



#depressionhurts

My Story— John

My name is John and I'm a 45-yr old husband and father, those close to me say I look a lot younger.

I was about eighteen years younger when I walked into the A&E department of Glasgow Royal Infirmary and said "Help me, I'm a manic depressive" but it was only another eight years before I finally received the medical help I needed and then in a different country.

I'm a Psychology graduate and this background gave me a slight advantage in introspecting my condition but let me tell you, reading about it in a book, or hearing it in a lecture is no substitute for the hellish reality of experience. I was so inappropriately medicated at times before the treatment that saved and restored me, that I had lost my original clarity and no longer knew, or claimed to know, what the hell was wrong with me any more.

One such time I was on Thioridazine, a minor tranquilliser, just before it was withdrawn from the Irish market on grounds of cardiac safety. At the same time I was in the local mountain rescue, high as a kite and rattling with these dangerous tranquillisers, running around like Rambo up 2,000ft mountains. In that unhinged state I turned up, practicing pursuit driving in a Ford Fiesta, four hours early for a training exercise, climbed a technical slope on my own with no radio, no phone and no backup and raced over slippery rocks to hide in a cave to surprise the rest of the team. It certainly did that!.

Looking back now, I can recognise manic episodes in myself as early as 21 years of age. I lost a deposit for a student flat by putting my own head through the wall having an argument in bed with my girlfriend. It's been with me most of my life and it's with me even as I write this.

What's the difference? These days, it's tamed.

No one has the God-given right to feel absolutely super every second of every day. We all have down days, weeks, or longer but it all goes pear shaped when moods cross over from being just moods into physically, verbally, or emotionally destructive behaviour and others suffer as a direct result. Sadly, it's usually those closest to us, our very worst vitriol is never delivered to a stranger's ear.

So one night in early 2001, after wondering what my hand would look like if I



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poured boiling water from the kettle on it instead of into my dear lady wife's hot water bottle as was the original intention, I stopped short of following through and voluntarily admitted myself to Psychiatric hospital (it was the days when you could still do that). So I found myself was in the right place for me at the time because I was finding it very difficult to function anywhere else.

I agreed to go on lithium. I spent St. Valentine's day in the ward, hastily arranging with another patient who had more privileges to run a message for me to the shop for a card for my wife. She brought the tax return in to me to fill out but she brought a Valentine's card as well.

When I got out, I remember I sat waiting for her in our local health centre car park while she had some health appointment of her own to go to. When she came out, she told me she was pregnant with our first.

Our second child was born five years later and by that time my own issues had taken a back seat. The kids have helped me pull through these years because you can't be a 'basket-case' all the time in front of them but by the same token you need to let it out somewhere else.

What's helped me? Firstly, lithium. Not right for everyone, pretty good for me. I've been on it ten years now and while there are some side effects like a lot of dental work and shopping trips for ever-increasing shirt sizes, I almost definitely wouldn't be alive without it and, even if I were, would be shaking my fist at an imaginary adversary under a motorway bridge somewhere, with only the stars for a roof.

I've worked with Glasgow homeless bringing them a warm snack and some banter and the number of them with untreated mental health problems stacked on top of addiction, is staggering. Actually I tend to see it the other way around, where mental health issues come first with any addiction just a misguided attempt at self-medication and in the circumstances, totally logical, because neither the booze nor the heroin are as frightening as the demons of depression, from whom they provide fleeting respite.

A couple of years ago, my depression resurfaced, this was all due to another family trauma nothing to do with me personally but everything to do with us



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as all the family were affected. There were mountains of pressures to endure.

I was fortunate to have a counsellor recommended by a very good friend and fortunate that money wasn't an object to a course of therapy sessions.

He went deeper than the drugs had, patiently reconnecting me to my very early sources of anger in my life and joining the mental dots of my existence. After I signed off from him I relapsed further. I don't even want to go there in this piece but it wasn't good and it didn't make sense.

I hadn't a care in the world. Beautiful wife, beautiful kids, beautiful house, not a money worry even on the brink of a huge recession. What was missing? Why was I so angry?

Well after a while I saw that while my therapist had given me the tools I still had to use them myself and do the work.

So I resisted the urge to run back to him snivelling and started the long hard process of consolidating all I had nodded and said yes to.

I call it the third stage of my recovery, the first being lithium, the second being counselling and the third being **my action**—doing what I learnt in the counselling which the lithium made me shut up long enough to hear.

Is there a further stage? Yes. If, that is, anyone is helped by reading this.

Then it stops being MY recovery and starts being YOURS. Good luck. Depression is certainly not dull.!