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"They look at it as a sad thing, but they don't know what can come of us if they allow us the services."

Joe Mercer talks to his longtime friend, David Burnett, about how David became his therapist at Reliance House - now called Reliance Health - in Norwich, Connecticut more than 30 years ago. They talk about the evolution of their relationship, the struggles Joe has faced with mental health, and what they have taught one another.

David (Dave) Burnett: I got a call from a dear friend from Norwich Hospital and someone I trusted who asked me to support you in our community-based system and I said "Jim I can't do that, I have to live in this community." And about three, five, six months later I got another call from Jim, who said roughly the same thing and I said no again.

Joe Mercer: Was it the nature of the crime, Dave, that I committed, that you felt uncomfortable with? Or did you feel that I didn't show no remorse?

DB: I didn't know whether or not you showed remorse Joe. And then sometime the third fourth or eighth call, I don't know, I said, "Okay I'll meet Joe Mercer."

JM: I don't know if your wife cooked you a good meal that night or not but I was happy that day.

DB: Once I met you a relationship that began that has just been memorable for both of us, Joe.

JM: Yes it has. And you smiled at me.

DB: Did I?

JM: Yes, you did.

DB: I'll be darned. Joe, you have such a nice way about you and it's so easy to like you. You got a big smile on your face and you're a little sheepish and you're kind of full of the Dickens sometimes and I just saw a nice person, I just saw a regular person.

I gradually got to know how much wisdom you got tucked away in that head of yours. I also learned, Joe, how deeply sorry you were for what you had done. You were a child, Joe, and you were psychotic. You didn't know right from wrong, Joe, and you did something you have regretted ever since. You just won my heart, and of course we've come to love each other.

JM: With the support now that you have showed me Dave I can say that I'm thankful. It's just that some people don't understand us mentally challenged. They look at it as a sad thing but they don't know what can become of if they allowed us the services.

DB: Many people don't understand that recovery can happen for people who were seriously psychotic. I mean, there were times, Joe, when you decided for brief periods not to take your medication. It wasn't just smooth sailing the whole time; there were some struggles, Joe.

JM: You gave me a lot of chances, Dave, cause the way I would act sometime...

DB: We learned from each other.

JM: Yea, that's true, Dave, that is true.

DB: There was a day when I had bought a ping-pong table for the basement in my house. And I had a friend who was going to go help me pick that up and that friend couldn't go at the last minute and I was leaving work and I needed some help and I said "Hey Joe, come with me I gotta go get a ping pong table."

The ping pong table was in the basement. Had to be disassembled or we weren't going to get it.

I had no tools and the person that was selling the ping-pong table had no tools. And I had given the woman the hundred dollars already. And I couldn't get it out of the basement. And I was getting angry and I was getting agitated and I was mad and I kind of wanted my money back. And you said, "Now hold on folks, everybody is getting a little too excited around here. Dave you just calm down, young lady you just calm down. We're going to figure this out and everything's going to be all right."

We slowed down, we figured it out, we got the ping pong table on the top of my car, we got it home. You saved the day.

JM: Then I figured that well I accomplished something today; we can play now.

(both laugh)

DB: We can play ping-pong.

You've gotten past the stigma---

JM: That's what it is Dave

DB: You've gotten to the point where you're confident enough you're comfortable enough and you trust people enough to talk about your mental illnesses and your

recovery. Joe you've got perhaps more wisdom than anyone I know and its wonderful to have spent all this time with you

JM: It's great but it's not over with (both laugh) we still got far to go. I love you Dave you've done a great job. (laughter)

DB: Life's been wonderful and getting to know you is huge part of that wonder and awe and thank you so much for being you, and I love you.