Being OK is Enough, For Now



A memoir of Patrick's arduous journey from the onset of mental illness to recovery

Acknowledgements

Writing Patrick's story has served to remind this author that recovery from mental illness is rarely straightforward. It involves time, patience, understanding and the encouragement of others.

I am deeply grateful to my family, whose love and support has helped me through the most challenging periods of my life. In particular, my mother and grandfather have been a constant source of reassurance. Their care and quiet belief has helped me negotiate the small steps that made my recovery possible.

I also wish to thank the mental health professionals and support workers who helped me along the way. Their guidance afforded me a better understanding of my mental condition and helped me begin to move forward.

To everyone who has shown kindness, understanding, or encouragement, thank you. When life feels overwhelming, even small gestures can make a difference.

I hope that sharing Patrick's journey will offer reassurance to others experiencing mental health difficulties, as well as to the families and friends who support them. Recovery is not always a straight path, and progress need not be measured entirely by how quickly we move forward. Sometimes, learning to accept where we are is enough.

If my words help even one person feel less isolated/demoralised, or encourage fortitude and hope among sufferers, then telling my story will have been worthwhile.

Prologue

What happens when an ordinary life takes an extraordinary turn? Patrick Nelson, a quiet, conscientious young man from Nottingham, discovers that the determination which once bolstered his competitive middle-distance running cannot prepare him for the greatest challenge of his life. Faced with mental illness, fear, and a shattered sense of self, he must find his way back with the help of those who love him. His journey reveals a powerful truth: sometimes, being OK is enough; for now.

The Story Proper

Patrick Nelson was born and raised in Nottingham, a city closely linked to the legend of Robin Hood. According to folklore, the famous outlaw stole from the rich to give to the poor, with many of the stories set in and around the city and nearby Sherwood Forest, home to Robin Hood and his well-known rival, the Sheriff of Nottingham.

Patrick's early years were ordinary for a boy growing up in a busy city. He did well enough at primary school to be regarded as bright, and his move to secondary school presented no difficulties. He got on well with his classmates and moved comfortably between different friendship groups.

He preferred listening to others rather than telling his own stories, and found humour in the observations of those around him.

Even though he rarely volunteered much about his own thoughts, there was an easy kindness about him that made him approachable.

During his secondary school years, there were no obvious signs that he would one day discover an unexpected talent for distance running. Physical education was simply another lesson he participated in without issue, not imagining he had any special ability. By the time he left school with a respectable set of exam passes, the athlete he would later become had yet to emerge.

At this stage, Patrick had little idea what the next phase of his life might involve. He was not unhappy, but content to take each step as it came. Nothing suggested the serious mental health difficulties and trauma that lay ahead. He was unaware that the ordinary world around him was about to become the setting for the greatest struggle of his life.

Like many teenagers on the edge of adulthood, Patrick was expected to make decisions before he truly understood himself. Friends spoke excitedly about apprenticeships, college courses, and ambitious career plans. But there were degrees of certainty among Patrick's peers that he felt he couldn't match.

He listened with genuine interest, smiled and nodded in all the right places, but privately wondered whether everyone else had received clear directions for the future that he had missed.

Home life, which remained his anchor. followed familiar patterns. Meals with his family, television humming quietly in the background, conversations about work and weekend plans. He found comfort in that predictable pace. The future felt less like a destination and more like something that would gradually reveal itself.

With no overwhelming ambition pulling him in one direction, Patrick saw college as a reasonable option; a chance to gain experience while postponing the difficult question of what direction his life should take. Like many young people, he was happy to feel he had plenty of time to discover his potential.

He enrolled on a media studies course at a local college, which was very different from school. The latter had provided structure through timetables and compulsory lessons.

College was less structured, and he was studying a subject he found appealing. Film studies, in particular, sparked his curiosity.

Patrick was rarely the first to contribute to discussions. As at school, he preferred to listen before speaking, considering different opinions before quietly offering his own.

When he did speak, his observations were well-considered, and his tutors recognised his diligent approach.

Assignments were completed steadily, but he was reluctant to submit them until he was confident he had met the requirements of each task.

College life also opened the door to new friendships. Shared projects, conversations over coffee, and afternoons spent editing footage created an atmosphere in which relationships developed naturally. Patrick had never sought to be the centre of attention, yet his calm manner and willingness to listen made him easy company.

The lingering post-school uncertainty gradually faded, replaced by a growing sense that he was beginning to find his place.

Away from the lecture rooms, his athletic ability was beginning to emerge.

His grandad, an athletics coach in his own right, was always on hand with training schedules, encouragement, and advice about which events to enter, from 5,000 metres to half-marathons.

Patrick showed great dedication to his training. Whether before lectures, or at the end of the day, he laced up his trainers and headed out into the streets, parks, and country lanes around Nottingham. Rain, frost, and heat were no deterrent.

Without realising it, Patrick was developing both physically and mentally. He was learning that progress was cumulative; the harder he trained, the better an athlete he became. Those around him began to notice subtle changes. He appeared fitter, and he carried himself with a little more confidence.

His studies gave him direction and balance, while running provided discipline, routine, and an outlet for restless energy.

For the first time since leaving school, Patrick felt his life was developing a sense of purpose.

For a while, that feeling seemed well-founded. Life settled into a reassuring pattern of lectures, assignments, training runs, races, and familiar routines. It was an ordinary contentment, built not on dramatic achievements but on small successes repeated day after day. He had little reason to believe such stability would prove temporary.

Many of the conversations at college were unlike those at school. Discussions drifted easily between films, music, literature, politics, and current affairs. Though naturally reserved, Patrick felt increasingly comfortable being part of them.

He showed a genuine academic curiosity that his tutors recognised and encouraged. They valued the care he put into his work and challenged him to write more imaginatively. He appreciated their confidence in him.

Regular running continued as part of everyday life. Each race was another opportunity to test himself, against others and against his own standards. He approached assignments with the same positive attitude he brought to training. At this stage, there was no reason to imagine his life becoming unsettled.

At eighteen, Patrick completed his college course and his time as a student came to an end. Leaving college felt different from leaving school. He had gained confidence and discovered interests that genuinely mattered to him. But what next?

Some of his contemporaries had no such dilemma. They had already secured university places, apprenticeships, or jobs.

In truth, Patrick stood on the threshold of adult life with little more than determined optimism and an open mind. He had no detailed life plan, nor did he feel he needed one. He trusted the future would reveal itself, one step at a time.

One evening, while browsing job sites on the family computer, he saw an advertisement that immediately caught his attention. A local company was offering an apprenticeship in web development.

The role combined paid employment with continued study, allowing successful applicants to gain practical experience while working towards technical qualifications. For someone with an interest in software design, it was not the sort of opportunity that appeared every day.

Patrick paused, then read the advertisement again.

On paper, it seemed to combine everything he was looking for. The salary was modest, but money had never been his greatest motivation.

Learning while working, gaining experience gradually, seemed sensible. For someone still discovering his place in the world, it felt like a realistic first step.

He was not an experienced programmer, but he had always enjoyed understanding how technology worked. His media studies course had introduced him to digital design, image editing, and the creative side of computing. Web development offered a way to blend problem-solving with creativity. It appealed to his careful, methodical way of thinking.

Patrick completed the application carefully and asked a family member to read it through before pressing submit.

Some days he convinced himself he had a genuine chance. On others, he assumed he would receive another polite rejection. Then, unexpectedly, a letter arrived: he had been shortlisted for an interview.

He began preparing, researching the company and practising responses to likely questions.

He attended the interview believing that hard work, kindness, and determination might be enough. It was a belief that had served him well.

The interview went well, and before long he began his apprenticeship. The week was divided between two very different environments. Part of it was spent back in the classroom, developing technical knowledge, while the rest was spent in the offices of a technology company based in Nottingham.

The office bore no resemblance to school or college. Rows of desks held computer monitors, keyboards clicking quietly amid telephone calls and conversations. Whiteboards festooned in diagrams lined the walls, while coffee mugs occupied almost every desk. The office had the energy of people working together towards common goals. For Patrick, everything felt new and stimulating.

Over time, the apprenticeship was suiting him well. He had always approached problems methodically and showed the same quiet persistence in writing simple code, testing websites, and learning new software that he had shown in his studies and his running.

Among his new colleagues was a young developer named Ryan, whose confidence naturally drew people towards him.

He was approachable, quick to laugh, and generous with his time, especially when helping newcomers find their feet. Unlike those who guarded their knowledge, Ryan enjoyed explaining things, breaking complicated problems into manageable parts without making anyone feel inadequate for asking questions. Patrick appreciated that immediately. Whenever he was uncertain about a task, Ryan was usually nearby with practical advice, or quiet encouragement.

Outside work, they discovered they had more in common than either had expected. Conversations drifted from computers to films, music, and everyday life. Patrick's interest in cinema often sparked lively discussions over lunch.

For Patrick, those early months marked another milestone. He was no longer simply preparing for adulthood; he was living it.

He had colleagues who respected him, meaningful work that challenged him, and friendships that extended beyond the classroom.

The uncertainty that had accompanied leaving school seemed increasingly distant. Step-by-step, his confidence continued to grow.

It's easy to underestimate the significance of those ordinary working days. They were filled with deadlines, conversations, cups of coffee, and problems waiting to be solved; hardly the material of dramatic storytelling. Yet it was within those everyday moments that Patrick began building the relationships and routines that gave his life stability.

Their personalities were different, but the two apprentices spent increasing time together. Ryan exuded confidence, while Patrick was quiet and reflective, preferring to understand what was being said before offering an opinion.

Regular running and steady competitive progress continued to give Patrick a growing sense of self-worth.

Consistent training and competing taught him the value of single-minded determination, a quality that served him well in his everyday work.

It began to dawn on Patrick that his quiet and conscientious nature could work to his advantage. His colleagues began to recognise him as someone steadfast and committed to problem-solving; he was at his best when a task required patience rather than speed.

Some days, however, progress was not straightforward. He admired the knowledge and professionalism of lead developer Andy Larkins, who was approachable when time allowed. The trouble was, Andy had increasingly little time to spare, and Patrick's training and progress began to suffer.

It became harder for Patrick to complete tasks to his own satisfaction and to judge his progress without regular feedback.

Much of his learning became self-directed, through manuals, experimentation, research, and study.

Day-to-day work in the office was becoming more tedious and less enjoyable than it had once been. Even enjoyable experiences, he reminded himself, eventually come to an end.

In time, it became clear that the apprenticeship could not continue as he had hoped. With less supervision available and his own confidence beginning to falter, tasks that had once felt manageable began to feel overwhelming.

After discussing his progress with his manager, it was agreed that he would not be kept on when the apprenticeship period came to an end. It was not a dramatic falling out, but a quiet, disappointing conclusion that left him without the structure he had come to rely on.

After his apprenticeship ended, Patrick's days became quieter. Where once they had been filled with conversations with colleagues, now his interactions were primarily family-oriented.

Then, after almost six months of unemployment, he accepted a part-time kitchen position at a local care home. It was far removed from technology, yet it returned some structure, responsibility, and purpose to his life.

His ambition remained connected to technology, but waiting indefinitely for the ideal opportunity had become frustrating. The kitchen gave him regular hours, steady work, and a reason to begin the day with purpose.

His kitchen duties were approached with the same conscientiousness he had once brought to programming, studying, and athletics. Yet the environment was very different. In the early stages, he had no inkling how his working conditions would affect his longterm health.

He settled into what he saw as the rhythm of the job. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner provided natural deadlines, while preparation, cleaning, and serving created a steady sequence of tasks.

The work was physical and repetitive, but every completed chore contributed to residents' wellbeing. For Patrick, that felt meaningful.

As he worked, he was surrounded by stainless-steel worktops, bright lights, and shelves of ingredients. The dishwasher hissed constantly, but where was the human contact in his limited workspace?

A small circular window in the heavy swing door offered brief views of chefs, porters, and care staff moving through the main kitchen, but for the most part this was his only human contact.

He was not unhappy, but the solitude encouraged deeper thought. While his hands were occupied with routine tasks, his mind wandered through memories, ambitions, and unanswered questions.

Some days passed with barely a conversation beyond a request for vegetables, a reminder about mealtimes, or a brief word of thanks. The routine remained reassuring, but the silence gradually became an issue.

As identical working days accumulated, Patrick's mental state began to unravel, a change not immediately obvious to his family.

He continued to perform his duties as conscientiously as he could. Maintaining a semblance of normality was, however, becoming increasingly difficult.

Each morning felt harder, and his conversations with himself grew longer.

He found that ordinary tasks demanded more effort than before. One cold afternoon, he reached for a large saucepan beside the sink. His damp hands lost their grip, and it struck the tiled floor. The sound seemed to fill the room.

Colleagues in the main kitchen heard the crash. Inside the preparation room, Patrick froze. His breathing changed as he stared at the fallen saucepan.

The accident itself was not extraordinary, but the sound overwhelmed him.

His heart pounded, his breathing became shallow, and his thoughts scattered. His legs gave way, leaving him beside the overturned pan. He might once have dismissed such an incident. Now he stared wildly, thoughts racing, unable to understand why such a simple event had become overwhelming.

A colleague spoke gently while another brought a telephone. Patrick wanted his mother, and she was called. She found him pale and deeply shaken, and took him home.

Some days later, Patrick understood he was not returning to work. The incident had exposed months of strain. It was not the saucepan that caused everything; it marked the moment when pressure could no longer be contained. He never returned to that job.

His family arranged an assessment and contact with mental health professionals was made. They explored his experiences, work, thoughts, and the gradual changes of the preceding years carefully.

Patrick found some experiences difficult to explain. He spoke about talking to himself and about struggling to make others understand what he meant. The assessment revealed elements of delusion that clouded his thoughts.

At another meeting, doctors explained that his experiences were consistent with paranoid schizophrenia. For several moments, the room was silent. The diagnosis gave a name to his confusion, self-talk, and growing suspicion of others, but it also raised difficult questions about his future.

Appointments and explanations about treatment replaced familiar routines. His mother listened as clinicians described available support, while Patrick struggled to imagine his own future.

As time passed, Patrick remained at home and his working routine disappeared. Running still mattered, but employment was gone, leaving long stretches of unstructured time. His family provided reassurance, reminding him he was not facing everything alone. His mother remained close throughout.

Among his worries was the fear that ordinary events might no longer be as they appeared. He questioned conversations and small details, searching for meanings that others did not see.

He was frightened by how distorted his perceptions had become. His family recognised his distress, while Patrick struggled to explain experiences that felt completely real. He craved reassurance, and his family did their best to provide it.

Yet Patrick was entering a phase of distrusting even those closest to him. He harboured the thought that, despite reassurances, he was destined to suffer physical punishment from devil-worshipping forces.

Without employment, his world had become quieter. His grandfather visited one afternoon and talked about ordinary things. Then his voice seemed to drift in and out of clarity. Familiar words became difficult to follow.

For Patrick, the steaming coffee, his grandad made and offered him, gradually became the focus of his unease.

He wondered whether something had been added. Although he knew his grandfather would never intentionally harm him, the thought of being adversely affected felt convincing. His pulse quickened.

He moved the mug carefully to the window sill, unable to explain why. His grandfather watched in silence, with quiet concern.

It is easy to underestimate the fear Patrick was experiencing. He wanted to explain what was happening, but no words came. The danger felt real, despite having no evidence to support it. Remaining in the house, a place full of imagined danger, was no longer an option. In a flash, Patrick was through the front door and away to who knew where?

Patrick did not stop to consider where he was going. His shoes were still loosely tied, and every hurried step carried him further from the house and from the people who had spent their lives nurturing him.

Regular running had once provided structure. Now his movement was something entirely different.

He was no longer training for a race or measuring progress against a finishing time.

He was running because remaining in the house felt dangerous; his frightened mind had convinced him that escape was necessary.

Patrick headed for the nearest alleyway. The cold air struck his face, but he barely noticed it. His thoughts remained fixed on the possibility that someone might be following him. Some of his thoughts were rational. He knew his grandfather loved him. But intense fear left no room for sentiment.

In truth, Patrick was not escaping from his grandfather or from his home. He was fleeing an entirely imaginary horror. He had left without a coat, without a destination, and without any clear understanding of what was terrifying him. His previously benign perception of his neighbourhood had become threatening. He kept running. Driven by fear, Patrick sensed that distance meant safety. Nothing else mattered.

Only days earlier, his greatest difficulty had been adjusting to his diagnosis.

Now the illness had carried him beyond the reach of ordinary reassurance. It was only when he was beyond his local area that he became aware of how far he had run. He still had no destination, only the urgent need to continue.

Wearing little more than shorts and a T-shirt, Patrick gradually became aware of the cold evening temperature. But where was he to find sanctuary? He was experiencing a crisis for which he was entirely unprepared.

When his mother returned home from shopping and learned of his sudden flight, she immediately grasped the potential seriousness of the situation. Fear and paranoia had taken hold. The police were contacted and asked about his direction, clothing, destinations, and familiar places. A local alert was raised.

It is easy to understand why the search became so urgent.

Patrick had left in panic, without a coat, frightened and confused, while those around him had no way of knowing his current mental and physical condition.

Evening gave way to night as his mother waited anxiously for news while police continued their enquiries. Friends and relatives checked familiar places, hoping someone might have seen him. Concern grew, as the hours passed.

Patrick remained beyond their search, walking through darkness in a detached frame of mind, oblivious to the anxiety of those searching and waiting.

The first possible sighting came from a member of the public who believed they had seen a young man matching his description outside a public house.

Subsequent sightings offered only fragments of information, but his mother tried to remain positive.

Each report suggested her son was still nearby, yet none provided the reassurance she desperately needed.

Some of his family remained awake throughout the night. Waiting for news overrode the need for sleep. Every telephone call broke the silence with a brief surge of hope, followed by renewed uncertainty. His grandfather thought repeatedly about their final conversation, wondering whether some word or gesture might explain Patrick's sudden flight. No logical explanation came to mind.

Patrick wasn't simply missing from the family home. To those who loved him, he seemed to be missing from the whole world. At 3:17 a.m., his mother sat on the stairs, wrapped in a blanket.

She remembered him as a child running through that doorway, and as a teenager completing his first half-marathon.

Days earlier, she had worried about him after his diagnosis.

Now she sat awake through the night, wondering whether he had found shelter, or was at the mercy of the elements. Every sound outside made her look towards the front door, hoping it was him.

It was just after 5:30 a.m. when a knock came. His mother reached the door and opened it with trembling hands. There was Patrick. As he entered, he looked exhausted.

His clothes were cold and damp, his hair was unkempt, and his expression was vague. He appeared unharmed, but the night had left its mark. His mother embraced him, and he returned the hug.

No one asked where he had been. They understood explanations could wait. What mattered was that he was home, no longer alone, but surrounded by people who loved and cared for him.

Relief was enormous, but the illness remained and recovery had yet to begin. Patrick sat quietly while his family took in what had happened.

Their relief was palpable, but they understood recovery would require considerable patience and support.

Two police officers arrived during the morning to check on his welfare.

They spoke gently, confirming he was safe and unharmed. A little later, a social worker arrived, offering support and giving Patrick the chance to describe his experiences. But Patrick remained curled in the corner of the sofa, avoiding eye contact. The social worker did not press him.

She recognised that conversation might not be immediately possible; he would need time. Patrick remembered fragments of his experience but struggled to organise them into words.

His immediate task was commencing treatment and learning to cope with experiences that had frightened him. His first practical step involved medication. The social worker explained the tablets were intended to reduce his symptoms.

He remained unsure whether medication would resolve all his difficulties.

He eventually reached forward, accepting the tablets and swallowing them with water. It was a small action, but to his family it represented treatment and hope.

The social worker explained that an Early Intervention Team would provide specialist support. The following morning, a bed became available at a mental health unit in Nottingham. Patrick agreed to a voluntary admission.

Life on the hospital ward was challenging. Long days were filled with unfamiliar routines and the constant presence of other patients, each with their own difficulties, from paranoia to hypomania.

The ward provided a safe environment where he could receive treatment and support, but it was also a place where he often felt isolated, frustrated, and uncertain about his future.

Some days passed quietly, with little to break the monotony, while others were more challenging as he wrestled with his thoughts and tried to make sense of what had happened. He gradually learned to accept the care offered by staff, although there were times when he longed for the familiarity of home and the freedom to make his own decisions.

Throughout the nine months of his medical incarceration, Patrick's hopes were often accompanied by periods of doubt.

He could not fully comprehend how long recovery might take, or what life would be like when he finally left hospital.

As he gathered his belongings to leave, Patrick knew that although he had made progress, his recovery was far from complete. His mother welcomed him home with open arms, determined to support his readjustment to life beyond hospital.

Being at home brought mixed emotions: relief at reuniting with family and returning to familiar surroundings, but also anxiety about reconnecting with the outside world.

While in hospital, Patrick had gained over forty kilograms. The prolonged inactivity and changes in eating habits had taken a heavy toll. Determined to help him regain his strength, his mother encouraged him to use a GP referral letter to obtain a reduced-price gym membership.

His grandfather accompanied him on frequent gym visits, offering quiet encouragement as Patrick began the arduous process of rebuilding his fitness.

At first, even the simplest exercises left him aching and exhausted.

The exercise bike and other machines presented serious challenges because of the considerable weight he had gained. But he was nothing if not determined and persistent.

The gym became a regular part of his routine, four times a week. He became more competent on the various machines, his stamina increased, and his progress spurred him on.

At home, his mother supported his efforts by preparing healthier meals, including grilled chicken, steamed vegetables, and fresh fruit. It all amounted to a change of habits and lifestyle that helped his body regain some of its former shape.

There came a time when he could look in the mirror with a sense of pride rather than embarrassment. His body was slimmer, his posture more upright, and his eyes clearer. The transformation was more than physical. For the first time in a long while, he felt a quiet sense of pride. He had faced something daunting and, little by little, had found the strength to persevere.

But improvements in his appearance were not the whole story. Patrick still struggled with concentration and frequently forgot instructions, or everyday tasks.

His mother understood that recovery was not as simple as losing weight or establishing a routine. She could see how far he had come, but she also recognised the difficulties he continued to face. One afternoon, she gently raised the subject of returning to work. Patrick fell silent before admitting he did not feel ready.

He explained that he wanted to get back to normal, but admitted he still struggled to concentrate and sometimes forgot things people had just told him. He expressed his fear of being unable to cope, at which point his mother reached across and took his hand.

She reassured him that he had no need to prove anything to anyone and accepted that he needed time. It might have been a reference to his running career when she offered the thought that “recovery isn’t a race.”

Her words afforded him some comfort, though they did not entirely erase his worries. He wanted to regain his independence and return to a life where he could support himself, contribute to something meaningful, and feel confident around other people. But the thought of returning to the workplace brought back memories he had spent so long trying to escape.

He reflected on his previous employment, remembering how isolated he had felt in his kitchen role. He recalled the pressure, the loneliness, and the times he had felt belittled. Looking back, he began to understand how deeply those experiences had affected his confidence and self-esteem.

For a long time, he had blamed himself for struggling to cope, believing he should have been stronger, or better equipped. He was now beginning to see that his difficulties had not arisen in isolation.

The environment around him, the treatment he had received, and the loneliness he had experienced had all played a part in undermining his sense of worth.

Patrick was content to concentrate on the things he could control. He maintained his exercise routine, tried to eat healthily, and worked towards a steady rhythm in his days.

Some mornings were easier than others. Old fears had a habit of creeping back, leading him to question whether he would ever feel mentally normal again. An antidote was to remind himself how far he had already come.

His mother remained a pillar of support, encouraging him, but not burdening him with unreasonable expectations. She celebrated his progress but never treated his setbacks as failures. Her patience helped him understand that he did not need to measure his recovery against anyone else's.

Patrick now began to look towards the future with a little less apprehension.

He could not say when he would be ready to work again, or what kind of work might eventually suit him. He understood that his mental health could not yet be described as sound.

One evening, as he sat with his mother, he found himself thinking aloud about what the future might hold. “Maybe one day, I'll go back to work,” he said quietly. “But for now, I'm just trying to be okay.” His mother looked at him, tears glistening in her eyes. She squeezed his hand gently. “And considering everything you've been through, being okay is more than enough for now.”

Patrick sat quietly, allowing her words to register. He was not the man he had been before his illness, and he did not yet know exactly who he would become. There were still fears to confront, confidence to rebuild, and parts of his life he hoped one day to reclaim.

But he was home and taking care of himself. He was learning to recognise his limits without seeing them as failures, and to accept help without feeling ashamed.

For the first time in a long while, he understood that he did not have to rebuild his entire life at once. He could take things one day at a time, finding his own pace and allowing himself the space he had so often denied himself.

The future remained uncertain, but a measure of contentment was within reach. That was plenty, for now.