

# Contemporaneous record of a Restorative Justice conference

Why me?

Location: Prison in the South East

Date: Spring 2012, commencing at 1pm

## Present:

Anne	–	burglary victim
Mike (Anne's husband)	–	burglary victim
Peter	–	burglary victim
Sue (Peter's wife)	–	burglary victim
Charles	–	burglary victim
Helen	–	burglary victim
Dan (Helen's husband)	–	burglary victim
Sam	–	offender

*... who burgled the homes of all those listed above apart from Charles, who owns a currently unoccupied property that Sam broke into.*

PC No. 1 – facilitator

PC No. 2 – facilitator

*A prison officer and a Why me? observer are also in the room.*

The harmed people are sitting in a semi circle with the two police facilitators at either side.

Sam is brought in by a prison officer and sits down facing them all.

**PC No. 2** – conducts brief introductions and explains that the meeting pertains to a string of burglaries that took place at xxxx during the period xxxx and xxxx. She reminds those present that the discussion must focus on what happened and not be about the character of the offender

or victims. She says that everyone in the room must respect confidentiality and respect others when they are speaking. She then asks Sam to explain what happened on xxxx when he burgled the home of Sue and Peter.

**Sam** – *(he addresses Sue and Peter)* It was mid morning. I came into town from the xxxx end. I can visualise your house. I came to the front of the house – there was a high hedge. There was visual screening. I noticed immediately the entrance to the back garden was insecure. There was a sturdy structure I could go over. I rang your doorbell and knocked. I like to remain anonymous. I don't like confrontation. I went down through the side door – it was really obvious it was isolated – noise can't penetrate through hedges. Also the door was open inside the house so it was obvious you weren't home. I used a sling shot to break the glass of the door – it's a method I used often. With hedges they absorb noise. I entered from the back, put my head round the sitting room door, went upstairs into the master bedroom. I t wasn't something I felt comfortable doing. I was something that really phased me – going into someone's sanctuary. I took some coins, membership cards and a locket. That locket destroyed me. *(Sue is looking visibly upset at this)*. My situation that day was so desperate and I was selfish at the same time. I took the littlest amount I could take because I needed somewhere to stay that night. I knew that locket was enough for that day and the next. I left your home. I wanted to give you it back *(the locket)* It affected me. It was a means to an end for me. I was a jewel thief since I was 21. What happened that day really drove it home, I went and sat on the xxxx opposite the xxxx for an hour and a half. I had the photo (from the locket) in my pocket. I was sitting in the hotel room with the photo. I would have given the photo back. I've spent my life being selfish. I used to look at that photo and one day the photo wasn't there. *(Sam breaks down in tears)*. Saying sorry to you doesn't seem enough. I don't expect to be forgiven. I used to think I had a photographic memory. I'm so sorry.

**PC No. 2** – I want to acknowledge that Sam said sorry. Sam – what were you thinking at the time?

**Sam** – My situation is so common – to be kicked out of prison with nothing. I'm not making excuses. I need to explain what was happening. I've been a thief since I was 21. I come from an honest family – they have all worked all their lives and still had no money. I made a conscious decision not to work. I'm xxxx years old. We never had phone in our house. I was a chef. Instead of working for a living, I decided to become a criminal. My father just died. I was so naïve. A friend put a huge amount of money on the table – asked me what I made in 60 hours a week *(of working)*. I became a criminal. I got on with it – never moaned about the sentences (I got). In 2008 something happened. I started looking at myself. I couldn't justify what I was doing as a criminal. I handed myself in to xxxx police. I confessed to 97 burglaries. I served my sentence. Probation then put me in a tent in a field. Six weeks on I kept telling myself there was something else I could do. My mind has been conditioned by doing burglaries. I've never had money worries. It's not personal for me – it's just business. But in 2008 it became personal. But I had nowhere to live in 2011 (when he was released from prison). It was killing me because I wanted to put it behind me. What happens to me happens all the time. I'm nothing special. We end up back inside. We just go round on a revolving wheel. On that day *(I burgled your house)* I was on auto-pilot. I needed a hotel room. I needed food. I'm so sorry.

**PC No. 2** – Who has been affected and who has been hurt or harmed?

**Sam** – I know everyone is affected.

**PC No. 2** – In what way have they been affected?

**Sam** – I know when you come home you're thinking who has been in my house when you're trying to sleep. You're thinking this item or that item has been handled.

**PC No. 2** – So talk about xxxx (*property belonging to Charles*).

**Sam** – It was the same day. I came over from xxxx. The previous night I left the B and B. I knew I needed money for that night. I got the bus at xxxx Street and I was looking for a residential area. It was quite a narrow end of the street. There was a high hedge, it was quite isolated visually. You can't see the front door. I realised there was no alarm box on the wall. I went through the gate, knocked on the door and realised I was out of view while I was at the door. Where your garage is located it's straight down, no fences, no hedges, but there was a tall hedge around the garden. At that point I still battled in my head about doing what I was doing. I didn't want to be doing it. It was my conscience. I'd already broken the bottom of the door to the patio. I'm so sorry about that Charles. With secluded gardens with high hedges there's very little chance of someone seeing. I had told myself I'd sleep in the park but there was a battle with my conscience – I needed to be off the street. So I left. It made me feel more desperate. I left xxxx at that point. I don't understand now how I had these thought processes. I saw things then from a criminal perspective. I could weigh up properties without a conscience. I burgled your property as being a potential solution to my problem. If the kitchen door had been open, I might have tried. It was a battle between my conscience and selfishness. I'm sorry Charles.

**PC No. 2** – Who has been affected and harmed?

**Sam** – My actions caused you and friends and neighbours and those in the background to be affected. If I could change it and take it away I really would. I deserved this.

**PC No. 2** – What happened on the xxxxth of xxxx in xxxx Road?

**Sam** – That was Anne and Mike?

*(PC No. 2 nods)*

**Sam** – The things I took from you ... I'd been staying in a B and B ... had to leave ... no money. By then things were beyond desperate. I read in the paper "Have you seen this man?" I don't know how I ended up in your street – it was just random. I sat down on the benches on the seafront, thinking how I could avoid doing it. It was mid afternoon. Your outer porch door was open. Your porch door..well – you don't have a good view from the property opposite. I went up to the door, rang the doorbell, no answer. Then I remember thinking, this is really dangerous as children are coming home from school at this time. It's not unknown for kids to have keys. It was getting close to the time that I couldn't get off the streets for that night. It was instinct. I broke the small window. I went straight up the stairs into what I realised was a secondary bedroom then I went to the master. I didn't give a lot of thought to who lived in the home – just needed to get in and out. I saw a gents watch on the dressing table. Thought that was enough for tonight but wanted things for tomorrow. I saw the jewelry box on the top shelf of the wardrobe. Anne – I'm so sorry for that. When I saw contents ... I'm so selfish, so sorry.

**Mike** – Can I ask?

**Sam** – Anything at all ...

**Mike** – You said you had the locket (*from Sue and Peter's burglary*) and felt remorse, but you'd gone on to do four more houses than ours ...

**Sam** – I held onto the photo inside. If I'd had money I wouldn't have burgled. It was relief and shame in that box. There was a lifetime's jewellery in there.

**Mike** – Forty year's worth. It's irreplaceable - it's the emotional attachment. Insurers can't replace it. They value it like a TV. We've lost an awful lot. The stuff that's missing would have gone to our granddaughter.

**Sam** – It was all taken to one particular place. I did tell the police where the stuff was. It was just total selfishness.

**PC No. 2** – Now xxxx Road (*Dan and Helen's house*).

**Sam** – I'm really sorry – I think it's really brave coming into prison for you – a foreign place to be, but I wish you could come in individually, so I could address each one. (*Sam addresses Dan and Helen*) Your situation was pretty much in the same vein. I needed fiancés. As with all these situations. Nothing about your property made it stand out – it was just my need for finances. You have a corner house with a high hedge. Your door is at the side which isolates the property. Your property is so isolated I did consider going through the front door. I raised the lock to see what tension was there. You have access to your garden. I went round to the back to the double glazed extension. The neighbour had the window open. I wandered round a lot that day. You had the high hedge ... I was pretty confident that using a sling shot that the noise would be cushioned by the hedge. I then went through the double glazing. The jewellery was old and I took it. I was flustered and left my sling shot on the bed. I realised it was not the sort of jewellery you see in shops. People make a fuss over things that are just property but they're more than that. I'm so sorry. Your jewellery was a means to an end for me. I feel I've tried a thousand times to find a way of saying sorry to thousands of victims I've left in my trail. I'm sorry (*Sam cries*).

**PC No. 2** – I want to acknowledge the apology .

**Sam** – It doesn't feel anything like enough.

**PC No. 2** – Sue, what happened?

**Sue** – We'd gone to a funeral. I got back and could immediately see something had happened. But then we couldn't understand it as the house was all as it was. I went upstairs. Our son's door was open and the laptop was still there...we thought (*if there was a break in*) people just took expensive things. Then in our room, everything was on the bed. All the jewelry. I phoned the police immediately. I phoned Peter. Later I realised that the locket which was a gift from my Grandma before she died (*had gone*). Real sentimental value. A gift from my Gran, but I have it back. The one thing of sentimental value I got back. The other stuff had no sentimental value. But what it meant for us was that if our son had been in, he wouldn't have heard you as

he'd have had his headphones on. You would have been confronted with him. It's a fear now for us, coming home...could he come back? I was in the lounge on my own and I felt not safe in my own home. I have to lie with my seven year old daughter to make her go to sleep every night. She's frightened. For us it's not property. It's the emotional impact, thinking someone's been in my bedroom. It's such an invasion – horrible thought. In my daughter's bedroom you took 50p from the money box. There's still glass around from the shattered door. It has a knock-on effect. Our insurance has gone up by £200. We couldn't get the glass repaired straight away because it was Petertmas. This is about us wanting to help you. We want you to be able to hear us, so you can then make the right choices.

**Sam** – (*upset*) This situation ... I've had so many names ... if you're wanted ... in prison you lose liberty ... I had liberty but no name ... I'm sorry I impacted on your lives. I'm sorry it's something that's still with you. I'm cursed with a memory that remembers detail. What you've said has had a big impact on me. I kidded myself I was free and easy and a decent person. My friends are honest and don't know what I do. It was me they came to talk to. I made a total mess of my life and messed up other peoples' lives. It's never going to right inside. I've been a Buddhist since I was seven. I thought attachments aren't healthy. If it's not freely given, it's not yours to take. I've never been called Sam for seven years – I used aliases. I won't be doing anything like this again. If your sone had been in, I wouldn't have harmed him – I'm not violent. I've stolen about three million pounds worth of jewellery since I was twenty one. I've given away two thirds of that. I don't know what motivated me. I didn't want to be some idiot pinching TVs and videos.

**PC No. 2** – What's been the hardest thing? (*to Sue*)

**Sue** – Not feeling safe in your own home and the impact on our seven year old. I know she's frightened. It's an emotional impact.

**PC No. 2** – Peter?

**Peter** – I got home at 4 or 4.30. It had been an emotional day at a funeral. I went in to supporting the family. You couldn't find out what had been touched and what had not. We were just sorting things out.

**PC No. 2** – What did you think?

**Peter** – Why us?

**PC No. 2** – Your thoughts since?

**Peter** – The police were surprised we were empathetic. We don't want this to be something you continue doing. We want you to do something with your life. You've wasted twenty years of your life. (*The impact on us is ...*) We have to stay with Grace (*their seven year old*) so we don't have so much time together as adults. You sound intelligent ...you've got to change.

**Sam** – I'm a persistent offender so you get added support from the police. Probation let me down badly. In prison it's not easy. I've got a degree in philosophy. All I have is my head, brain and my thoughts. Every one of you is in my head all the time. I've reached saturation point with the amount of victims. I'd rather lie down and say enough's enough.

**PC No. 2** – Charles?

**Charles** – I own the house with my brother – it was our inheritance from our mother. We were letting estate agents in. I knew burglary had happened. If my mother had still been alive she wouldn't have answered the door. It would have been a shock to her. Your modus operandi is not foolproof (*of making sure no one is home*). The only thing in the house was the furniture. All the valuables were taken out. It's been an annoyance. You've reduced our inheritance by £330 as that is our insurance excess. Nothing went missing but it has taken up time. You seem to want to stop.

**Sam** – Sorry. I'm grateful for what you've said.

**Charles** – I do hope your family can help.

**Sam** – My family are law abiding. These days my father would have gone to prison for abuse. My brothers and sisters were affected as well.

**PC No. 2** – Mike?

**Mike** – I came home early from work and I'm thankful that I did. I saw the inner doors were open – the house was in darkness. I realised there had been a break-in. I then thought, is someone still there? I looked around and found the top drawer open and the wardrobe open. I phoned the police. Then Anne came home at six. I explained and she saw what had happened and broke down. We've been angry ever since. I was angry because it's affected her so much. The stuff was so dear to her.

**Anne** – You took everything. Every bit that was worth anything that was passed down from family, friends, from grandmothers I never knew. Nothing left. When I saw that box had gone I was just so very very sad to think of what I'd lost. You've taken memories away. I haven't got them. I brought our granddaughter's photo (*shows photo*). She won't have anything. We lost thirty items, and all I've got back is three small rings. Where is it all? I had to go round jewellers 'windows looking for my own property. I'm just sad now. We're having so many problems with insurance – they want to give us vouchers, but these things are not like TVs or DVDs. We've had to have a new front door and new windows because of you.

**Sam** – I came in intent on being open and truthful. Once jewellers pay out for items they don't like handing them over to police then they are out of pocket. The reason I chose that shop is that it takes the gold to the bullion dealer once a month. I thought that stuff would still be in the shop (*when the police came*). I'm sorry I've done what I've done. The photo of the baby (*Anne & Mike's granddaughter*) ... I deserve that.

**Anne** - (*Very forceful*) She's got nothing. You do deserve it.

**Sam** – I'm willing and able to compile a list. I'll write a letter. I'm so sorry for your loss and the damage.

**PC No. 2** - Dan?

**Dan** – I came back, opened the porch door – twiddled around the lock. The gate was open, the side panel completely shattered. I realised we'd been burgled. I didn't think you'd be there. I went to the main bedroom. Were you disturbed? My wife came back. The police came. It looked like you'd been disturbed.

**Sam** – It was because it was the type of jewellery it was.

**Dan** – I was angry. There were a mixture of thoughts.

**Sam** – It's despicable.

**Dan** – What comes out of this is that you're sorry for what you've done. Maybe you'll lead a different sort of life. There might be some way you can put back into society.

**PC No. 2** – How has it affected you and others?

**Dan** – You wonder when you go out what it'll be like when you return. It made me realise that home isn't as safe as you thought it was. Our elderly neighbours worried about us going on holiday. Lots of people are affected.

**PC No. 2** – What's been the worst, the hardest thing?

**Dan** – The thought we might have been targeted. But I realise we've all been unlucky victims. I hope some good comes in that you have a serious intention to change your life.

**Sam** – I apologise sincerely for what you experienced.

**PC No. 2** – Helen?

**Helen** – My husband phoned. Said we'd been broken into. I was really concerned. I was thinking, why our property? It's not the value of the things. We had to leave on holiday then worried about it. We thought we'd been targeted. Why did you come to ours?

**Sam** – It wasn't the situation that I picked your house. I hadn't convinced myself I was going to do it. A big hedge does not help security. It's ridiculously tall – it undermines security. I'm saying this so you can take measures. I was totally selfish.

**Helen** – There were rings left on the floor, the catapult was left on the bed. Why?

**Sam** – I didn't want to be doing it. I had no business being peoples' houses. In your house it was a struggle to do what I was doing.

**Helen** – But you still went on committing crimes...?

**Sam** - My answer to being homeless and having no money was to do this, but I didn't want to. It was the least I could steel.

**Helen** – So you were guilty?

**Sam** – Yes. Since 2008 I reached saturation point. I'm never going to be doing this again.

**Helen** – It is closure for us, but this is what we hope you need to give something back to society.

**PC No. 2** – *(to Sam)* You've heard how Peter and Sue, Charles, Anne and Mike, Dan and Helen have been affected, harmed and hurt by what you did.

**Sam** – Yes, they've said it.

**PC No. 2** – Do you see this?

**Sam** – One hundred per cent.

**PC No. 2** – What can you do to repair the harm?

**Sam** – I work in the engineering department. *(in prison)*. I designed a double glazing unit with a security feature. It's going to be submitted to an outside company depending on contracts coming into prison. I want to give some money for this to victim support. I've been asked by two police forces to give advice and speak about the mentality of burglars and I've agreed to do this. I'll do anything I can. I can't apologise enough – especially to Anne.

**Ian** – *(addressing all the victims)* What would you like to see out of today's meeting?

**Sue** – To feel that Sam is helped to have a different life. I'm going to think about you again. I want to know you're doing OK – taking support up.

**Sam** – Thank you. I will.

**Peter** – I feel exactly the same.

**Charles** – It would be nice for everyone to know what happens to you in the future.

**Anne** – Every one of us is a victim. I hope that this meeting will be positive you. This is your second chance. Don't let it go.

**Sam** – You have all been forgiving and easy on me. You are all decent people. You've got values I can only aspire to have in the future.

**Mike** – I was very open minded. The thing that must come out of this is that you must help yourself. The system has let you down. I seem to be the angriest person, but I'm going away not as angry. I hope you can grasp this second chance. I hope you stop doing it. Stop stealing. I wish you well.

**Sam** – I put in a lot of work. I was let down by the system. There is an opportunity for me to be better. If this is your anger *(to Mike)*, you're chilled out. Thanks for being easy on me.

**Dan** – It's wrong for you to think you've been given an easy time. You seem remorseful. You seem to have enough about you to do more. You need determination and support and luck.

**Sam** – I do have aspirations. I've never had a key to my own front door since I left home. I need that. I hope you accept this is from the heart. It's nice to feel I'm not just here and despised.

**Dan** – What’s happened has happened, but you can make something of yourself.

**Sam** – (to Anne) I’m never going to forget that photo, Anne. I want to be a better person.

**Helen** – I think you truly are remorseful. I hope you do get the support.

**Sam** – I didn’t start burgling till I was twenty one. I got a twelve month sentence in 1984. I was going to stop, but my friend asked me to help him get money and I did. Being in prison has not changed me, but I’ve changed myself in what I want to be.

**Helen** – I hope you can stop others. Give something back.

**Ian** – (to Sam) What have you learned from this meeting?

**Sam** – since 2008 I fantasised that I could be a normal person, but life isn’t like that for everyone. I sort of lost hope in society about decency. I saw a system that was geared up to make me fail. I thought no one was interested, but then I realised there are decent people. I felt more empathy with you people than with anyone since I was twenty one. I didn’t feel part of society. You’re decent people and I’m sorry. This has been overwhelming and there’s been a sense of guilt too.

**Peter** – You are very brave and genuine. You’ve got a lot to offer. You can’t move on if you keep beating yourself up. I forgive you. You should make something of your life. Guilt is a horrendous thing. You’ve said sorry now move ahead. You’re clearly a clever bloke. Lots of prisoners would have shied away.

**Mike** – I agree entirely. You must always remember; ‘I was this in the past, now I’m this...’

**Peter** – You can’t undo what you’ve done.

**Anne** – You have choices. Make the right ones.

**Charles** – Your strongest asset is your memory. Use this.

**Dan** – Yes, and you’ve got a good way of expressing yourself.

**Helen** – And maybe you’ll remember all our faces.

**Sam** – I’m very grateful. I’m still three years away from testing the waters.

**Ian** – (To everyone) Any more questions?

**Peter** – What did you do with my coins?

**Sam** – Took them to a shop on xxxx Street in xxxx (gives details)

**Ian** – Thanks everyone.

Sam is taken from the room by the prison officer. The others chat for a while and everyone leaves the prison together.

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