

Is who you are what you do?

James had been doing the same job for a number of years. He liked his job. But times were changing and retirement was approaching. James felt anxious, found it difficult to sleep, wasn't enjoying life.

Mary's husband worked long hours in the city and often travelled abroad. To begin with Mary had found this difficult, but over the years she had made a life for herself, doing her own thing with her own friends. This worked for them. She enjoyed her life. Then her husband took a redundancy package and was home – every day. Mary began to feel trapped. She began to feel anxious and stressed. Although she loved her husband, she no longer enjoyed her life.

So often we equate who we are with what we do. 'I am a banker'. 'I am a social worker'. 'I am this person with a life I've created for myself'. Then the job changes, or something in our life shifts – and we lose our identity. We don't know who we are any more.

Yet – we are all individuals with skills, talents, passions and values that are part of us. Not tied to any job or way of life. Intrinsically us.

And it's not the way of life or what we do that is important; it is the ingredients that matter to us. Perhaps it is the freedom, or the challenge, or the sharing, or the camaraderie.

Once we have identified what these are – for us – then we can build them into our life again.

James recognised that what he valued was the sense of achievement when he got things done, and the enjoyment of sharing this with colleagues. He got a part time job with a charitable organisation where he could have these in spades. He has never looked back.

Mary valued the space and independence that having her own life within the marriage gave her. She discussed this with her husband and together they worked out how their marriage could accommodate this. She now enjoys her life again.

The seeds of our future happiness are all there in our past. It's just knowing how to recognise them and nurture them that is important.