

For Broadcast: 1<sup>st</sup> December 2019

## A SECOND CHANCE

### *Interview*

**Dion:** “I remember many times especially in my later high school years planning how I was gonna run away, yelling into my pillow that I hated Dad.”

**I’m Richard Fox and this is Messages Of Hope. Family relationships don’t always work out the way we’d like them to but it doesn’t necessarily mean giving up. Have you ever clashed with a family member and struggled to see any way to fix it? How do you cope when you’re stuck living with family conflict? Today I’m talking with Dion about the toxic relationship he had with his dad.**

**Dion, what sticks out in your memory as you think about your childhood?**

**Dion:** I didn't like my parents arguing. It became so common in the home that it was almost normal but I didn't like it, I didn't like that normality and I'd see my friends parents and how they were together and I kept thinking why can't my family be like that family?

**What age were you Dion when you started to notice there was something going on with your dad?**

**Dion:** um well I was about to turn 5 and I didn't consciously recognise that it was the drinking at that point, at that younger age. Probably the biggest thing I noticed was the fracturing of my parents' marriage, in the form of arguments and whatever, and that's where I saw things starting to unravel for Dad and Mum.

**So most of your dad’s negative behaviour was directed to your mum?**

**Dion:** Yeah. I think the direct emotional and verbal abuse was towards mum but the extra kind of emotional abuse kind of spilled over to us boys because you know obviously mum and dad are at each other - Where are we? What are we doing, what are we watching, what's our example? Um, what does that do in the long term you know? There's all this unsaid stuff that happens when the arguments are happening I guess

**Dion, when this was all happening, as a kid if someone asked you how do you feel about your mum and dad, what would've you said?**

**Dion:** Oh I would've pretended that it was all fine probably depending on my age. I probably would have said, oh you know, it's all ok.

**I’ve been talking with Dion about growing up hating his dad. Let’s hear the story from his dad’s perspective. Gavin how did you cope with the frictions at home?**

**Gavin:** Well I probably would have hidden the fact that it wasn't ok because it wasn't, but we acted, you know like if Dion's mum and I went out to church, just acted like a normal couple. You hid everything and it was probably wrong at the time but that's the way we did it and to hide it I s'pose.

### **So you were a Christian family?**

**Gavin:** Yeah I was brought up as a Christian, baptised when I was probably 3 weeks old but probably basically just a pew sitter up to that time.

### **What do you think was the worst thing as the relationship with your wife was unravelling?**

**Gavin:** I guess it was the arguing all the time I think was the ugly part and just argue over stupid things really, things that weren't even important, and once an argument started it just didn't stop and I didn't know how to let go or control myself basically. I went outside and had another drink you know.

### **Were you aware of the affect your behaviour was having on your children?**

**Gavin:** I didn't see that affecting them but they saw it, knew it was affecting them. I probably didn't know that at the time or didn't see it or didn't bother to see it.

### **After high school Dion left home and went interstate to work at a Christian campsite called Warrambui. In Dion's words, 'the inevitable' came that year.**

**Dion:** It was that time in August in 98 that Dad rang and said....Mum's gone. I fell on the floor cos I had no idea. I mean I knew it was a possibility for many many years. I knew, cos I remember mum saying as soon as the kids are gone I'm gone. She recognised the marriage had broken, fell apart, long ago. I was just crushed but I was at Warrambui and I was so grateful that I wasn't actually in the midst of the mess. I was in an environment, in a community that was so supportive and just surrounded me with prayer and love.

### **For Gavin the realization that your marriage was over had come a few months before that phone call to Dion and it had a dramatic impact on you.**

**Gavin:** It was the next day that I had my last drink. It was on the 25th May 1998. Alan, our pastor, said I think you should go to AA and so on the Wednesday night I was sitting and having tea on my own and I was trying to think of all the excuses in the world why I wouldn't go and eventually I did and it was probably the best thing I ever did. I felt straight away I needed to be there, and that was probably the turning point.

### **Soon after that you met up with Dion interstate and another significant moment happened for you.**

**Gavin:** I said to Dion I haven't had a drink for 15 days and he came and give me a hug. That was the first thing I s'pose that I knew - I hadn't lost all the respect of my kids. And it also encouraged me to keep going on my track of recovery. That was a big thing, a very precious moment.

### **How did your journey go from there, were you able to stay off the alcohol?**

**Gavin:** Absolutely. I attended AA for 12 months. I had a wonderful support group from the church of 6 people and they still support me to this day and we go out every year to celebrate that particular day.

**Have you ever had a family conflict that seemed hopeless? How did you cope with it? You can share your story with us on our Facebook page at Messages of Hope. We'd love to hear it and sharing your story can inspire others too. I'm Richard Fox and I'm talking with Gavin and Dion.**

**Earlier in the program you both talked about pretending that nothing was wrong with the relationships at home. Like you had one life at home and another life outside of home. When you look back was there any benefit to hiding away the problems?**

**Gavin:** When I think back now, nothing. Probably made it worse.

**Dion:** Just delayed the inevitable. It didn't hide it from the friends.

**Gavin:** from other people, yeah.

**Dion:** I mean realistically though, everyone knew...

**Gavin:** Yeah

**Dion:** but no-one spoke about it. It was a hidden problem and that's what probably caused Dad so much more problem. No one was willing to talk to him about it and if they did take the risk he would shut them down.

**Gavin:** Yep, which is pretty normal for an alcoholic. You're in denial.

**Something that's common in both your stories, where change was happening in your life, was that you were surrounded by other people. Gavin, for you it was the AAA community initially and Dion, the community at Warrambui campsite. Do you think that support from people around you was the crucial thing and did your faith in God play a part as well?**

**Gavin:** I think for me it was a combination of both. To have alcohol AA on its own was good but it wasn't enough. But the home support group, the church support group that was absolutely fantastic. Yep, couldn't have done it without them. When I look back now I think for me probably, maybe if God hadn't allowed something to happen in my life - come to a crisis point, I may never have stopped drinking and I really thank him for that. I really turned to God a lot and it helped absolutely. So now there's a very close relationship there. We can talk day to day and basically I just treat him as another person. It's good.

**Dion:** Yeah and I would say I was definitely surrounded by loving Christian communities in those times and I remember calling out - like screaming out to God, before he quit, saying Why? Why? Why? Even that act of crying out, you know that desperation, and that connection, it strengthened my relationship with God even though it was that devastating a situation. I knew I could sort of call out to him in that time. Moving past, once Dad had quit, there was the marriage. My parents' marriage had broken down but there was also a joy in the fact that he'd walked away from the alcohol and that meant new possibilities, new things, new chances, - second chance really- and that was so much to celebrate and give thanks to God for.

## **Dion how would you describe your dad now?**

**Dion:** I would say before Dad stopped I really didn't know who he was, didn't have a relationship with him. Outside of the alcohol I couldn't really describe who he was but after that a completely changed man and we've become such good friends since then. I would never have imagined that I could be such good mates with my Dad before he stopped drinking. And we talk to each other often and share stuff, like all sorts of things that we've never told anyone and that's only because of the sort of person he's become since stopping drinking. I look at him and see his faith has just skyrocketed because before it was essentially nothing. It was an action. Now it's real, it's a living thing.

**It's amazing how you've got such a rich relationship after having had pretty much no relationship for so many years.**

**Gavin:** I guess I really never knew Dion either before I'd stopped, till I stopped drinking. I've only really got to know him since then. And like Dion will tell you it's just grown from nothing to everything.

**I'm Richard Fox and this is Messages of Hope. If you're struggling with conflict in a relationship contact us for the free booklet Forgiveness. You can order Forgiveness by calling 1800 353 350. Or go to [messagesofhope.org.au](http://messagesofhope.org.au) to order or download your free copy.**

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