

Coma survivor tunes into music to get back on track

When a former musician went into a coma in 2017, his family were told to expect the worst. Two years later, he is slowly piecing his life back together and releasing his old tracks as he remembers them.

David Naylor has a very unique story to tell. At least, that's the message I see in my inbox from his mentor at Building Better Opportunities, a programme dedicated to tackling key issues in communities across the UK.

I've been warned that the 49-year-old's memory can be patchy at the best of times – a devastating result of the serious medical problems he faced in 2017 which left him in a coma for weeks.

David doesn't remember any of this, but he's been told by his sister that his family were expecting to hear the worst after he contracted sepsis alongside colitis and meningitis.

He once loved the buzz of London, owning his own music business there and working at the Priory Hospital in Roehampton for seven years.

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Now, he's left everything about his old self behind, abandoning songwriting, selling everything he owns – bar a single pair of shoes, some black trousers and five blue shirts – and moving to the Chells area of Stevenage.

When I ask him why he felt the need to sell everything, David's reply is simple: "It's the past."

Everything is said with a smile – David's ethos is always to approach things as positive as possible.

For the last year, he's been working with the music studio 'The Practice Roomz', who are helping him to chase his dream of releasing his own music album – something David is convinced he never would have the confidence to do before his coma.

The one snag is that he can't remember the songs he once wrote, so day by day he is slowly putting the jigsaw back together again, and learning about old friends and habits that he can

barely believe were so central to his life.

David has adopted a new persona in the wake of his near-death experience, and there's no looking back now. He says this often leaves him feeling "like an alien".

His life has become a ritual, eating the same bowl of cornflakes, taking medication at the same time and reading the same book day in day out.

He uses old e-mails, forgotten lyrics and his trusty journal, which is covered in colourful scribbles, to keep his mind straight.

Sounds mad? "That's because most of it is," David insists.

"I was totally lost when I came out of hospital, with little to no memory of life beforehand.

"I'm still trying to figure it all out," he says with a wry smile.

The support David has received from Headway – a charity specialising in brain injuries – and Building Better Opportunities has been helping him "figure it out".

He credits them with helping him find purpose after his close shave with death and giving him



David Naylor has turned to music after suffering memory loss and being in a coma

Picture: COURTESY OF DAVID NAYLOR

the confidence needed to chase his dream.

"As the music keeps coming back into my head, it's like a jigsaw and I'm working out if these are two separate puzzles or not.

"It's terrifying, but so exciting at the same time. It's a chance to start again.

"People want to get their memory back, get their old life back. Now I'm happy to let that go and do what I think I was too scared to do before."

Although David has turned his back on songwriting, he's determined to finish this album – a symbol of accepting who you are that he wants to share with others.

David plans to work with Pete Maher, a music mastering engineer who has produced songs from U2, Katy Perry and The Rolling Stones, to help him release

an album that will have been constructed entirely from what he thought were long-forgotten memories.

Rather than dreaming of number one hits, David wants to make a difference – even if it's just in one person's life.

He admits there is one thing he wants more than anything, to live on a secluded beach with his instruments and the waves. A work trip to California inspired one of the songs he has just finished mixing, Santa Monica.

Excitedly, he pulls out his laptop to show me his dream home, a single, minimalist room overlooking a perfectly white beach with just enough space for a drum kit and a single pair of shoes.

To follow the progress of David's album, visit onelastpoem.com.

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