29:17 No, no, I know.

29:18 It's hard because you want to try and look like Steve most of the time.

29:25 No, Mike said that to me. And that's a genuine thing.

29:27 And do you know what?



29:28 I probably I did it, I'd say, for around a month, right, but to be able to do it for longer, you do find hard, but you have to pay attention to what you, I suppose, going back to you saying about the hydration, the health and stuff like that, ultimately, yes, we're here discussing this as well.

29:45 And in terms of when it's cellular and things like that, it makes it harder for us to control.

29:50 But I understand what you're saying, up to that point, or even now, with you both to this point, you are in control of your health.

29:58 You're winning the lottery every single day, and you're in charge of playing that every day, aren't you, with your health?

30:03 And I think that's important as well.

30:06 Absolutely.

30:06 And as you say, I think when you're going through something like you guys have been through, to look in that mirror,

30:12 And love yourself, I can imagine you're thinking of your family the consequence of what's going to happen. Is everything in place? You know, how do you go to sleep at night? Do you know do you know the most interesting concept in life, I've found with people, people won't bat an eye at spending a thousand pounds on a new set of tyres for the car, but when you ask them to spend a hundred pounds on themselves, it won't work.

30:41 So, just to go back a little bit, Mike.

30:44 You mentioned you do a bit of counselling now yourself and helping others, which is absolutely amazing.

30:51 But did you have counselling yourself?

30:52 Yeah, I had numerous counselling sessions in Sŵn y Gwynt in Ammanford.

30:59 There was a guy there, he was a psychiatric nurse, Simon, his name was.

31:05 And I remember when I went down to see him, one of the first things he did was to draw a photograph of a person on a big A4 paper, and he made it into the shape of a jigsaw puzzle.

31:19 What he did to me was he drew the points, he asked me where I was hurting, and on this photograph he put an X where the pain was, but everywhere else on my body where there wasn't any pain, it was like a tick there.

31:34 And during that time I was going to see him, one of the things he said to me, and unfortunately I can't remember the answer to this because I was on antidepressants at the time, because they thought that the second reason that I had my spine was depression, so they put me on antidepressants.



31:53 Because I'd had six consultants in Carmarthen looking at me and saying, no, nothing wrong with you, all my bloods were fine and so on.

31:59 But anyway, when I was going to the counsellor, one of the things Simon said to me was, Mike, he said, we are looking to unlock the lock.

32:08 And what we are looking for is the key to open this lock.

32:11 Sometimes you can find 10, 20, 30 years before we can find this key to open the lock.

32:16 Sometimes it can be found within seconds.

32:19 By the time I went to the third session, we were coming up to wrapping up.

32:23 There was something that was bugging me.

32:24 It was the most simplest of things that was concerning me.

32:30 But it obviously was a mountain that I was finding that I remember talking to my wife and my mother-in-law about it, and my mother, and they thought, oh don't be so silly, that's nothing.

32:42 And within that 10-minute period, Simon turned round to me and said, we just found the key to open your lock.

32:49 And once he did that, it was happy days.

32:52 And the most interesting thing from that then, we then went to remission in 2004.

33:01 Given the go ahead, I got my job back in the Fire Service in 2004 after being out for a year.

33:08 And, obviously, over a period of about 12, 18 months then back in work, I went, obviously I hadn't been intimate with my wife for a long time during that time because I was just unwell.

33:21 And I had become fearful about taking part in the sexual acts and so on because it was so, I thought it would be all over within seconds, and I didn't feel like a man.

33:33 And eventually the wife and I, we went to have a sex therapy in Carmarthen with a lady in Carmarthen and went there probably about six or seven times.

33:45 And the difference that made about getting yourself worth back, it was, on occasions, where the wife and I would be there and then the wife would be seen and then I would be seeing her at a different time.

34:00 Because there are some things I didn't want to say in front of my wife and vice versa.

34:04 So, I did that for a period of about six, maybe eight weeks.



34:09 And the one interesting thing, or fact that came from that, the lady that took me, she said, I'm going to develop this and take it to people that are going through cancers because I've found something that needs to be worked on, she said, because there are a lot of people in your circumstances don't come out and see people about it, you know.

34:27 That's it, isn't it? I mean, just listening to what you're saying there, it's not just the cancer.

34:31 No, There's side effects.

34:32 There are the other things that are going to occur from that inside the relationship, outside the relationship.

34:39 And that's very brave of you to speak about that, Mike.

34:40 That's amazing.

34:42 Did you have any counselling?

34:43 No, nothing.

34:45 Was there a reason?

34:45 No.

34:46 You just didn't feel?

34:46 I didn't feel that I needed it.

34:49 I, to this day, still haven't felt like I needed it.

34:52 That's not to say, one day I won't, but....

34:56 Yeah, absolutely.

34:56 I mean, I've personally been involved in, a lot of incidents and issues where friends of mine have suffered PTSD, they've needed counselling, et cetera, et cetera.

35:07 Again, I never had counselling for any things that have happened to me, but I'm very aware that in five years' time, six years' time, tomorrow, you know, something could flare up, which would be that final bit of war, yeah, in the teacup that could, you know.

35:24 I think it's a good thing.

35:25 And I know the Fire Service with Vivup offers a very good counselling service, free.

35:32 I think it's...

35:33 That's just something that I just discovered today, that is.



35:36 So, and what I found when we were speaking earlier on, when I initially joined the Fire Service, there was a lady councillor called Alma, and she did a lot for people in the Fire Service.

35:50 You know, this isn't something new this has been going on for many, many years, you know.

35:54 And I found it invaluable to have somebody to go to then, isn't it?

35:59 She was like a she was like an in-house counsellor for the Fire Service?

36:02 She wasn't, I don't think she was employed by the Fire Service.

36:05 Don't quote me 100% on this, I'm not 100% sure.

36:08 But she put her services forward to the, you know, I think she did the police as well, you know, at the time.

36:14 But you would definitely say you benefitted from it?

36:15 Yeah, definitely.

36:17 I mean, counselling is important for anything, isn't it?

36:20 Within the Fire Service, the things that you're going to see on a daily basis is something that I know the Fire Service are looking into with possible coffee mornings we're looking at bringing in.

36:31 I think the hardest part, Steve, is the fact that, especially with males, it's a bit of a harder thing.

36:38 I'm a male, I do male things, and I don't get affected, but they do.

36:42 It's the males that are the worst, you know, and that's what you need, you know.

36:46 And like I said, you'd be surprised, you know, people will often ask, you know,

36:51 One thing you look at, look at somebody's body language.

36:54 I've always loved people watching.

36:56 You can see we sit down in the park bench and watch the world go by and you would pick up so much off somebody just by people watching.

37:02 How they're feeling, what they're thinking.

37:04 Yeah, I can see that, when you stop for 5 minutes and just watch.

37:10 Yeah, it is.



37:12 I think it was Ranulph Fiennes who said, you know, you've got two ears and one mouth.

37:15 Yeah.

37:17 You should listen more than you speak, and I think you'll learn a lot.

37:20 Yeah, that's true.

37:22 And I suppose in your situations you learn then as well about the people around you, like the support networks you have, the people that come to the fore.

37:31 Like, obviously, like, you know, Mike, you obviously encountered a hell of a lot, over a big period of time ago.

37:37 But with you, Iwan, like you said, yours was pretty fast-paced from flash to bang of like there.

37:42 How is it, obviously, we know your experience of work, but how is it with your experience in work, as in, obviously, you were on watch, I presume, at the time?

37:49 I was on watch at Neath at the time, yeah, so obviously I went sick straight away, but obviously when I found out I was on sick then for 12 months, come back.

38:02 What was it like? What was everyone like? What was the watch like?

38:05 Oh the watch, former colleagues, people I've been working with before, you know, everybody, my phone's going flat out, people are coming down to Cardiff to the hospital to see me.

38:16 For my second stage of the second round of chemo then, it was over 4 weeks, every day, Monday to Friday.

38:24 Obviously because of the distance, they offered me to stay in, but I'd been there for five weeks, so I didn't want to spend one more night in there.

38:32 So I said, no, fine.

38:34 Obviously talking to people in work about it and they set up like I think a WhatsApp group with a few different people in it.

38:42 That's a difference now with modern technology, yeah.

38:46 And yeah, for the four weeks then, for at least two or three days, I'd have somebody from the Fire Service come to the house, pick me up, take me to Cardiff, stay with me when I had the treatment, take me back. Somebody else tomorrow.

39:00 And it's nice just to have different faces.



39:04 That's amazing because obviously your wife has probably got to go to work, your children have got to go to school.

39:09 All these things which we all take for granted on a daily basis, how do you get to these places?

39:15 The interesting thing, and what Iwan was saying there now about people coming from the Fire Service, but I was very fortunate, I was a bit further away than Cardiff, I was up in London in Barts.

39:24 And I would be back and forth to Barts every three weeks, sometimes every week, depending on what was needed to be done.

39:31 And the interesting thing is that it was a long haul for my in-laws would be making food for me to take up to put into the fridge, because I'd have a week's supply of food.

39:42 And my wife would come up every week to see me then, at the weekend and stuff.

39:46 But I remember one of the things I forgot to mention earlier on.

39:50 One of the things they came up to me, he said, right Mr Edwards, do you want to have any more children?

39:54 Well, I had two young children at the time, and I thought, I hadn't really thought about it.

39:58 So, all of a sudden, he said do you want to donate some of your sperm into the sperm bank in Singleton Hospital? There's a London-based clinic in Singleton Hospital.

40:10 So, all of a sudden, I've have boys come into the house in the morning.

40:14 Right, I've got to get this done within the next hour, so there it was, and that's and that's how it was, and people don't think about that part of it.

40:21 I did that as well in Cardiff.

40:24 So, you know, it's laughter, it is, right, but you know, when you know, one of the things I was going to say was when I was going through my treatment, and when I came back into the Fire Service then in 2004, the funny thing for me was, right, and I didn't know any of this at the time, and I'd landed on Green Watch in Sketty, right?

40:42 And what the boys, didn't say nothing to me at this particular time.

40:45 This particular day, Steve Williams, he's a character in the job, right? Real larger than life character.

40:51 And we had a crash tenant in Morrison here at the time.

40:53 And Steve and Adrian come down this particular day and we were doing drills on the yard, see?



40:57 So Steve came down and jumps off the truck, comes over and he shouts out, hey, Solid, that's my nickname, right?

41:06 I'll never forgive you for doing us out of a good piss up, see?

41:09 Because I didn't die.

41:11 Right?

41:12 So, everybody, everybody now, their jaws are down to the ground, right?

41:17 I can't believe Steve has just said that.

41:20 I looked at Steve, I smiled, and I said to him, Steve, that's the best welcome back I could ever ask for.

41:26 But, when that was said, the boys all opened up then, Mike, we were all so pleased for you coming back into the job.

41:33 We were frightened of how we were going to treat him like eggshells, because has this affected him big time, right?

41:40 I said, no, no, I haven't changed in that way.

41:42 It's the elephant in the room.

41:44 Yeah, it is.

41:45 And that was the one of the things.

41:48 I didn't realise none of the boys, they were all good as gold to me around there, but they were a bit unsure.

41:55 I found that as well.

41:56 When I came back, people weren't sure how to talk to you or head down.

42:00 Do you mention it? Do you not mention it?

42:02 Yeah, and then people would ask. How are you?

42:06 I just wanted like a normal chat, did you watch the football on the weekend?

42:09 Yeah, how's it going?

42:11 The thing is, for you, you've, you both, you've lived it, you've gone through the trials and tribulations, you've come out of that, and to you guys, you've physically been there and lived it.



42:20 To them, they're unsure because they don't know what they should say.

42:23 That's the difference, I find I can speak to people who've had like traumatic events, cancers, whatever, much easier than I would have seven years ago, because I wouldn't know.

42:34 Do you find that people would listen to you as well, because of the experience?

42:37 I remember an experience in London, right? There's a guy that I've become friendly with, a guy called Robin, and Robin was having a stem cell transplant about 3 weeks before me, so we were in isolation for three weeks after the transplants, and while I was in there now. He was playing his guitar and I was in his room with him the day before he had his transplant and one of the nurses comes in.

42:58 Oh, what are you guys talking about?

42:59 Oh, we just found out we've got something in common.

43:02 Oh, what's that then?

43:04 Oh, we've both got cancer.

43:05 We made light of it, we made light of it, and the nurse just looked at us and we just burst out laughing because it was our coping mechanism.

43:15 You feel upset all day, everybody. Horrible time innit, but we made.

43:21 It was it was made light of it, and another strange thing is, Iwan just mentioned it there now, the people that he can approach now that's going through any type of experience with cancer, he's more than happy.

43:35 But the interesting thing is what he doesn't realise is he can talk to anybody or anybody now about any type of ailment because that experience is identical trauma, the fear, everything is there, it's identical, it's just a different name.

43:50 It's that vicious circle, isn't it?

43:51 It is, fear, hatred, why me?

43:54 Why me, exactly.

43:57 It's all there, isn't it?

43:59 Yeah.

44:01 Gentlemen, we could talk all day.



44:04 It's absolutely, listening to your stories, but it's not a story. It's something that you've gone through in your life, which is, you know, something that we all wish none of us will ever go through.

44:17 But I just want to thank you from Shane and myself today for being so brave and like coming out and just sharing your experiences with us, because I'm sure, I think this could snowball and I think this could help a lot, lot, lot of people.

44:35 And I know that in the Service you're already helping people. I know that for a fact.

44:42 But I think this podcast today, you know, could really help and shape things for the future. I really do.

44:50 I don't want to cut you short. Is there anything else you'd like to throw in just before we finish?

44:54 If you haven't signed up yet, on the stem cell register, sign up. As soon as you can, please.

45:00 Yeah. And where can they get that information from? I know you said it.

45:04 Google DKMS or Anthony Nolan.

45:07 Yeah. Well, I certainly will be doing that.

45:10 It costs nothing.

45:11 And again, if you save one life, that's just amazing.

45:14 And it's something I've learned about today. Because I didn't even know about it.

45:18 Seven years ago, I didn't know anything about it either.

45:19 So, I'll definitely do that.

45:23 Anything you'd like to add?

45:24 No, the only thing I can honestly say is to just keep life simple.

45:32 You know, people, we're in this life, we could be here for one minute, one hour, one day, one year, 100 years, right?

45:39 And just keep it simple.

45:41 Don't make, we're ingrained to make things complicated, you know, and why?

45:46 You know, and that's what it is.

45:49 And just think of, I always give this analogy of my brother.



45:54 My brother is into his parachuting and base jumping, and he jumps off aeroplanes, helicopters, whatever, cliffs and so on, right?

46:02 And I said, if you do a random act of kindness to somebody, I said, you'll be on a high for days, weeks, years.

46:10 And one thing I remember, a lady that did a lot of healing for me when I was going through my treatment, a lady from Tumble called Denise, and I remember her talking to me about four years ago, three or four years ago, outside Lidl's car park, and I hadn't seen her for a couple of years.

46:28 And she said to me, do you know all that time that I was going up to see her twice a week for some healing, right?

46:34 She said, I've been on a high for 17 years, purely because of what I did to you, she said.

46:42 Wow.

46:42 I said, yeah, I know.

46:44 I've been into Lidl's across the way, but somebody in the front can't afford to pay for something.

46:49 I've paid for it.

46:50 I've been on a high for months on end because I've done a good deed.

46:54 If you do these good deeds, it gives you the feel-good factor, and everything that's inside you then is feel-good.

47:03 I think that's something for us all to take on board when we're listening to this podcast.

47:06 It's nice to be nice, and if you can do one good thing a day, you know it's going to help somebody else.

47:12 Even just saying hello to somebody, you know, I think we've lost the art of that in this country, just saying good morning, hello, how are you?

47:18 You know, it means a lot to some people, they've got no interaction with anybody else that day.

47:23 Shane, would you like to add anything before we end?

47:24 No, only just that, like, it's always a pleasure to speak to both of you and, hearing your experiences, albeit like, it's tough and you guys have lived it.

47:34 It's been a real pleasure for us to understand and experience it, but also a pleasure to know you both and, like, you know, feel like we're part of this new journey you're on then, you know, that we you've been fortunate enough to give us your time and help us sort of



help us highlight what support can be there for people, but also like highlight the type of individuals, kind, caring, sort of thoughtful individuals we have in the Service.

48:04 Yeah, I think we always, people always look at the negative things that are going on in the world now, rather than the, there's a lot of positives going on, I think, if we can take the positives.

48:15 There's a lot of, there's a lot of positive when you're going around the world every single minute of every day, but it's not highlighted, you see.

48:21 No, it's the negatives.

48:22 It's the negatives, and I know it's to keep people down, isn't it?

48:26 You know, and the thing is, like I said, if you do that random act of kindness every single day, and you know the hardest one of the random act of kindness is to be kind to yourself.

48:37 Once you crack that, and you've got to remember, life is a journey, like Shane has mentioned, but whatever comes into your life, that's all it is, one thing, it's an event.

48:50 Thanks, Mike.

48:51 That's great words, and I think we'll leave it on that.

48:54 I said, but before we go, for everyone that's listening to the podcast, this is the first one that we've done, and I hope you've all really enjoyed it.

49:03 It's been an emotional ride here for me, listening to these, you know, events.

49:10 If you've got anything that you'd like to put out on a podcast or you'd like to share with us and you'd like us to come and do a podcast for you, we'd be more than happy to do that.

49:21 And if it can help just one person, as I've said earlier, we'd be more than happy to do it.

49:26 And if you are interested and you would like to do that, if you could contact Lizzie Jones, Head of Occupational Health, if you contact her in Human Resources in Carmarthen at Service Headquarters, that would be perfect.

49:43 So that will end us for today.

49:44 Thank you all very, very much.