



How emotions become symptoms

Guest: Lee Harbour

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Anna Duschinsky - [00:00:16]

So welcome, everybody, this is part of our Recovery Stories series. My name is Anna Duschinsky and I'm here today with Lee Harbour who is very kindly sharing his own experience of his recovery process and journey from chronic fatigue, so hi Lee.

Lee Harbour

Hello.

Anna Duschinsky

Hello, how are you doing?

Lee Harbour

Yeah good.

Anna Duschinsky

So Lee, can you tell me a little bit about the point at which you realized that you had chronic fatigue or certainly that something was pretty wrong?

Lee Harbour

Um, yeah, so, I got quite unwell at university, so I think that's when I first noticed something wasn't right. I didn't have any awareness at that point, so I didn't really, it didn't really compute to do anything about it, I kind of just pushed through it and then it did go away, and I kind of had a period of being fairly well then for sort of, the next 4 or 5 years.

And then, when I continued in the workplace and then took on more demanding roles and was expected to work more hours, I started to notice that I couldn't physically do what other people could do. So despite the fact at this point I already had a headache every single day, I would go to work feeling like I could pass out at any moment. The penny didn't really drop until I was, I become a running joke in the office that I arrived 20 minutes late and I left 20 minutes early every day, whereas everybody else was arriving early and leaving late. And I had to ask my colleague, how do you physically do it? I didn't feel like I had the choice. And then, when they answered that they could do it without a problem, I think that's when the penny dropped that there was something going on.

Anna Duschinsky

That something was wrong. So what happened from there? What was your next step?

Lee Harbour - [00:02:13]

So, I think I went to the doctors at this point and just said I felt unwell at the time, and they just said I was depressed. But, something I've never actually encountered is low mood, like I've never really had it, even through the whole recovery, I've never encountered low mood, so it didn't really sit right. But it seemed like the only thing to do. And at this point, I've been offered for my company to pay me to finish qualifying as an accountant, which I didn't really want to do but I saw it a ticket to move on somewhere else. So I did that and then became quite aware of how easy it was to then move around and it can choose jobs as I wanted. So used that as a way of, so I quit my job, went traveling for a bit and then came back to a higher paying job in London thinking I was on my way to success in some way. But actually, yeah, it just pushed me right to the edge of what I could do.

Anna Duschinsky

OK, and from there, what happened next?

Lee Harbour

I got very unwell, very quickly. So, I actually got very unwell when we were travelling and didn't really recover. So we got back to the hotel, so I went trekking in Nepal and got a very bad stomach virus and then had to walk four days back to the hotel without eating or drinking, well I could drink water but I couldn't eat. It was horrific.

Then, yeah, I just couldn't then leave the hotel. So I just spent a week in the hotel until we flew home. And then I had to start my job straightaway. And it was really just completely running on adrenaline. Yeah, I had a very, very long commute to work. I had about nearly two hours each way. I had a team of graduates that I was managing and I've never managed anyone before and they were very, very keen and energetic and I just couldn't keep up.

And also, the role was, it was in a commercial team, so there was lots of kind of sales, schmoozing kind of evenings. So there was expectation to work all day and then go to an event in the evening with lots of drinks and socializing.

Yeah, I just got to the point where my body just completely gave up. So I went to visit my mom in Scotland and then couldn't get home. So I then stayed there for the next 8 months.

Anna Duschinsky

And when you say, so, and that was the crash wasn't it? The point at which you had to stop. And when you say, obviously I mean you talk about being unwell at various different levels, what were your symptoms? What are you experiencing at that point by the time you got to Scotland and couldn't back?

Lee Harbour

It was an entire symphony of anything I think the body could throw at me. So, it was genuinely terrifying actually. So it started off with headaches, like severe headaches, which I had already had my whole life anyway. But the dizziness increased and then I felt a lot of nausea, but then I got these really strange sensations, like I was cooking, and I could feel like, almost like the blood going into my hand and it felt like my hand was going to pop like the pressure was building up in the extremities.

And then I remember having a shower a few times and my whole body went blue because my circulation just went crazy. And got really cold all the time. And yeah, I just felt, genuinely like from the outside, it was like something quite serious is happening here. I'm not supposed to be going blue when I have a shower.

Anna Duschinsky

Not normal no.

Lee Harbour - [00:05:58]

No.

Anna Duschinsky

OK. OK, so by the time you got to visit your mom in Scotland and literally you couldn't get out, yeah, as you say, it sounds like it was pretty much a random assortment of what the body can throw at you to stop you, at that point in time.

OK. And as you say, pretty terrifying already. And you obviously lived through many years, to some degree, and we'll kind of backtrack and talk about it a bit more, but many years of not feeling great. It sounds like there was a build up over a period of years. So if you look back now, with the benefit of hindsight, where do you think that started?

Lee Harbour

Pretty much preverbal, pre memory. I think it started right away, as far back as my memory goes I felt unwell. So yeah, I don't have memories of not having regular headaches.

Anna Duschinsky

Right. So regular headaches have been there almost from the get go. And and did you, I know you did because we talked a little bit, obviously you tried to explore that, you went to the doctor, you would tell your mom. What happened?

Lee Harbour

Yeah, I think it was because it was unexplained, it was just put down as I was putting it on. But also there wasn't just headaches, I actually was physically sick quite a lot as well. So I would have periods of just being, you know, being physically sick and my mom trying to say to the doctors, well I can't be making it up because he is actually physically vomiting. And then the doctor was quite forcibly like, no, no, you still can put that on. And I think the advice they gave my mom was to just drag me to school.

And this kind of happened a few times. This wasn't just like go to the doctor's once that was the advice. It was kind of again and again and again. And because it happened at such a young age, I think at such a young age, you just stop because I guess what do you do? This was, it sounds weird, the time of pre internet and you couldn't just Google these things and stuff. So, I don't really know what I would have done in hindsight in my mom's position at that situation. But it definitely set off a narrative in the family about me, but also from me, within myself, about myself. That's going to shut off noticing my headaches. It just became the absolute norm.

Anna Duschinsky

Right. So from that point, as you say, so interesting first off, in terms of your response to it, we talk a lot about our reactions to our emotions, our reactions to our body, and there you very clearly defined that actually you were always taught the narrative was, I'm making it up. Your own narrative was, I'm making it up, there's nothing wrong, just just shut it down. Don't pay any attention to what's going on. And how long, obviously that continued all through your life, as you said, but did that increase in severity? How were your teen years? Coming up to when you were working?

Lee Harbour

Well, I think, it's strange actually, I think my teen years were kind of ok, in a sense of health, but actually I think I took on new coping strategies of drinking quite a lot, recreational drug taking and general risky behavior and exercise. So, it's quite interesting that, I never made that leap before of like when I introduced a new coping strategy, the physical symptoms went away for a while. But I think

then later on they then compounded them because it was just creating more, potentially trauma in my life narrative.

Anna Duschinsky - [00:09:38]

Interesting. So, we talk, as you know, about emotional styles and the way in which we relate to ourselves. And actually, you just named a bunch of them really haven't you? Traumatizing is one relationship where we disconnect and therefore the symptoms and emotions come out through the body, certainly it's a simplistic way of looking at it but it's one way of considering that response. But obviously, everything else that you're talking about is kind of a massive distraction, isn't it? So from alcohol, exercise as well, extreme exercise can be that as well. Recreational drugs clearly are.

So, it's interesting. So, as we look back to your childhood, and I know that you have done a lot of work in piecing this together, unpicking what happened, so the headaches and the sickness from your perspective now, as that kid, what was going on?

Lee Harbour

Well yeah, so I think I was born into a fairly fraught dynamic. So my parents argued a lot and both had unhealthy relationships with their own emotions as well. So there wasn't really any space to control their own emotions, let alone mine and my sister's, so, and then I think that made me very sensitive to the mood of the room from a very young age.

So, I can remember from a young age being able to ponder what mood people are going to be in and then how I should behave to make sure that I don't exacerbate that mood. So it became a very quick shutting down of like well, I don't even, the only need I have is to be aware that other people are as calm as they can be, rather than me thinking, well, what do I need?

Anna Duschinsky

OK, so, yeah. So, essentially, even though it wasn't maybe physically dangerous, emotionally it certainly didn't sound like there was much space, because of course, as you say, there was a lot going on emotionally in the household already. So there wasn't a lot of space for you first off, it sounds like.

Lee Harbour

No. And I think, I don't know whether I'm naturally a curious person, but from day one, I've always been a very curious person. And that certainly wasn't well appreciated by my mom at times, I think, because, you know, various reasons, I think if you're already stretched then having a child that questions absolutely everything, and not just from a curious position, but I kind of wanted to know the absolute purpose of things. And then I would question whether it was, the validity of it. So but yeah, so that's what I have within me. So I think I had a high level of curiosity that then took a lot of energy to shut down as well.

Anna Duschinsky

OK, so, yeah, I mean, it sounds like you were very, very bright, very sensitive little kid, essentially. And absolutely, that requires a lot of time, energy and attention, really. And by the sounds of it, that wasn't just wasn't really possible. And presumably if there was a fair bit of fighting in the household, then a lot of your parents' attention was on each other, I'm guessing. Right? Managing that dynamic potentially.

Lee Harbour

Yeah, yeah, I think so. And there was certainly a build up of stuff. Like there was, because it became, you couldn't predict it I guess. So, as you know in dynamics, if you don't express your feelings, if someone's upset you like a week ago and they do the smallest thing a week later, it will explode. So,

it wasn't always clear, like my mom could become really upset with my dad, over something that I couldn't see. But it was just all to do with the overall dynamics. So it all became very confusing.

And then also, what I took from that was that I also didn't have a clue of what healthy emotion expression looked like. So I became terrified of emotions because I'd only ever really seen them in quite intense, unpredictable, chaotic ways, so I think that's how I come to see them.

Anna Duschinsky - [00:14:01]

Absolutely, so your relationship to, as you say, your own needs, your own emotions was to shut it down, was that, it wasn't a safe place, was that actually the most important thing was for you to maintain calm or manage the environment as much as you could and also to try and understand it, right, to try and predict? I can hear that a lot in what you're talking about there. You're curious but also you wanted to understand, you were trying to make sense of the world in a way to feel, I mean safe, would be the word that comes to me, to try and find a place of safety within that.

Lee Harbour

Yeah and then I think I then used that to then find safety in the world by exploring it in absolute depth. Like, I still today pick things to pieces. I want to understand the absolute dynamics and relationships between everything. And if I feel something about something, I want to know why I feel that way. So it's become this real kind of. Yeah, I mean, that didn't really manifest itself until later on, but I think it was certainly within me because actually it caused a lot of trouble at school.

Like, school become a real extension of me seeing myself as a problem. I went to a very low achieving school, like a pretty terrible school to be honest with you. I think you have to see it to believe it I think. So, on the day when everyone's getting their GCSE results, all of my friends, and they were like a normal sample of the school, were pleased that they got a D. One pass out of the lot.

And then because I was academically capable and got good grades, but I never, I've never, I've never tried. I've never tried at school, I didn't care at all. I actually saw school as a bit of a social outlet and just something I enjoyed. But I was in trouble constantly but I don't think I did anything wrong. And still to this day I don't think I did anything wrong. I just asked questions and got in a lot of trouble for it.

Anna Duschinsky

Interesting, again. So, and also it would strike me that there's a level, I don't know how much of an issue this was for you or not, but certainly it sounds like you stood out, you were different in that capacity to the people around you because you have an innately curious mind. And actually quite a lot of it was relatively easy for you. So how was that as well?

Lee Harbour

Yeah, it was, it was kind of strange, I think, I was always like, I was always popular, I've never had trouble having friends and I always had lots of friends, I never got bullied or anything at school. But I always had the real sense of like, I guess like an existential crisis of like what the hell is, why am I here? Like, what is going on? How is, how am I here?

And I still see it, I look back at my parents sometimes and think how did I become who I am from them? And not in like, I don't mean that in a horrible way, but just I have interests in lots and lots of stuff that most other people I've met who have the same interests as me got them from their parents. My parents have no interests, none of my peers have the interests I have, no other adults around me did, but they just happen to, I don't know, just appeared out of nowhere. So I think I found it very confusing. I think I found life very confusing.

Anna Duschinsky - [00:17:36]

Interesting word, again, confusing. Why am I here? Why am I so different from these people around me? How does this all work? And yeah, it almost sounds like you've landed on a planet that you didn't belong to at some level and had to try and figure it out, basically.

Lee Harbour

Yeah, pretty much.

Anna Duschinsky

OK, so confusing your experience of yourself, your own emotions was, that either they were problematic, as you say, you were the problem at school, you were, to some extent, a bit of a problem at home because you really did want to know and understand all of these things, and a real, I suppose, increasing lack of connection maybe, to your needs and your own emotions as a place that you could easily inhabit. These are the, either the people who were there to hold them for you or in fact, the world in general. It sounds like there's a kind of disconnect to a large degree in what you're describing to me.

So it was confusing at points, as you said, emotions certainly were scary. Was the world a bit scary?

Lee Harbour

It's so hard to kind of, because so much of this is retrospective because when I was in it, I thought I was having a great time, like I genuinely enjoyed a lot of my childhood. I still look back at a lot of it fondly, but I've had to relook at it from a new perspective to understand also the impact it had on me becoming an adult.

But, yeah, I mean I certainly was, there was some scary things that happened, and I think where I grew up is also, I think, like I said, it was quite a deprived countryside town and there was lots of violence. Like we would go and watch people get quite violently beat up for recreation, kind of thing. Like you'd hear, I guess the High Street on Saturday night was a bit like a war zone. And we would go there from young ages just to watch it.

And then as you get older you become part of it because there's nothing else to do. There was literally nothing to do other than just loiter around and watch it unfold. And then because of that, you got this very weird dynamic where there were people that just didn't leave the town. So, entering 13, 14 onwards you started spending time with like 20 something year olds who, when you're that age you think they're really cool, but actually they're the people who just don't leave where they grew up. They're quite dangerous people to be around at that age. And, so there was a real sense of un-containment in the whole situation. Just lots of kind of, yeah...

Anna Duschinsky

And if you'd already I guess, hit a point where you were relatively disconnected, I mean, as I say, we start with you, is a very intelligent, very sensitive kid and and there's a kind of disconnection as you go through from your own emotions, your own instincts. Would that be fair? Your own kind of sense of yourself?

Lee Harbour

Yeah, I think I just didn't know who I was as well. I think that was a real searching and I didn't find that until much later. Whereas because I've always been quite happy go lucky, I find that I enjoy stuff. I think I did enjoy a lot of the stuff we did as kids because there was a real, the whole time it was uncontained, it was also completely free. We could do what we wanted and there was no repercussions for anything.

Anna Duschinsky - [00:21:16]

So as you say, so yeah, I mean and it's a really interesting dynamic that you're describing because as you say, at one level, you were enjoying the experiences, you were having a lot of experiences and you weren't overtly unhappy in any of it. So what do you think? So certainly we talked about home and school and what might have been problematic there in terms of the confusion and the way that you related to yourself, the meaning you made, the narrative around yourself and your emotions, certainly. In those teenage years, retrospectively looking back, what impact do you think that all had?

Lee Harbour

Certainly, I think I went to war with the world a bit over it actually. So even though you said that I wasn't overtly happy, I actually was, I think I was just deeply conflicted. And I didn't see an out, I didn't see a way out. So I was kind of like, well, what do I do? And it wasn't until, the only, because, even though I was academically gifted or whatever, there was no sense of, no encouragement to go to university or what I could do in the future. So actually, I went to university to leave. I didn't go with any career aspirations, it was just to get out. So, it was only when I saw I had a way out, I realized how much I hated where I'd come from.

Anna Duschinsky

OK, so would it be fair to say that actually what you were doing through a lot of it's, as you say, you were relatively happy, go lucky. It sounds like you were doing a huge amount of normalizing in order to survive that environment, that you're living in a war zone essentially, in your high street, and you normalize the war zone so you can continue to exist within it if you don't have a sense that you were able to remove yourself from it. And it's actually only retrospectively coming out of it that you can process or even emotionally recognize the impact of what you just lived in. So actually, there was a level where you were unhappy, where it wasn't what you wanted, where it was quite dramatic potentially. But you normalize that to such a degree that you perhaps weren't aware of it. Is that kind of what you're saying?

Lee Harbour

Yeah, definitely. I think I wasn't even aware of the real impact it had until my, sort of about 30, years later. But at that point, I have got like a, on a more, I guess, ego level of separation of like, I'm better than this. So it wasn't like this place, I wasn't aware of the damage it had done, but I was aware of I absolutely do not want this for my life. I don't want to join the local football team, go and get drunk every weekend and buy a house down the road from my parents and repeat the cycle.

I was like, I want more than this. I want to get away. And I know that sounds quite judgmental of everyone that stayed, but it was just, I guess the way I experienced it wasn't healthy in any way. But it definitely, I wasn't aware of it on the level of an emotional level, it was just like, well, I'm better than this and I need to show everyone that I'm better than this.

Anna Duschinsky

And so. So we kind of fast forward through university and moving through finding a career and I suppose trying to find yourself right, trying to find what it was that you did want by the sounds of it through your 20s and into your early 30s. Is that fair? Was that what that process was about?

Lee Harbour

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I'm an accountant by profession, and I only studied accountancy because I went to the open day and had an argument with my dad because I was hungry and the first door we walked in was the accountancy building so I just signed up to it. And that is entirely the reason why I became an accountant. So I don't feel like I've had any direction or even had any direct, because no one ever asked me. So I never thought about it.

And then it wasn't until I did my degree in accountancy that I then did a master's in philosophy, and I think that was the turning point in my life of really understanding who I was. So it took until about 21, 22 years old. That was a great turning point. But then what that did was put me into my head so much. There's no wonder looking back why it stood out to me so much, because it gave me the absolute escape into my mind.

Anna Duschinsky -[00:25:43]

OK, so you escaped into your mind and presumably it was only at the point where things became absolutely untenable, absolutely impossible, you know, at that point in Scotland where you couldn't get up anymore, you couldn't go back, you couldn't keep pushing, you couldn't do any of those things, that you were forced, I'm guessing, to begin to face some of what was there.

Lee Harbour

Yes, yeah.

Anna Duschinsky

Which is one of the common themes of chronic fatigue, we're forced to, and I think for you it sounds like it was pretty extreme, but we're forced to come into awareness of something not being OK at some level through this bodily process.

So, you've already described that actually it was pretty terrifying for you to be in that place, you know, going blue and feeling like your hands were going to pop, and it all sorts of bizarre symptoms. I'm interested, and we've kind of vaguely had this conversation, but I'm interested in how you began to explore all of this.

Obviously, you, from that point to now, have gone on an amazing journey, which I know still continues to some extent, and we'll talk about that, of re-evaluating, reconnecting, finding a different relationship to yourself and your emotions, which I know has been a pretty full on experience for you at points. But I am intrigued as to how that began for you. So at what point did you go, right well I clearly need to work on my relationship to my body and my emotions, because actually, for most people that isn't something which is necessarily an automatic response. You know what I mean?

Lee Harbour

Yeah, it was actually instantly and it's really strange. I still can't understand quite how this happened. So, one thing I could get from work for help was, I could get CBT on private health insurance or something. And I had one session the day I think I left Scotland, so it was a really weird experience because I didn't even know that chronic fatigue existed either, so in one small session, he set me off on a real journey.

So, in the session all we did, he introduced me to mindfulness for literally, I don't know, five minutes, he just told me to sit and feel my feet on the floor and become aware of my breathing. And I felt so anxious and uncomfortable doing it, it felt terrifying and for some reason, it just stuck, something stuck with me.

And then he tested me on the fact that I said I didn't have any energy. So he wanted me to run up and down stairs in this building. And I was like I'm not going to do that because I'm exhausted. I think he thought I was making up my tiredness. And then he sort of said, well you do realize there's a thing called chronic fatigue or ME?

So when I got to Scotland I just started every day, I just meditated every day, I just went on YouTube and found some English Buddhist monk who did guided meditations, but in Australia, he was a very interesting guy. And I just started doing them every single day. What's so interesting about that is that only a few months before when I'd been to Nepal where lots of people go for spiritual courses and things, I completely rubbished it. We met people out who were there for retreats and I just

questioned it, picked it to pieces and was quite derogatory about it. And it just wasn't something that was in my mind at the time.

And then as soon as I started doing it just stuck. And I've done it pretty much every day since. But I still find it strange that I turned to it so quickly and so strongly, like I always have, I'm quite good at making myself do stuff, but I turned it into meditation and I experimented with it a lot.

Anna Duschinsky - [00:29:49]

And in that experimentation, because, of course there's lots of different forms of meditation, but for you, you know that first experience of mindfulness, of tuning into your body and recognizing that it was a terrifying experience, I mean, first off, a very interesting response to that is to go, great I'll do more of that. But actually maybe retrospectively looking at your history, maybe that wasn't so unusual I suppose at that point. But clearly that triggered something that caused you, with your very curious mind, to want to find out what was going on there at some level. Because I know your meditation, your form of meditation, it was very body based. You spent a lot of time really working on your connection in.

And in that process what was the process of beginning to rebuild? Because, as you say, the level of disconnection had become quite intense. You almost tried every version, you know, somatization and alcohol and intellectualizing, pretty much all the emotional styles all right there. So what was the process of beginning to come back to reconnect? And what was that like for you?

Lee Harbour

It's quite a long one. And I think in hindsight I made contact with stuff through meditating straight away, I have no idea what it was or how to even process it. So actually, in hindsight, I think I just created an overwhelming level of anxiety where I went from, like, even though I was disconnected I don't know if I was numb, I think I felt too much. I think that was such a mess, I could feel everything, that it was then well, how do you get any clarity in this?

So I did a lot of the, it's quite interesting actually because I was so stubborn as well, I wouldn't seek any help. So I actually became aware of the Optimum Health Clinic very early on. But rather than seeking help, I decided to do lots of research and almost worked out everything that was on the 90 day program myself and tried to teach myself. And I got to a certain level doing that, but it was all head based, I completely neglected the emotional side. I wasn't aware I had, I'd started talking about emotions and in my mind I was analyzing how I felt about stuff, I hadn't actually truly felt anything. And I reached a fairly good level of recovery actually through working on patterns of behavior and pacing and changing my lifestyle.

And that's when I decided to join the practitioner training program. And it only took two weekends for me to touch into something that felt utterly terrifying that I realized I need to, so that's when I started going into regular therapy and having weekly therapy sessions. But then even that took, I think a year before I even felt an emotion.

To put it into context, I haven't cried from like the age of 14 through to 30. Apart from maybe on one occasion for about 30 seconds. So, yeah, the disconnect on that level was quite extreme, and when emotions did come back they felt very terrifying to me because they were so physical.

Anna Duschinsky

Right. And actually, that's been a lot of your journey hasn't it? I know that you've done nutrition and that's helped in some ways as well, but that actually for you, a lot of the symptoms as you tracked them, as you worked with them, as you began to understand this correlation between the emotions and the body sensations or physical symptoms, has been really key, hasn't it? That recognition of the correlation there, can you tell me a bit about that?

Lee Harbour - [00:33:58]

Yeah, I mean, because I feel like I made quite a big leap in it, there are two fundamental pieces as well that sit beneath that, that allowed this to happen.

So, it took me a long time to actually get any conditions of living that were suitable. So I was at my mom's for a while and she didn't put any conditions on how long I could stay there but I was so isolated, I had no freedom, I had no friends there and it just became untenable to stay there. So I came back to Norfolk where I grew up. I tried to stay at my dad's for a while, that fell to pieces within weeks. Then I went through a series of rented accommodations and it just was a pretty horrible journey really, feeling that unwell, trying to live with other people you don't know.

So that took a long, that was a really fundamental piece of working to get my own place, and it was when I got my own place I felt a level of stability where I could, without anxiety, start to turn into emotions. So that was quite a fundamental piece.

Anna Duschinsky

It's really interesting. And actually, if we look at your history, a lot of it was about the external conditions being unsafe, being too fractious, being too fraught, being too chaotic, being frankly dangerous at points for you. So it makes a lot of sense that actually for you to feel able, even though you were aware of it all, perhaps by that point, for you to feel able to actually tune in and go there, it required that level of stability, a sense of safety to be in place first. Makes perfect sense.

Lee Harbour

Yeah, yeah. Definitely. Yeah. So it was a real long slog and I had to, the thing is, because I knew that was so important, I had to keep pushing and I went back to work far sooner than I should have, but I just felt like I had no option because I knew something in me, a bit like the meditation, I knew that I needed, it was more important for me to push through for a little bit longer to get the right conditions than it was to, and I don't really know if that was the right thing to do or not but I am where I am.

But yeah, so that reconnecting was just, I basically took the body based meditation bit further. And I sort of found I needed meditation to set me at a certain level. I had to meditate in the morning to be able to get up and leave the house because energy strangely, is something I always had but I had it in such an adrenalized, frantic way that, I mean, I liken myself to a dog, I have to be walked every day so I could feel calm and actually spending a day in the house was just pure anxiety for me. So I got quite reliant on going walking in the countryside as a side stabilizer. So as I started working on this emotional stuff, the countryside was my real safe place. So I didn't really have to build the two in tandem.

Yeah, when I was at home I would spend hours, literally hours, laying on the sofa just feeling, because my headaches got to a point where they was, because I think I was meditating and bringing stuff to the surface, I think it was the resistance to it that was causing such strong physical pain. Like my head was in absolute agony. I bought this thing that I put on my head, that I kept in the freezer, that I had to wear every morning because it felt like, it was kind of desperation, essentially, that then led me to spend hours just focusing in on the feelings.

And I think what became really curious to me was the fact that they moved. That was the really important part was, well if I can focus in on my pain on my head and then it moves to my neck, and then it moves to my stomach, and then it goes back to my head like that can't be a physical thing. I can't have something wrong with my brain. There's not something physical going on here. It is linked to stuff.

And also my symptoms became very state dependent as well. So, it was just then a really slow, slow process. And I remember watching, I think it was video Alex did on how to make contact with your emotions, which was based on feelings in the area of your chest and that part of my body genuinely was numb. That is the only bit of my body that couldn't feel anything. And I would just lay and focus on that part of my body for hours. And for months nothing happened and then slowly I'd just get a

sensation. And then it would get a bit bigger, then it would last a bit longer, and then eventually I cried, like the first time I ever accessed emotion in a conscious way.

But then what was interesting about that is that then flooded the, I think emotion came up for probably a few seconds, but it flooded me for like a week. So, yeah, the power was, yeah, really impressive how powerful it was. And then this went on for a number of months of just making more progress with feeling in stuff but actually it was a really scary time actually, because I have reached a fairly good level where, like I said, I started joining the course and I was able to drive to London from Norfolk, it's like a two, two and a half hour drive, spend a weekend there. I went out for dinner, I walked a long way as well, I stayed in Highbury Fields and decided to walk to the clinic, which was nearly an hour walk, and that was all fine. And then, so I really did feel like I was on the verge of recovery.

And then I hit into the emotions, it was then a steady decline back down to the same level of physical discomfort, something in me just, I knew this was the final piece, like it felt right again. So I think it's that I've had moments of just deep intuition of just like, well just keep doing this because the only way out of it is to really go through it and I always had a sense of turning towards difficult things. Like I kind of...

But also on a, because I read a lot through this process as well, so I read a real mix of spiritual books, philosophy, psychology, labeled it all together and it was a real recurrent theme of turning towards the pain. You can't ignore it, turn into it. And interestingly, that's the experience I had with meditation, is that if a headache's severe, the more I fell into it, the less severe it felt. So I had that on a very small scale. So I tried to apply that to my entire life. So it then became a, sort of seeking out, turning towards my discomfort on a regular basis. And yeah, then eventually the barriers all dropped at once and my emotions came flying, flying out. And this was probably about a year ago now, but what has been amazing in that process is that all of my physical symptoms completely disappeared with it.

Anna Duschinsky - [00:41:23]

It's an astounding testament, isn't it, to the power of our emotions in creating these physical experiences. It's something that obviously we've seen in clinic for years and yet I think for a lot of people, it's something that's quite difficult to get your head around, because, of course, we have this normalization, as you say, I have a headache, therefore there's something wrong with my head. That's the kind of standpoint we start from. And I find it really interesting that the bit that got you was that it moved. It moved and therefore it can't be, something in my stomach then it's not something that's wrong with my head.

Of course, we're not trying to simplify. It doesn't mean that there aren't, you know, lots of physical or physiological aspects to things as well. But, yeah, I see over and over and over and over the power of these emotions and our emotional state in the way that we resist them to create genuine physical pain or real physical symptoms, physical sensation.

So, I mean, a really intense experience for you, clearly. And I met Lee, obviously on the practitioner course when he came first, and watched his journey through all of this, which has been amazing to witness your, and it's interesting, you know, I'd say dedication, commitment, I think desperation is the word you used, and I'm sure there's a correlation between the two, but also your instincts, your intuition to keep following it, to keep following that path, keep following the trail, if you like, of the emotions and symptoms, through to the point, as you say, where actually on a day to day basis you're symptom free basically aren't you?

Lee Harbour

Yeah. Yeah. So the only time I get any symptoms now is in areas that are kind of emotion, I basically know straight away, because I'm still working on myself and doing therapy, so I'm still bringing stuff up and that's the only time I will get symptoms is if I've touched on something that needs processing.

But what's amazing now is, I think is that reaching out to take a leap of faith over these physical symptoms are emotions, but when I say I get physical symptoms now it's like, I might wake up with a headache, which isn't very often now, and I can sit and feel into it, release the emotion, I'll maybe cry for a few seconds and then the headache's gone. So now I see it is a true communication feedback system of my body saying to me to, just stop for a moment, feel this, and it does genuinely go. And I think eventually that will just go because I won't need that because I'm becoming more and more normal, normalised checking in with myself, eventually that communication system won't need to be there.

Anna Duschinsky - [00:44:11]

You'll feel the emotion naturally as opposed to needing the physical symptom to be the marker that there is an emotion, in other words.

Lee Harbour

Yeah, because there's still a little delay. There's still like a small delay sometimes. I might have an emotional reaction to something but I might not feel until the next day. Or sometimes it does happen in the moment now.

So yeah, it definitely took a lot of, yeah, there was definitely a leap of faith. It was a real like this is, I had to make a solid decision, right this, because I think through this journey, there are so many different directions you can take and so many different avenues you can look. And I explored all of them. I got to a point where I was driving myself crazy. So I was like right, just back one horse and I'm just going to follow it until the end and see what happens. And it yeah, it's definitely paid off.

Anna Duschinsky

Really, really interesting. And so, you today, as you say, I think it's an ongoing journey for you still isn't it? There's pieces you're still continuing to work on and I think that's life as well to some degree. But clearly you've come an immense, immensely long way from where this all began. And so what's the future for you if you know that, you might not?

Lee Harbour

Well, I mean, I think what's interesting about there still needing pieces to work on, I think, perhaps that's almost driven by myself because I have such a deep interest in this area and I do want to go on to work as a practitioner myself. So I think that's the only reason why I'm still in regular therapy is because I want to follow the process on. Actually, if I was looking at it just from a chronic fatigue recovery position, I'd be probably better suited to stopping the therapy now and just letting myself calm down and just going back to work, but I don't want to do that, so I've chosen to carry on exploring because I'm learning a lot from doing it.

Anna Duschinsky

And Lee, you're really taking that idea of we are our first clients to the nth degree here. Definite commitment there.

Lee Harbour

But I have found the whole journey deeply fascinating as well. It sounds like it's been a, it was difficult, terrible at times, but it's also probably been the most interesting thing that's happened to me in my entire life. I do see it that way. But it was interesting.

But yeah, so now I work, I'm back working, doing pretty well. Like, I kind of have carried on working with accountancy and doing other bits and pieces and yeah, I just find that I can do much more work now.

Anna Duschinsky - [00:46:59]

And you've just been connected to the training course, to come to our level three, so obviously that's another piece of what you're doing.

Lee Harbour

Yeah. Yeah, so I feel like I'm juggling a lot of stuff. I don't feel any stress anymore. So I feel like, I'm still doing the training and I'm wanting to pursue that. And a certain point that became my, I was desperate to pass that to stop having to be an accountant. But now I found a way, I don't mind so much what I'm doing because I don't feel stressed at all about anything in the work area, that area is kind of covered, which seemed impossible even only a few months ago, but something just really landed. So, I guess I'm at a place where I've now really started to see the other side and it is just a case of following that through.

But it's interesting, it's not like going back to before I got unwell but it is this sense that I could probably, the options are very open to doing what I want to do and it feels like I can achieve quite a lot without it being stressful.

Anna Duschinsky

And I think that's a goal that many in their lives' will definitely appreciate, will be working towards as well.

It's an amazing story Lee. Are there particular learnings, I mean there's masses of learnings so it's hard to encapsulate or to distill it down. But from your perspective, in hindsight, looking back from where you are now. Could you begin to pull a couple of things out from that?

Lee Harbour

Do you mean from the recovery journey itself or pre getting unwell?

Anna Duschinsky

Probably the recovery journey itself, yeah, but I suppose what has formed the recovery story is also your recovery journey, is what created the point where you hit that crisis as well.

Lee Harbour

It's really hard because I don't want to say, like, I probably could have done going at it with less intensity, but then I also don't know if I would have got to where I am if didn't have... It's a really difficult thing because I look back and think, gosh, I made so many mistakes, not mistakes, but I really pushed myself into some really stressful situations by, you know, like I would go weeks where I was like right, I'm not going to watch telly, I'm not going to read, like I took a lot of pleasure away from my life because I became so obsessed with like, well, I'm just avoiding emotions. So I almost tried to live like a monk in my flat for a while to encounter that. In hindsight..

Anna Duschinsky

It certainly brought a lot of intensity to your journey. And I hear you, to some degree, and I think Alex would probably resonate with that. I think he did as well, that the bringing of the achiever pattern or the intensity with which you approach the world into recovery, and of course, there are benefits to that to some degree, there are also, as you say, disadvantages to it in the impact of that potential area as well.

Lee Harbour

Yeah, I do think maybe chill out a bit, like go a bit slower.

Anna Duschinsky - [00:50:11]

It sounds like you're reaching at this point, it sounds like as you work this through, the intensity is settling around everything. You don't have to do this. You don't have to, as you say, in terms of work even, it sounds like there is a softening around a lot of this for you.

Lee Harbour

Yeah, I'd say it's completely softened. Like, I have to make myself do stuff now, it's completely gone the other way. So, that's what I said about going out and walking, I used to have to stop myself from going out too often in my van and go for a walk. Now I have to talk myself into going out in my van, to go for a walk. Now I have to talk myself into meditating. Not like I have to, but like, I have to remind myself, like, oh, you feel a bit wired you could perhaps do with meditating, whereas not even, not too long ago it was a sort of, you need to. So, yeah, all the intensity is dropped.

I think that's the piece in me that, I think my nervous system, so I feel like I've cleared all the stuff around me, my nervous system was wired, is intense. Like I think I've always been quite an intense person, I have an intense existence on the planet, I experience things intensely. So I think maybe if I could have acknowledged that intensity earlier on and worked on that, then perhaps my journey wouldn't have been so difficult.

Anna Duschinsky

Well, listen, thank you very much for sharing with us. As you say, for you an intense journey but I think the learnings for anyone listening, first of there's what happens when we live in an environment or, in whatever capacity doesn't have to be perhaps as extreme as your high street, but if we live in those environments where it doesn't feel safe, then it's going to impact, that we're going to respond to that in certain ways, that we're going to suppress, repress our emotions in one of the various forms and styles. And to be able to recognize that I think is key and, of course, that disconnection is, in its extreme form, does lead to conditions like chronic fatigue, because we stop listening, we stop paying attention to our needs, we stop paying attention to our body, we lose the capacity to do it.

For you also, I mean, I think that the biggest piece that, first off, your commitment to following that, I love your idea of turning towards the pain and embracing that. Yes, I hear what you're saying, maybe a little less intensity around that could have done you a favor. But certainly the other piece for me is the absolute power of emotion in terms of the impact when we repress it, suppress it for that long, that it has in the body and your own learning around that.

So thank you so much for sharing this with us today. I really appreciate that. And I hope everyone listening has enjoyed the story. Thank you very much for that today.

Lee Harbour

Thank you.