

My 'Colourful' Life With Schizophrenia

My name is David Holloway, I am a 32 year old Anglo-Indian, who first became ill at 16 after I was exposed to solvents on a school work experience job, in a laboratory where there was no air-ventilation. I suffered a complete mental breakdown after 6 weeks there, and was admitted into hospital and diagnosed with clinical depression. I also began to thought block, where I would suppress every thought I was having because I feared that I was dying, and I believed that I could hear other people's thoughts. I suffered brain damage and this resulted in a type of retardation that seemed to rob me of my higher level thinking. I've watched programs on television with young adults who have had brain damage after an accident, such as falling from a height and hitting their head, and my life was exactly like that for 3 years until college. At college I regained my mental power of problem solving, but I was not fully able to understand fairly complex concepts such as the potential difference between an anode and a cathode inside a battery. My course in engineering was very hard work, but I successfully gained my Btec national diploma in engineering.

My schizophrenia seemed to begin after my father died in 1999, and was not properly diagnosed until I was 22. I was a proficient child in education, excellent at science, and a child prodigy in sports. I was voted form representative aged 11 and sports captain for my school two times. I had many loyal and inspirational friends at school, but even as a child I had paranoid beliefs about what my friends and family may have said behind my back when I wasn't there. I was insecure about my looks although I was a handsome child, and I was abnormally tall for a boy. I was taller than most of my teachers aged 12. I passed 10 GCSE's with very good grades when I was very unwell. My father was a kind and gentle man, and my mother is a loving and loyal companion. When my father died I had no way to cope but things changed for the better after University and I established a new set of friends. I had lost my first set from school after my breakdown. I then went on to achieve an undergraduate degree (BSc) with honours in sport and physical education, at the University of Bedfordshire.

Poetry

Poetry is what I use to write when I am very unwell, and I have written a book of poems entitled the 'Colours of Schizophrenia'. I have adored poetry since I was 12 or 13 after my English teacher, Mrs Wright was very impressed with one of my poems about the 'future'. She displayed it on the classroom wall. Poetry is what makes my soul 'dance' and it helps me to escape this illness and take on a new life where I can hear the 'whispers' of her voice. I write to 'express' myself; expression is a term used to describe what some people believe is a human requirement of living, it is defined as allowing an individual to control to some extent their emotions and emotional state. Poems say what is deep inside my subconscious, things that I may or may not be aware of that have hurt me or helped me in life. I sometimes don't know what I am writing or what it is exactly I want to say. This may be because I don't want to acknowledge some of the pain in my life. But lately my poetry has become more consciously created and organised. One of my poems speaks about my delusions.

Mystery

Mystery of 'dreams'?
Hidden code resembles life,
Lies sedate the mind,

This poem is a Senryu, which is similar to a Japanese Haiku with 17 syllables (5,7,5) but it is solely concerned with humans, as opposed to nature. Mine alludes to the essence of my illness as a 'dream,' state, where the real world, 'reality' seems to be hidden in code or cipher, and my delusions appear as lies that slow my life down.

Theory

There is a set of ideas that my brother and I have discussed and came up with in a conversation one day. I stated that the damaged areas of the brain like in the frontal lobes and the

hippocampus, may be compensating for their loss of brain function elsewhere. This may have had the effect of merging the subconscious state of mind into the conscious mind, creating a type of 'waking dream' world. This theory although very simple explains why reality seems distorted and symbolic in nature. For example a person in a 'dream state' may see a cloaked man in 'red' and perceive him as a 'demon' who exists in the real world. This idea may never be realised in an ordinary person, but if they were influenced by the symbolic gestures of schizophrenia; the dream world would still be partly be connected to the abstract imagery of the conscious mind. This compensated loss may then take the place of the brain's executive function. This theory may only apply to paranoid schizophrenia. My experience with other people like me is that they make connections to everything and use basic psychology such as body language and facial cues, to read what is really going, as if there is always another secret motive behind everything. But these often 'wild' connections lead to ironically disconnected thinking and unhealthy relationships.

Delusions

I suffer with a very persistent delusion which is that presenters on the television can see me. I know it's not possible, and I've had some success with letting go of it. It's not logical to believe in this delusion, but that is why I know I am still unwell, and not completely recovered. I have a blogging website where I have helped people to create a 'false perceptions' diary. This is a list of delusions, that entail a description of a delusion and whether this delusion can be removed by the psyche through a similar method of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). It's hard to find answers to life but through the laws of science not God, one can unravel the mysteries of mental illness. Not that I don't believe in God, but the nature of right and wrong, is maybe too restrictive in religion, but science may have the power to enlighten minds through the use of peer reviewed empirical research. I am a Christian who believes in the power of prayer and the Lord Jesus, and God helps me with my delusions because I don't believe he is responsible for them. The start of a poem about my battle with my 'inner voice within' and is entitled 'Subconscious'. Its about my brain, and how my thoughts hinder my view of human 'reality'.

Human 'madness'
of possibility,
'waves' of power
and frequency.
Release me from
the indignations of
my past.
Take me through
the 'looking-glass'.

Love

People with schizophrenia often dream of love and romance, but they find it very hard to meet people. Many of us become lonely and unable to experience what most people take for granted. This leaves most of us with little hope of discovering what 'human nature' is all about and why its so important to the world. When this loss is compounded by major rifts within the families of schizophrenia sufferers; then the idea of true love can turn into an combination of bitterness, and resentment. It did for me but I was lucky enough to find it. Love consists of knowing that somebody is there for us no matter what. It's hidden away like a 'secret garden', and its always there if we seek it, with honesty. My father and my mother have taught me why we should hang on to to love and fight for it. People do amazing things for love. My mother had to put up with me, she is a mental health nurse now and my brother started to study schizophrenia at University in psychology of all things, which is an amazing turn of events, and in many ways these two amazing family members are the only reason I am able to write these words today. My fiancée is a beautiful woman nine years my junior who I met at University and we lead a healthy and normal life together in every way.

Drugs

I don't believe in using drugs. I think this has helped me to fight my schizophrenia. I know of many mentally ill people, who have taken cannabis. I've seen their mental health deteriorate, and some people have even taken their own lives after heavily advocating this so called 'recreational drug' to me. I may be lucky to have had a father who was a doctor, and a mother who is a nurse because they warned me many times not to take drugs. I was growing up in the 90's where ecstasy and cannabis seemed to be everywhere. The only time I fell victim to cannabis was at University, and it appeared to make me extremely paranoid. I know the idea of 'easing' the mind, and getting rid of 'the pain' can seem like a good choice, but in my own opinion it's often a path which leads to more dangerous levels of abuse such as harder drugs, and less controlled ways to enjoy oneself such as sharing needles. I also do not drink alcohol as much as I used to and my mood has increased ten fold.

Schizophrenia may be helped with good diet in my opinion. My diet consists of lots of fruit and carbohydrates such as pasta and bread. I eat a lot of vegetables although may be not as much as I should. I try not to drink too much carbonated drinks, and I drink plenty of water but not too much tap water. I discern that Olanzapine has imperatively been the major factor in my recovery. Research has implicated that Olanzapine may reduce the degenerative illness in the brain in certain brain areas, and may even aid neurogenesis in other parts. My weight gain on this drug has been controlled by using my knowledge of physiology from University.

Philosophy

My philosophy in life has often taken an esoteric viewpoint. This means the spiritual life inside the soul. And the opposite law is called the exoteric, or the divine identity outside the self such as the 'theory of knowledge'. Fear and paranoia are symptoms that all people suffer with at some point, but people who spend too much of their lives, whether by choice or illness, looking too deeply into their souls may feel unhappy. Most people with schizophrenia that I know are locked inside a life of fear, and shock and resentment. In the pursuit of a career I have managed to empower myself by writing a blog on the Internet about schizophrenia and poetry, writing books, and web designing. My slogan is 'helping minds by creating unity'. This has given me financial perspectives and has managed to control my stress levels. It's easier to gain respect from other classes by having a positive career outlook.

Hope

With most of the world in recession there are billions of pounds worth of cuts to be delivered, however in the UK the coalition government must try to help some disabled people back into work; but to force them back would surely result in a massive failure for society. These people especially those with schizophrenia have little hope of living a normal quality of life, and should be congratulated not looked down upon. They are some of the most vulnerable people who need care and support, and any government who hurts them is cowardly. Big cuts in the UK will lead to untold misery for schizophrenia sufferers unless they are properly taken care of and looked after. People do recover, but those on the 'edge' of society need to be supported, for they are in my opinion the most misunderstood people in the world. There has to be a level at which people can admire people with schizophrenia and the success of the anti-psychotic Zyprexa (Olanzapine) by Eli Lilly is one of those scientific breakthroughs, which gives us all hope. It has affected my recovery so much that I have got back enough of my past life to be satisfied with being 'normal'. And now I can look with hindsight on what a journey it has been, to have lived through such tough times. In all it has taken over ten years to attain this milestone in my life. I can now say with my hand on heart that its been the toughest thing I've even done, but I learned so much, and been through a black hole of 'nothingness'. I hope that I can continue to recover, and with these new found wings I can learn to fly, and move on.

Perceptions

I pray that the perception of schizophrenia can be altered to that of a renewed awareness which evokes more notions of love, peace and harmony. Instead of the negative crime films in Hollywood

and those crude depictions on television. My poetry book is called the 'Colours of Schizophrenia' and it's about altering what society thinks people with schizophrenia believe in, and aspire to. I hope that society will be encouraged to see that the 'human spirit' encompasses every human and that this illness we have named schizophrenia, has still to be understood, so lets not stigmatise any human soul.

David Holloway (BSc)

Editors' note. We have decided to leave this paper exactly as it was submitted because to do otherwise seemed inappropriate to us. The author has given us full permission to publish his name; we are grateful to him both for the article and for his permission.

GP comment

What have I learned from this paper?

This is a very moving account from a highly articulate individual with schizophrenia. I hope it will dispel some of the negative concepts about people with schizophrenia by demonstrating that the condition can occur in wonderfully sensitive, creative and caring individuals.

Tom Inskip, GP
Bedford.