

WARTS AND ALMOST ALL

Dean Charlton

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Written by Dean Charlton

This book is dedicated to my mam, dad and lovely Brenda.



Introduction

My name is Dean Charlton (née Riches) and at the time of writing I am 61 years of age. My parents were originally June and Malcolm Riches, but because my father cheated on my mother, she kicked him out when I was one. I was born on Easter Sunday, in a town called Castleford, in the north of England, on the 29/03/64.

Bravely, my mother who was working hard at Bellamy's sweet factory, bought a terraced house for me and her in Armitage Street, Castleford. At first, my grandma Vera looked after me and my cousin Stephen but it became too much for her, and consequently, I started nursery young as my mother had managed to get me out of nappies by nine months of age. She then met up again with my stepdad

Melvyn (I will refer to him as dad from now on) and he adopted me when I was four and my name became Dean Charlton instead of Dean Malcolm Riches.

Perceptively, my dad realised that the fumes from the local chemical factory were irritating my weak chest, and moved us to the village of his birth nearby called Kippax, which is about 3½ miles from Castleford and 8 miles from Leeds. I spent the rest of my formative years in Kippax and my immediate family still live there.

Interestingly, when my mam and dad got married, they started married life with only £5 which was the result of a whip-round at the Angel pub, Allerton Bywater, where they held their wedding reception. They got a mortgage (which they worked hard to pay off early) and bought their house in Kippax from an elderly couple called Mr and Mrs Greaney who became their friendly and generous next-door neighbours. They even allowed us to use their caravan at the coast on occasions, and always brought us gifts when they had been away themselves. In addition, when they died, they left my parents £50 each to spend as they wished, which was quite a lot of money back then.

So, that was the start of my life...

- Now a bit about why I am writing this book. The main reason is I think I have had an interesting life that someone else might like to read about, and also, I thought it might teach me something about the life I've led so far, and illuminate some of the mental

health conditions that are out there for people who may still be ignorant about them. I also thought it might serve to advertise my magazine From The Horse's Mouth (www.fromthehorsesmouth.org.uk) which is growing daily as we speak.

The magazine itself is open to anyone who expresses themselves in a non-sexist, non-homophobic and non-racist way and was intended as a platform for myself and for other people who are often left voiceless.

This book is called Warts and Almost All as I wanted to produce an honest piece of work without revealing all of the skeletons in my cupboard. But I can honestly say that I have never slept with a skeleton in a cupboard. I have decided to use people's real name in the book if I have something positive to say about them, and to change the names of people indicated by * who have done me a disservice or even violently assaulted me.

As I write, starting this book, I am sat early in the morning in Costa Café in Halifax, England, because I find it is a good place to work while it is quiet, and I can also enjoy some drinks and a couple of slices of brown toast, at the same time. It is also convenient for me as I only live a few minutes from the town centre. I moved to Halifax in 2007 and the place has provided me with a better life and the local people have been good to me and my friend Brenda.

My Mother (June)

My mam has been an extremely good mother who has worked hard with my dad to provide for me and my brother David. Even today, she tries to help me by working on her column June's World in my magazine, giving me good advice, and also by giving me bits of money. She has been an excellent wife to my dad and always been loyal to him. They have worked hard as a team to bring us up well and we were never short of anything.

She has told me how difficult it was growing up with a drunken father, and this is probably why she and my dad were dismayed when I was often drunk, when I was younger and often acted like a violent fool (exaggerated by being mentally ill and by being on lots of medication).

My mam was born in February 1938. She is kind, very hard-working and generous. My mam has never let me down and has followed me loyally around various places, even buying me wallpaper to decorate my flat in Featherstone. She used to buy me fish and chips when I was almost destitute in Featherstone. When she was young, she tells me she was a sought-after woman, enjoyed bopping, and was rather good at it!

My Dad (Melvyn)

My dad has always tried his best to bring up me and my brother David as well as he could. He has been a great provider, but I was a difficult child to bring up, and as a result, we didn't always see eye-to-eye when I was much younger.

He was also born in 1938, and is a very talented man: artist, photographer, electrician, DIY expert, barber and many other things. He has also designed, made and sold his own ceiling roses and coving.

My dad followed me all over, with my mother, when I played football and he also stressed how it was important to do well at school. He has helped me out financially when I have been in trouble e.g. paid off my student overdraft and a large phone bill that I stupidly ran up when I lived in Featherstone.

All-in-all my dad has been an excellent role model to me and my brother.

My Brother (David)

David is 5 years younger than me and is my mam and dad's son. So, he is my half-brother. He is a very competitive person and was a good sportsman when he was younger, especially at football and rugby league, until he got injured. He still keeps himself very fit. He has done a lot of jobs well, and looked after his family - with help from his wife Kerry.

I think it's true that I have got on with him better as we have got older; I don't think (like many people) that he understood my earlier behaviour because of my undiagnosed bipolar OCD, and drunkenness, but he did go with me on the first day, of my first stay, in a mental hospital which was called Stanley Royds, and was in Wakefield, England. In addition, he bothered to sell me advertising space for the magazine, in its first incarnation, when I was being treated for a cancer called Hodgkins Disease, in Cookridge Hospital, Lawnswood, Leeds.

David has always been a good father and now is a good grandfather.

* I think I have/had a half-sister called Tracey, in Castleford, from my father and his second wife. But I have never met her and have never really felt inclined to trace her.



Brenda Condoll

Brenda is a very important person in my life. She is not blood-related but after over 29 years of loyal friendship she is like family to me. Brenda comes from St. Kitts and Nevis (Nevis) in the Caribbean. She is 74 and came to England to be with her mother when she was 15. She was initially brought up by her grandmother Mamma Lucille in Nevis and was the oldest of nine girls. She stayed loyal to her grandmother until after her death; she visited her grandmother before her death and then to lay some flowers on her grave on a second visit to her island. Brenda always sent money home to her grandmother. And she still sends money, when she can, home for her family there to have 'treats'.

Brenda has spent almost her entire life in Leeds, England, and used to do clerical work in offices. Unfortunately, she became ill and was diagnosed with Schizophrenia and spent time on a psychiatric ward in Leeds. She has other ailments like other women her age, but now functions alright with medication, and if we avoid her getting too stressed.

Happily, St Annes Housing Association, in Leeds, gave Brenda, and myself, a good home for many years and we are both grateful to them. I actually met Brenda when I was given a room in a group home in Harehills by St. Annes, when I was technically homeless in High Royds Hospital, at Lawnswood, in Leeds. We got on well together straight away.

Besides my parents, no one has helped me as much as Brenda and she was the only friend I had after my so-called friends deserted me, in 1996 – I wrote to all my ‘friends’ when I came out of the psychiatric hospital and no one even replied. She even waited for me in my rented flat for 19 days alone, to come home from hospital, when I had my heart attack, on the first of February 2024. Happily, she moved in with me in early 2025, so, that I can hopefully take care of her as she gets older and because I get on with her so well.

Brenda is: lovely, friendly, loyal, kind, beautiful, helpful, and a very popular woman.

Her Christian faith is very important to her and gives her great strength to carry on, although she doesn’t ram it down anyone’s throat. She gets on with things her way.

Brenda has been my platonic companion for over 29 years and together we have travelled to the following places: Nevis (twice), Malta, Spain, Gibraltar, Majorca, Tenerife, Torremolinos (twice) Belgium, Holland, Poland (including Auschwitz) Portugal, New York and many places in England. Brenda doesn’t always talk much but I would not swap her for anyone on the planet. We can’t travel, at the moment, abroad as the insurance for us is far too high.



Ages five to eleven

When I four or five, I went to Kippax North School, near Leeds. It was only a short walk from my home, and, apparently, I used to angrily chase other children down past our house at the end of the day when I was very young. I remember doing okay at school and particularly enjoying playtime when I could play football with my friends in the playground (some years later, I went to watch my nephew Jake at his sports day, and the school buildings seemed so tiny) using a netball post and a coat as the goal posts. I took this very seriously and one day the headmaster Mr Morris walked partly home with me, and told me I could make it as a footballer if I remained dedicated. That did not prove true.

I really enjoyed playing against other primary schools and had a lot of success, scoring many, many goals as the centre forward. My friend Clive Townsley nicknamed me 'Channon' after the international player Mick Channon.

Deborah Sykes was top academic dog in my year, as was David Clayson in the year above, who went on to study at Cambridge University and did well for himself and his family. I think David he ended up living down the South of England and I think Deborah chose to start quite a big family.

There was also a bully called Peter Drake* who everyone was scared of. I remember there was supposed to be a big fight 'down the avenue' between him and Sean Coates* but even though the latter was a year older, he broke down in tears with all the emotion involved and the fight was called off, with the crowd baying for blood. Drake* was then the new cock of the school. It all sounds so ridiculous now.

I was however in awe of a small lad called Tony Wright who was, one day, bullied by Drake* in the boy's toilets at Kippax North. He had no chance against him, but didn't back down at all. I saw Tony some years ago working on a bus checking tickets in Leeds and told him exactly this, and how I had admired him all those years ago. His attitude was that you don't back down to bullies, whatever the cost.

One teacher I remember from this time was a young woman called Mrs Trousdale who was very helpful to me. When I was eighteen, she was ironically, one of the customers from whom I collected milk money. The apparent, quick passage of time freaked her out a bit!

This part of my life was dominated by school (but I loved the long school holidays) and playing and following Leeds United, and England, on the telly. Like a lot of the kids in the area, I dreamt of emulating the great Leeds's players and was totally devastated when the team lost. I remember my brother grassing me up for kicking my dad's portable radio in disgust, when they lost an 'important' game. I used to play a lot on Kippax Common with my friends. One of the teams I played for was the cubs, but I got into trouble one day for a dangerous and dirty tackle on Steven Slinger. On another occasion, I also hit him accidentally in the head with a golf club and remember being incredibly worried about him.

I can also remember being scared, with my friend Gary Watson, of someone called Trevor Bould* who lived 'down the avenue' who was enormous compared to us and tried to bully us. I also recall getting 'worms' from sucking grass from around the pitch!

I spent many a happy hour playing football, cricket or touch rugby league with kids like Kevin Keir, Neil Clarke and Phil Dawson. I remember being threatened by another bully when playing cricket. He will appear later in the book as he assaulted me when I was seventeen.

When I represented the school in the boy's 60-metre dash, like everyone, I was totally outclassed by Stuart Pickford from a village called Great Preston, who was already built like a man while we all still looked like boys.

At this time, my parents used to be busy working up the garden, so, I read comic books in bed and strangely tore and ate paper from around the edges of my books (my mother told me I also used to put handfuls of soil in my mouth when I was small). One thing that also sticks in my mind is taking a pile of someone's winning raffle tickets from a table, at a fayre, at a school in Allerton Bywater. God may punish me for this at a later date!

My main friend at this time was Ian Miller (ironically when I was sixth form, I became better friends with his sister Julie) with whom I made plenty of money carol singing even though I was rejected by Kippax church choir for being tone deaf. I used this money to buy Christmas presents; we used to camp in our garden and my dad brought us very, very hot jam on toast for supper in our tent.

I was lucky to be sometimes taken for a week to Blackpool with my auntie Iris, uncle Brian, and cousin Stephen. I liked to go to their house and enjoyed playing a card game called Queenie for pennies, and I liked playing a tennis game on their TV. Stephen was very kind with his money when he was later a miner and I was still in education. He bought me a lot of things like alcohol. But once I tried to fight him when I was drunk as I thought he had bullied me when we were youngsters.

We always had many bonfires with lovely food made by mother. Like many kids we went out collecting wood for the occasion, for weeks before. I know that my dad once tried to buy us fireworks but was late and there were next to none left, so, instead of us doing without, he bought one expensive and massive rocket. I also liked the morning after bonfire night with the challenge of rekindling other people's bonfires from the embers.

Oddly, during one bonfire night, one of our neighbours actually chucked an old dustbin over the fence, which was very strange behaviour. On another occasion, someone stuck a fork into one of my friends' brother's legs as he was posing as a Guy Fawkes for 'penny for the guy'. On a brighter note, we used to buy lovely cinder toffee from Mrs Thornton 'down the avenue'.

Another thing I should mention is the great Christmases that my parents created for us when we were kids. I received lovely gifts like a Raleigh Chopper bike, a really good small telescope so that I could observe the craters on the moon (my dad even got me out of bed to watch the moon landing in 1969) a lovely Scheaffer fountain pen and many other beautiful things which I didn't always appreciate, like clothes. Comically, I pretended to be asleep while my dad, playing the role of Father Christmas, put out my gifts at the end of my bed. My mam always went the full mile and prepared and cooked a great Christmas meal with many of the vegetables grown by my dad. I would like to add that distant relatives Joyce and Fred always turned up with presents for us on Christmas eve. Good memories.



Age eleven to eighteen

I failed the 11+ and so, like a lot of my friends, I went to Brigshaw Comprehensive School when I was eleven years of age. I wasn't that happy at leaving primary school behind and I wasn't happy at all having to wear trousers instead of shorts.

At eleven, I was still obsessed with football and was the centre forward for the Brigshaw school team and I did well until I came up against a tall, lanky, fast defender who played for Corpus Christi School. In a Leeds Cup Final played at Elland Road (Leeds Utd), he marked me

out of the game because he was much faster than me and bigger than me. I did however, pass the trial for the Under 11s Leeds City Boys squad but never broke into the team. One of the reasons was that my attitude wasn't right. One good moment was winning a brand-new pair of Puma boots because my mam had sold the most raffle tickets for a Leeds City Boys fundraising event. One other happy memory of my childhood was being the first person I knew to get the new shiny QPR shirt!

Although I successfully played for the school team until the end of the fifth form, I should have realised that I wasn't really quick enough to play the game professionally. Talking about sport, I remember Ian Glover's dad taking us to watch Castleford RLFC, on a Friday evening at Wheldon Road when we were about eleven. I thought it was great running on to the pitch at the end of the game to get one of the players' sock tags!

It was at about fifteen that my OCD and bipolar commenced. I know that I felt terrible and experienced questions like: What are we doing on this planet in the middle of nowhere?" over and over again, questions that are reasonable but unbearable when laced with depression and anxiety. It was a terrible, lonely and scary experience, especially when others seemed to be getting on with their lives ok and having fun. Unfortunately, this type of suffering has been repeated many, many times in my life.

An infamous character, David Crowther, who is now dead, was my football coach for New Manston (Crossgates, Leeds). He befriended me and picked me up from my home and took me in his car to his flat. He encouraged me with my writing and organised some football trials with Sunderland, Sheffield United and Middlesbrough for me and a friend, but it turned out he was a paedophile and had probably been grooming me. Ironically, the fact that I was starting to suffer from bipolar and OCD, may have saved me from a terrible experience.

Another friend who was very important to me until I was around thirty, was musician and school friend David Collins who I looked up to. I used to send him song lyrics in the hope he would use them in with his music. Nothing ever came of this, which is my own fault, as you shouldn't rely on someone else's talent to do well.

David knew me when I was ill, and although he didn't understand my conditions, he always tried to be sympathetic and put up with many hours of my 'ill' questions. Over the years, David was financially very kind to me and I owe him many meals and many much alcohol.

Academically, I did okay for the first five years at Brigshaw Comprehensive School though I struggled with the sciences and maths. I used to copy my Physics homework from a friend called Andrew Briars (Galon), and the comical teacher Mr Farrar, must have known that I was a sort of passenger in his class. However, I think I could have got more than a grade D at 'O' level if Peter Vause had not brought a Led Zeppelin album to our house, the day before the exam, when I was about to study my electricity book.

When I was about fifteen, I was fortunate to go on a French Exchange with a school near Lyon. I was paired up with a French lad called Thierry Sieurac. This opened up my eyes and I was impressed by France and friendly with a girl called Claudine Lafarge who I kept in touch with for a long time afterwards. Two of the things I fondly remember from this time are the song 'How Deep Is Your Love' and having a go on a mobylette. Me and David Collins also later went to stay for two weeks in the gendarmerie where her father lived. These experiences of France inspired me to visit the country many more times and to study French much, more seriously.

One person who was good fun (in History) was Malcolm Driscoll who just laughed when our teacher Miss Jackson told him off. He couldn't help himself. He was not too bothered about education but he went on to have a good career working on the trains. Another friend Neil Clarke was very clever and went on to do well in the building industry.

I did a couple of things that I regret academically; when it came to the end of the fifth form exams, I was lacking confidence and entered a couple of my dad's excellent paintings and a couple of written things from him, as part of my English course work. I did regret this as it was cheating, even though I would have passed, at a bit lower grade anyway. This later came back to haunt me as part of my OCD symptoms when I was working as a Clerical Assistant for the Post Office in 1983.

At the end of fifth form, I arranged myself to go for a trial with York City FC and did well enough at the trial to be asked back, but for some reason I decided to stay on at school and go into sixth form. Me and Andrew Briars then decided to go stay with some ex-students of my dad, in the Dordogne, France. Around this time and it was great dashing around the roads on little bikes called mobylettes. Stupidly though, one night, I got drunk on a blackcurrant-based alcoholic drink and was encouraged to try some dope. The result was that I was sick as a dog and spent the next morning cleaning up the blackcurrant-based mess in my bedroom. I wasn't interested in dope anymore after that, but I should have also packed in alcohol there and then.

During this period, my step-cousin Graham Milthorpe got killed in a motorcycle accident which must have been terrible for his family, especially for his mother Gwen who was a very nice person and apparently very beautiful when she was younger.

My time in sixth form was not very successful due to me being ill with as yet undiagnosed bipolar and OCD, and because, whenever I had money, I drank lots of alcohol (I drank alcohol while some of my other friends dabbled with LSD). My English teacher Mr Taylor actually took me aside and told me I drank far too much, although, he was obviously unaware that I sometimes mixed alcohol with Benylin cough medicine for effect!

At this time, I was completely lost and not very nice to the teachers who tried to help me. But I was very ill and felt isolated. I only started working in the latter part of sixth form and somehow managed to get D for English Literature, D for Art, D for General Studies and E for French. I was lucky to get anything.

I was also friendly with a nice girl called Victoria Simpson for a short period of time in sixth form, but I disrespected her by getting drunk all the time and spending little time with her.

I worked as a kitchen assistant at the Windmill Hotel, in Leeds, for money that I think I typically spent on alcohol. I don't remember that much of this experience, except the head chef wasn't very nice to me and that I also won a slow cooker in a work do.

Also, when I was seventeen, I had a huge carbuncle on my back which the hospital lanced for me. My friendship with David Collins was still alive at this time and I often went to see him in his new home in Knottingley, West Yorkshire. Alcohol usually featured during my visits with David usually footing the bill.

At this time, the older boy, who had threatened me when playing cricket, came up to me when I was drunk from illegally drinking in Kippax pubs and kicked me down below until my testicles were swollen and black. I couldn't tell the police but my dad went mad with the idiot and severely threatened him. Years later, I asked him the idiot why he had done it and he said it was because I was "cocky". I never did get even with him but he was just an ignorant, violent yob.

One of my main friends in sixth form was June Watham who really seemed to like me. When I look back, I think I took advantage of her kindness (she had a Saturday job) by accepting alcohol from her and other gifts. I think she was a really nice girl and I think I should have treated her better. Another good friend was Richard Bucktrout who had an old Morris Minor and then an old Saab that he took me places in, although, I don't think we always stuck to the laws of the road. We were typical, silly seventeen-year-olds drinking things like Newcastle Brown and Theakston's Old Peculiar.

I enjoyed the following summer holidays laying on the lawn listening to pop music and selling ceiling roses and coving to shops in the local area. In retrospect, I should have done more with my time and perhaps like young people I see today, should have been out earning money.

A couple of people who also really deserve a mention in this book are Mr and Mrs Beeston. They really helped me as a young person; they opened up their house to a group of their daughter Jane's friends and together we listened to music like Meatloaf and Pink Floyd and

watched TV whilst drinking their hot drinks and eating their biscuits. I don't know if they are still alive, but I think they would be pleased with what I am doing today.

Post Sixth Form

I didn't really know what I wanted to do after sixth form, but because of my low grades, my options were limited and I drifted into applying for a course called Literary Studies at Portsmouth Polytechnic. Before I went, I received and blew in, £26 from some kind of interest from a fund that someone attached to Brigshaw Comprehensive, had set up. It was meant to buy books and I spent it on alcohol. I am ashamed of this now but try not to dwell on things like that.



Portsmouth (1982)

On my first day in Portsmouth, I met Simon Eddols (who was very good-looking and a hit with the girls) and Tim Carr who were to become my friends for a long time after my stay there ended. On the first day, I actually took a room over a delicatessen with Simon, but was soon overwhelmed by the smell of cat piss near my bed. Happily, the landlord did sort this out quickly.

Other things that stick in my mind from this time were that me and Simon were wrestling one day and I badly hurt my neck, and that I took a German girl out for a pizza. Some years later I went to stay for four days with her in Germany to try and find work.

I started the course okay, but me and Simon were wild with alcohol, but not violent. At that time Tim just drank peppermint cordial. Me and Simon spent each other's money and were totally irresponsible financially. I think it was because we had not had a large amount of money before, at our disposal. One night, Simon even ran over parked cars when he was full of alcohol.

I started to feel unwell and went to the doctors who understandably said I was probably homesick. My alcohol intake was high as usual as I was trying to cope with my conditions, and I got incredibly poorly but didn't understand it. I remember being incredibly down in a park drinking Old Peculiar and listening to Pink Floyd's The Wall. I was so ill and didn't know what to do to help myself.

When I went home for Christmas, I didn't want to return back to Portsmouth. As I've already said, the problem was that my conditions were, as yet, undiagnosed, and my parents were ignorant of them and I think that they thought I was just lazy and didn't want to do anything.



Post-Portsmouth/Basinghall Telephone Exchange, Leeds

I then had the first of many encounters with the DHHS in my life and received benefits (welfare) for the first time in my life. I wrote a huge number of letters enquiring about work to companies and continued to do so until I was accepted to work as a Clerical Assistant in Basinghall Telephone

Exchange, Leeds on the 28/03/1983.

There were three managers in the office who were: David Murgatroyd, David Roberts (who later told me that I needed a psychiatrist) and Rod Stephenson. David Murgatroyd didn't like me at first as I was a jumped-up nineteen-year-old but became friendly with me later on when he got to know me better, David Roberts was a bit aloof and Rod Stephenson actually saved my job when I got a poor first appraisal (during this time I took an overdose as I wasn't well and ended up having my stomach pumped in Pontefract General Infirmary – I didn't really want to live and I didn't really want to die, and I was drinking heavily. One night I was so drunk that I spent the night in the basement of the telephone exchange, where some people did weight training. I did do some positive things like ringing my mother every morning, and because we got free calls, I was able to ring Claudine almost daily. I did also work hard when I got well.

One thing that I that I found amusing, at the time, was that one of the cleaners booked every Friday afternoon off to go drinking! Another thing, looking back, was that I was foolish enough to take my work out drinking with me. How stupid can you be when you're a binge drinker?

After this, I rallied, stopped drinking, got myself fit for more football trials and did five months of a correspondence course in French to improve grade from an E to a D so that I could go back into education by enrolling at Bristol Polytechnic on a course called Modern Languages with Information Systems.



Bristol Polytechnic: 1984-87

Before I went to Bristol, I arranged to have a trial with Bristol City, but I honestly think I overtrained through mania, and I failed the trial. Maybe I wasn't also considered to be fast enough. I also spent a morning training with Bristol Rovers squad who said they would monitor me if I played for the Polytechnic side. I passed the trial for the college side, but never actually played due to illness. We also played an inter-hall football match and I attacked one of the lads who had been making fun of me. Other students also criticised the miners for striking, which, coming from a mining village (Kippax), did not go down very well with me.

I started drinking again when I was turned down by Bristol City and everything caught up with me and I crashed, and really, the writing was on the wall. The medical profession tried to help me by getting me to attend a nearby psychiatric hospital in Fishponds but I can't say this really helped me.

There were some interesting young people at Fishponds halls of residence where I first lived. I met an Irish lad called Terry O'Brien who was my neighbour. All-in-all I got the impression that there were a lot of kids from well-heeled families, who for whatever reason, had not made it to university.

My academic life was untenable after term one due to mental illness (the course director said I couldn't cope with pressure) and I was also banned from all the student bars in Bristol for one month for assaulting someone in the Fishponds student bar - I don't know what else they could have done. It was only due to other people's kindness that I avoided any involvement with the police. Unfortunately, I was also kicked out of student halls for drunkenly punching someone and ended up living a sparse doctor's attic room, on Cumberland Road, near the suspension bridge, in Bristol. This meant a 6-mile cycle to college and living in abject poverty as I no longer had a grant and was on benefits again. I was so hungry one day, that I asked the doctor's wife if they had any spare food which she didn't like. I actually used the slow cooker that I had won at the Windmill Hotel to warm food, although it took hours to cook things! Also, my bed in the room was broken and I had no fridge.

At that time, I don't think the poly had any counselling (I doubt if this would have helped me anyway) facilities as my only support came from the GP Doctor Clifford who did his best to try and help me but wasn't really qualified to do so.

I was not well enough to do the second term of the course, and instead, had my second contact with a mental institution when I became an out-patient at a local hospital in Bristol. But I can't remember being prescribed any medication at this time. The course director then split my study into doing half in the first year and doing the second half (as a part-time

student) the second year. I then successfully completed year two although I failed the Beginners German part of the course, but went on a placement to France anyway.

I was awarded a placement at a centre for the unemployed in St Herblain, near Nantes, France, in 1987, which lasted for six months. I was there to help students with their English (I used the National Geographic and an album called Graceland by Paul Simon to help me), which I did, but I foolishly passed up the opportunity to take a look at all the modern software that was on offer. Even the first day, I put going to the bar before going into class and getting to know the students but it was there that I met an older lady who was nice to me called Mme Chenou who was serving.

I worked hard but again spoilt my image by, on one occasion, drunkenly becoming aggressive towards another English student. I was warned by my boss Mr Touche that such behaviour would not be tolerated. I always shot myself in the foot because of alcohol and/or illness. Mr Touche said it was good to focus on cartoons and sex in life.

One night I received two tickets to a night club in Nantes but ended up (for some reason) walking home alone in the middle of the night. Another 'night, I went alone to Nantes to see a Tom Cruise film called 'The Colour of Money.

I also remember having no food and a man from the Ivory Coast gave me part of his chicken dish that forced me to drink water with every mouthful as it was so hot. I used to drink cheap red wine and even slept in the town centre one night when I was extremely drunk.

A positive thing I did do was to organise for the centre to play a local football team. This was great publicity for the centre. One of the members of the local football team told me I needed to lose weight, although I did go running while I was at the centre.

Three people invited me to go to their homes but I was always on the lookout for alcohol. I still owe one student Françoise Perroteau 20 Euros.

At the same time, I was studying basic Beginners German for my re-sit and I had prepared the foundations for my thesis (which I never used: it involved looking at the centre in St. Herblain as a working system). I did the re-sit when I returned to England but I did not pass it, for although I knew lots of everyday German, I did not understand technical German. Even so, the college did not wash their hands of me and wanted me to spend a year in Germany. But I became too ill and took to my bed until a psychiatrist came to our home in Kippax, and suggested I went into a psychiatric hospital called Stanley Royds which was in Wakefield, England.



Life in Stanley Royds (1987)

I don't remember much about my time in this hospital except there was a carpet salesman from Halton who had had a breakdown, and a lad who regularly lost all his wages playing cards, on a Friday afternoon, in the White Swan pub in Kippax. There was also a full-sized snooker table that anyone could play on.

I know that I was very poorly as I had ECT (Electro Convulsive Therapy) twelve times there. The anaesthetic and treatment left me feeling in a daze but

I did gradually improve. They used to give you a cup of tea and a biscuit after your treatment. I don't think they are too liberal these days with this type of procedure, and I am not sure that they know how it actually works although I think it has damaged my short-term memory.

I also remember that there was a direct bus from Wakefield to Kippax which enabled me to go to my parents some weekends. Another memory I have is that a thirty-eight-year-old married student nurse, who liked me, wanted to continue to see me once I had been discharged from hospital. I declined as she was married. Ironically, while there, I bumped into one of my old schoolfriends (who had dabbled in drugs) working as a student psychiatric nurse. He was the one who always used teabags twice in sixth form.

I was eventually discharged and went back to live with my parents and brother, in Kippax. Significantly, people who had known me for years shunned me, but I think this was out of ignorance rather than nastiness.

Out of desperation, I enrolled on a Computer Programming Course in Leeds which I was not very good at, as I was still ill, but I was able to claim good expenses for long-distance interviews for jobs which was money for drink. I did however, get on well with one of the tutors called John Hartley with whom I drank a lot of alcohol. He was a married man with a lovely young family, but I think he was lacking direction himself at that time in his life.

Now seems an appropriate time to take a look at the illnesses and conditions that have plagued my life and shown me to be both very weak and very strong.

I did also go to Cologne, in Germany, to learn how to teach English as a foreign language but I came home after four days as I was so ill. I saw little of the country and, due to illness, it was a terrible experience.

Illnesses and Conditions

The first thing that affected me (though I was unaware of it until later in my childhood) was Testicular Torsion when the spermatic chord gets twisted and the blood supply is cut off from one/both testicles which die if not rectified. I do not remember this happening as it is apparently a very painful experience, so, I think it may have happened in the womb. The result was that one of my testicles died which has really affected my confidence with women as I feel odd having only one normal testicle. This has really affected me psychologically as a man but I now think I have had it all out of proportion.

Interestingly, I have made an effort to make sure that my genes are not passed on as I don't want anyway else in the next, or future generations, to possibly go through what I have been through.

Fortunately, before I was fifteen, the only thing I had to worry about was having weak ankles which often stopped me playing football for a short period of time. I also broke my wrist when I missed a wrung on the local climbing frame and this was very painful. I remember that one day a couple of yobs encouraged me to fight someone called Darren and then wanted to fight the victor (me). Years later, when I'd had a lot to drink, I offered one of the yobs out in the White Swan pub, in Kippax, and he hid behind the argument that he was now a married man with kids and so couldn't fight.

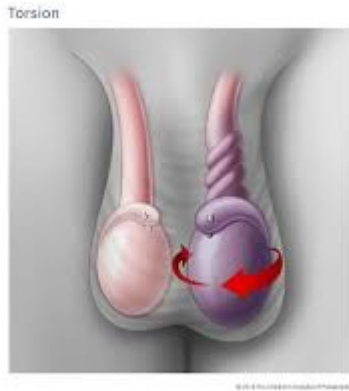
But it was when I was fifteen that my real problems started to kick in, i.e. undiagnosed bipolar and OCD. OCD has really had a negative, cyclical effect on my life. Then, when I was twenty-eight, I was diagnosed with a cancer called Hodgkins Disease.

I had my first experience of pneumonia when I was forty and was in intensive care in Leeds. This was followed by the discovery that the Lithium Carbonate I take for bipolar had damaged my thyroid gland. Besides this, the only real side-effect of Lithium is that I have is thirst. I have blood tests every three months to monitor how things are going.

I also had a horrible camera put me down my throat, without anaesthetic, at one time which was horrible but found an ulcer. Finally, when I was fifty-nine, I contracted pneumonia again which caused a heart attack and led me to having three blood transfusions as I was anaemic. Gout has also been a minor problem before I went on medication to treat it.

Alcohol played a major role in my life between the ages of seventeen and thirty-four and there have been occasions when I could have had alcoholic poisoning. But happily, I stopped drinking on the 17/02/98. Alcohol and/or mental illness plus medication made an absolute ass of me and I hope I am never like this again. I am no longer aggressive, have to apologise the morning after, have more money and no horrible hangovers!

Experiences of illness/conditions



Testicular Torsion:

I have not enjoyed the consequences of testicular torsion as it has left me feeling inadequate as a man, and I always dreaded someone finding out and being publicly ridiculed. Now I tell myself that I don't care.

Weak Ankles:

I did not like having weak ankles as not only is going over on an ankle painful, it made me miss much cherished football matches when I was younger.

Broken Wrist:

A relatively small injury but an hinderance.



Bi-Polar:

A dreadful condition where it seems like there's no point in carrying on as you feel so bad and on your own within your feelings. Alternatively, you feel so high that nothing can wrong. People do some crazy things when they are 'high'. Fortunately, Lithium Carbonate has successfully controlled my mood swings including the massive highs when I acted in a very strange

way e.g. I once went looking at properties in Leeds as I believed it was only a matter of time until I would be able to afford them!



OCD

Having any type of OCD is very painful as it is a symptom of an anxiety disorder which takes over all your mind. In my case, I have always suffered from Pure OCD which means I have always been in a mental loop of self-doubt without physical checks e.g. I once had a phase of doubting if I could read or write as I had totally lost my confidence in basic tasks that I couldn't remember learning and, actually wondered if I had been taught things correctly in the first place. The symptoms have taken many forms and I continue to suffer to some

degree – you just learn to manage it. I take Fluoxetine for this but it doesn't seem to work and my OCD remains cyclical in nature.

Hodkins Disease:

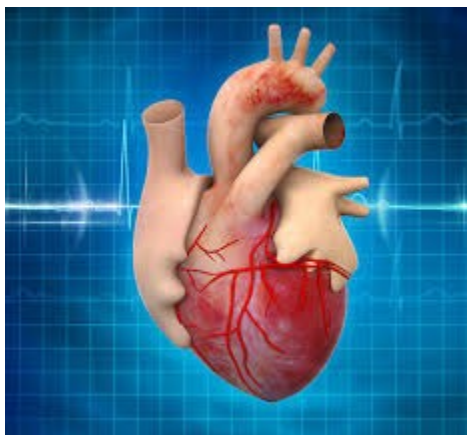
Is a disease of the lymphatic system and, untreated, would have taken my life. Consequently, I had twenty radiotherapy treatments which burnt out the cancer, although it also burnt my throat and made eating difficult and I lived on drinks for a while. Another difficulty for me was that I had to take three buses each way, each day, between Featherstone and Cookridge Hospital as well as handling Bipolar and OCD. I returned home to my flat in Featherstone feeling quite ill every night. I was fortunately under the very proficient Dr Stone who looked after me well. I also continued doing the paper version of my magazine.



Pneumonia (twice)

When I was forty, I felt absolutely terrible, unable to sleep and was very, very thirsty. So, I called an ambulance and before he realised the gravity of the situation, the man who came, told me he was not providing a taxi service. I was only infected in one lung, but was put into an induced coma and fortunately I came out of it. My parents, Brenda and other friends came to visit me. Brenda even cooked me food that I liked and brought it with her to the hospital.

In 2024, I was feeling exhausted and out of breath, leaning on buildings to rest mid-walk. Doctors were unsure what was wrong with me. I finally decided to go to the Boulevard Surgery, in Halifax as I was not well at all. While I was in one of the consulting rooms, the doctors realised that I was having a heart attack. An ambulance was called which took only 12 minutes to arrive. Once in hospital, I was taken to A&E which due to horrible machine noises, was horrific. Eventually, I spent time a lot of time on a Cardiac Ward (in total I was in hospital for 19 days). The nurses, doctors and cleaners were amazing at Calderdale Royal Infirmary. Brenda meanwhile visited with my parents (also Hari, Jess Jay and Krishna) and waited 19 days in my flat for me to come home. What loyalty.



Heart Attack

It seems that the pneumonia caused a heart attack. The heart attack itself was not painful and I didn't know that I had had one. I was then deemed to be anaemic and had three blood transfusions. My medication is on going although, initially, I was on decreasing amounts of steroids.



Bacterial Ulcer:

In the middle of 2024, I was unlucky enough to have problems with my right eye and was unsure if I was going to lose my sight in it. I was told that I had a bacterial ulcer in it. Happily, it was treated with anti-biotic drops and took around a month to sort it out, although my sight in my right eye is not as good as it once was.

Broken Collar Bone (twice):

I broke my collar bone was I was 16 playing football. Mark Cowton shoulder-barged me when playing football. The second time was in 2025 when I fell out of bed and broke my right collar bone which was very painful, and as I write, is still healing.

Gout:

Largely sorted out by medication but is very painful when it happens.

Medication that I Now take:

This may interest someone with a pharmaceutical background.

Adcal

Allopurinol

Aspirin

Atorvastatin

Bisoprolol

Chemydur

Chlorpromazine

Depagliflozin

Fluoxetine

Levothyroxine

Lithium Carbonate

Omeprazole

Ramipril



Billy Bucktrout's Kindness

Following a bad argument at home, I slept in a corn field down Brecks Lane (in Kippax) with David Collin's bass guitar (which he had lent me to try and learn), and the next day, it was clear that I could no longer live at home following the argument. Consequently, when I had no money and nowhere to go, Billy Bucktrout (Richard's brother) allowed me to stay with him in Allerton Bywater for a nominal contribution towards the bills. Billy

had had a bad motorcycle accident and was waiting for some compensation before he did his house up. As a result, his house had no hot water, no wallpaper and no heating until I got a portable gas fire from my parents.

At this time, I had little money (I could have had a bit more if I had not drunk alcohol) and ate a lot of chips from the local chip shop. Billy found it strange and funny that I would go running and then eat some chips straight afterwards. I also benefited from Billy's kindness when he daily shared his Chinese takeaway with me that he got on his way from the pub. I used to wait for him coming home for this food. I also got the idea to start painting again and this led to the idea of doing a collection of wallpaper and fabric designs. I always begged and borrowed to buy a tube of white titanium, acrylic paint. A painting called *Us Kites* inspired a song of the same name that appears on my CDs.

I also reconnected with my old school friend Katie Rothwell who had inherited a terraced house, from her grandad, in Castleford. I had many good, some drunken, times with Katie even though we often had little money, even though I got money from cleaning windows at Three Lane Ends, Castleford. She was a very good friend to me at this time and was always fair to me. When she sorted herself and started a nursing course called Project 2000, I went to visit her in Leeds, and once again, drank a lot of alcohol with her. I think she went on to live in Canada with her husband.

But my life was changed when someone else came to stay at Billy's. I didn't like it as I didn't trust this person even though I had been friendly with him earlier in my life. He actually went on to steal a considerable sum of money that Billy had hidden in the house.

Anyway, one of my aunties had a boyfriend at the time, who lived in a nearby town called Featherstone. He told me of a flat that was going there if I could get the necessary £200 bond together. My mother typically stepped forward with the money (which she gave later gave me, and which I used with some other money to go and live in France). Katie and my dad helped me move my scant possessions and some furniture that had belonged to his deceased parents. So began seven difficult years in Featherstone.



Featherstone

The flat I took was on Green Lane, Featherstone. My parents and my auntie Sandra helped me sort things out so that it was habitable. As I just said, I was given furniture that was left when my dad's mother died, so, I had enough stuff to make it into my first real home.

Featherstone was an odd place as it was a very parochial. In some ways it was like a throwback to another time (thirty-five years ago), and although most people were grounded and nice, there was an air of violence about it and a minority of psychological bullies. Some people tended to use their mouths rather than their fists when a dispute arose. I must have seemed very odd to the locals, posing as a designer who periodically got blind drunk and acted like a complete fool.

A visitor to the property opposite, called Ray Withers, introduced me to the owner who I learnt was Johnnie St. George. He made fabulous hatboxes that he even sold to Harrods. There was an obvious link between our work and Ray encouraged us to become good friends.

Johnnie had been in the entertainment business as a top singer, and was part of an act with his partner Oz, who was a clairvoyant. Apparently, they had had a shop next door but this was not a financial success. When Oz died, Johnnie apparently surrounded himself with a group of young men and got on with his life in Featherstone. He had much more money than me but he looked after me in his own way. Later, he let me sleep on the floor, in his front room, when I was unwell and didn't want to go home. I do think I did his head in asking questions and the same questions over and over again, looking for reassurance – typical of OCD.

Another person who helped me, when I had no money, was Ken Robinson, who was a small newsagent in Pontefract. He became a good friend and occasional drinking partner (He was married with a daughter though) He was kind enough to give me credit for confectionery when I needed something until I my benefits, and then my wage was paid.

In 1990, I had a stall at the Home Interiors Exhibition in London. I think this was not a financial success as my work was too different and not thought to be commercial enough. Ironically, I have seen examples of fabrics, years later, with designs that are very similar to mine e.g. ones that employ butterflies on a pointillist background.

The Prince's Trust gave me a grant of £500 to do this which is ironic as I am a republican, but I don't think the money came directly from him. Obviously, my parents came to London to support me. I also then held an exhibition at the Resource Centre in Castleford, which also included the work of other local artists including Mr Isherwood and his beautiful stained-glass work. My dad also took me down South where we left my work with an agent called Jennifer Sanderson. But I never heard anything.

But the lack of commercial success and extreme exhaustion from mania, led me to have a 'breakdown' and I ended up in Pontefract General Infirmary. (One time when I was ill, I stayed in bed for three weeks and my dad threatened to burn my bed). My parents visited me often, and then as an out-patient, I had another 8 ECT treatments. Johnnie said I should stop the treatment as it made me like a zombie.

Someone who was in hospital with me (who apparently had had his drink spiked) and who was a big-hitter from Featherstone, later humiliated me in the 'Top House' when he announced he was in the 'nuthouse' with me. I felt very small and stupid. But he didn't care.

One thing that was also very difficult for me at this time, was that a spring had come through my mattress and resulted in me trying to avoid it when I slept! Another problem arose when one of Johnnie's 'friends' took my bicycle from Johnnie's backyard to go watch a rugby match, and just abandoned it when he got another idea. Of course, he denied this and consequently, I no longer had any transport. This was important to me at the time.

A person who helped me a lot during this time was my aunty Sandra who fed me in exchange for me doing some babysitting. This was very helpful to me at the time.

I started my magazine From The Horse's Mouth as a newsletter to publicise a music French course that I was trying to write. At the same time, I was giving some kids cheap, private French lessons to get a bit of extra money that I spent on alcohol. But from the very beginning, I was chasing my tail as I did not really have the personality to harass business people to advertise with me.

I did however, manage to organise some events to raise money for Cookridge Hospital who had successfully treated my cancer. I also gave me some exposure to people like the pigeon fancier in Featherstone and I was lucky enough to interview the rugby players of Castleford and Featherstone RLFCs but looking back, it would have been better if I had had more knowledge of rugby league. But I tried.

There were some people who tried to help me like Mr and Mrs Beeston who lent me a computer (Mrs Beeston also took me from Kippax to Cookridge Hospital when I was very ill) and my kind printers in Pontefract and then in Kippax.

At this time, I used to go to a lot of local pubs and unfortunately, I was beaten up by bouncers in Pontefract because I bumped into someone when I was drunk.

Eventually, I could not pay the two printers the money I owed them and was taken to court. I was told to take out an Administration Order as my debts were less than £5,000 and I had to pay a nominal amount of £7 each month, out of my small benefit payments. The printer who took me to court chose not to repeat this action after three years had elapsed, which was very kind of him. I was devastated and felt very ashamed of what had happened and it would not have happened to that degree if I had not been manic and over-optimistic.

I'm not quite sure why now, but I later moved to an upstairs property on Station Lane in Featherstone and it was there that I became very ill with my Bipolar and OCD. When I decided to leave the property to go to France, in 1994, the landlord even tried to con me out of the £200 bond that I had paid him. But a representative from the local council adjudicated in my favour.

When I look back, I don't think the business community in Featherstone really wanted me there and to do well, thus withheld their potential advertising from me. It was extremely parochial.

Again, it was a very bad time for me but I recovered to start writing songs (the chords/melodies/lyrics). I think at this time I was desperately trying to be a person of value as I had been badly written off by many people who knew me. Now I'm not really bothered.



Meneac, Brittany and returning home

Thanks to Jill Turton, I was able to spend three months living in her caravan at her property called la Bossette, in Brittany, France. I went there with the idea of making a new start and finding some paid work but none was available for anyone. I agreed to do some gardening and

some painting inside the property in exchange for staying there. During periods of inactivity in the caravan, I read a lot of books that were there by Dick Francis about horse racing. Also, gendarmes arrived to check my passport and joked about Eric Cantona's antics at Leeds United.

The people in Meneac were not particularly friendly, including my neighbours, and I made matters worse by drinking heavily and getting into a drunken fight one night. I can remember falling into a ditch on the way home and waking up with wet-through clothes and a bloodied ear. I still did not learn my lesson about taking alcohol and medication although I kept a lower profile after that incident. People were impressed with my French but not my drunken behaviour.

Jill Turton was very kind to me and over-looked my character flaws. She even didn't mind when I ate food in the caravan as I had none. I also used her bicycle to go into the village for provisions as it was quite a walk. I think it broke.

I have no interest in revisiting a village like Meneac which to me was a bit backwards. When I was there, I dug over the bit of land, did the agreed work and lived in the caravan, using the amenities of the house. It was difficult with only have cows for company and suffering from

OCD. I was ruminating about something from my 'A' levels. I didn't know what was wrong at the time though. It was OCD.

Featherstone (Part Two)

When I returned penniless and homeless from my three-month stay in France, Johnnie was good enough to allow me to stay with him once more. Almost immediately, I got some work as a factory operative for Golden Wonder crisps, in Scunthorpe, and then for Homepride, in Rotherham, through an agency in Pontefract. Johnnie had a meal ready for me when I returned home from work at whatever time, depending on the shift. I paid him some board out of a pittance of a wage and he treated me as well as anyone could. The women in the factory at Homepride, apparently called me 'Frankenstein' because of my cool demeanour towards them.

Following this, I got a job on a Routemaster bus that operated between Castleford and Leeds. I was again paid the princely rate of £3 an hour as an old-fashioned bus conductor. I wrongly bailed out in Leeds one day when I was pissed off with the conditions of the job and went out drinking. I would not do this now. What you've got to realise was that I had on-going OCD at the time. When I was working however, I did my best to help the appreciative passengers by carrying their luggage and talking to them.

Being out of work and needing to buy Christmas presents, I then took a job as a factory operative in a wire factory, in Featherstone, making the stands for microwave trays. I bought my presents and again bailed out which annoyed my parents.

Unfortunately, me and Johnnie were at opposite ends of the political spectrum and this came to a head one day. He actually punched me after the situation escalated and kicked me out. Johnnie then told 'his crew' and other people that I had tried to kill him and this is not true. I was just angry. As a result, I had to leave Featherstone to avoid further problems.

In retrospect, I think Johnnie was extremely kind to me, as he had even gone between our properties with pasted wallpaper (which my mother had bought) and decorated my flat for me. Even after our fallout, he gave me shelter for the night when I had some trouble in Castleford and it was snowing outside. He warned me to leave early though before his friends arrived for the new day.

Having said all this, one of the people who was also genuine was Paul Shenton who worked as a milkman and at the car auctions. He was always extremely nice to me even though he didn't really understand my illness. I also thought Ray Withers was a good friend to me at the time.



Castleford (Briefly)

At the end of my time in Featherstone, I had managed to get a room in a DHSS bed and breakfast in Castleford. I had the ground floor room at the front of the building and shared a kitchen with the other residents who were mainly ex or existing criminals. One day the landlords comically arranged breakfast to con the visiting authorities that they provided it all

the time!

While I was living in Castleford, I became manic and tried to madly arrange some songs that I had written. To me they sounded wonderful but to other people they sounded terrible! I must have driven the man upstairs mad and, eventually, he and another man pounded on my door threatening to “batter” me when they had been out drinking. Me and alcohol were like Popeye and spinach, so, sober I felt very frightened and was also short of sleep.

In a panic, I left my room and went into the snow, carrying my shoes and walked to Johnnie’s in Featherstone as I didn’t know where to go – even though me and Johnnie had badly fallen out. As already mentioned, Johnnie still gave me overnight refuge and the morning after I went to the council to seek safe accommodation. I was then offered a place in a hostel for the homeless in Leeds. All this time I was drinking like a fool on medication.



Lady Beck Close

My room in the hostel was good and we paid part of our benefits for food. I received some excellent meals and had no complaints there. However, as I did not have a doctor anymore, I couldn’t get any Lithium and became very, very manic walking around wealthy parts of Leeds for hours. I was in a different world.

One ex-nurse, who was then a resident, turned me away from his door when I asked him for help. My mother who worked in Leeds, came to see me everyday and has never turned her back on me, whatever. She has been a great mother.

Somehow, I thought people like Paul McCartney were communicating to me through the radiators. I felt good but in fact, I was in a terribly unwell.



High Royds Hospital

After about ten weeks, things came to a head at the hostel when I thought a someone told me to break a back car window in the staff carpark. The owner of the car was furious but then said to me “It’s not your fault, you are ill”. I was then taken in a police car to a hospital called High Royds, in Guiseley, and offered the opportunity to be sectioned or be a voluntary patient. They

said it was much better to be voluntary so, they suggested I was voluntary there.

The hospital was like a massive stately home with big corridors. It was a bit eerie on a night with massive corridors. In all I spent ten weeks this hospital, mainly because I was technically homeless. It was there that I was officially diagnosed with Bipolar and OCD and started back on Lithium. I tried to join in the occupational therapy classes but I wasn’t very well. People said that I was always near the radiators when I first went there, and this is because I still thought people were communicating to me through them. Unfortunately, once my mania had finished, depression kicked in and I felt absolutely terrible with depression and OCD going on together.

There was the usual ‘space cadet’ talking rubbish and people arguing over the television channel. The accommodation was poor with a curtain between rooms. There was little privacy and I hated staying up until the medication trolley arrived. I was very greedy at the time eating all the club biscuits that were left out in the kitchen – I weighed 17 stone at this time. But at least I didn’t have any more ECT, and as I said, I was finally diagnosed as having Bipolar (Manic Depression) and OCD together.

When I was coming to the end of my hospital stay, I was invited to apply to live in a St. Anne’s hostel in the middle of Leeds. I was turned down by the staff there who said the other residents would try and steal my medication. So, I spent a little longer in hospital before St. Anne’s then showed me a room in a group home in Harehills, Leeds. I liked the avenue of trees outside and I first met Brenda who immediately came across as being a very nice person. I said I would like to live there though I was still ill.



Harehills

The property in Harehills was huge and split into single rooms with communal kitchens and a lounge. It was there that I was first exposed to living with other mentally ill people, and I didn't react that well as my

OCD was raging. In the first few days, I took another half-hearted overdose and ended up on Roundhay Wing, in Leeds, for a few days. I was then discharged still ill.

My next-door neighbour was called Simon Heywood and we got on well sometimes but rubbed each other up the wrong way. He got very fed up of hearing me talk about my repetitive OCD thoughts as he wasn't too well himself. We used to listen to music together, and like me, he had a bad relationship with alcohol. Simon had a tendency of taking overdoses and wanting to be found. Unfortunately, one day, he took an overdose whilst amongst very drunk people and was not found in time.

My next next-door neighbour was called Gary Fawkes and he was very nice except he always wanted to borrow money for gambling. But he always paid back when he said he would.

In the meantime, my relationship with Brenda Condoll was developing and we were becoming very good platonic friends. She did things for me and cooked me some lovely meals (at that time we were still eating meat and fish etc.) I did have a problem with one of the other tenants who accused me of bullying him. To be honest, I did get on to him a lot as he was pathetic in my eyes and really annoyed me doing nothing every day. In my opinion, one thing about organisations like St Annes, is that tend to defend the weak and vulnerable however nasty they are to other people.

During this time, me and Brenda worked at Burmantofts Senior Action and Ebor Gardens luncheon clubs. I was however, sacked by Leeds City Council for my outspoken views I expressed when I wasn't that well.

One good thing I was able to do was to accompany Brenda to see her grandma Lucille who brought her up, and was coming to the end of her life. I was impressed by life on Nevis and then went back and spent 6 weeks there on my own. We later re-visited the island (crossing from St Kitts to Nevis in a terrifying motor boat ride during the night) to lay flowers on Brenda's grandmother's grave.

I did try and start jogging and walking around Harehills but this fizzled out as I was so unfit.

One 'good' thing that happened at this time on the 17/02/1998, was that I was savagely beaten up when I was too drunk to defend myself. This was a blessing in disguise as it motivated me to give up drinking alcohol for good. The landlord of the pub knew very well

who had done it, but lied to the police when they spoke to him. I had two black eyes for days but at least it got me off of alcohol until today.

Anyway, the small flat in the house next door became vacant and my support worker Kevin Downes encouraged me to move into it. I stayed there for over a year. It was okay, but again in a house with other mentally ill people.

St Annes then decided to give up the two properties in Harehills and offered me and Brenda a flat in the more modern Simmons Court, in Cross Green, Leeds. I stayed there for seven years and Brenda lived there until April 2025.



Simmons Court

Simmons Court catered, at that time, for people with mental health issues, learning difficulties, or drink problems. Its construction was apparently contested by some local people.

My flat in Simmons Court was clean and Brenda stayed with me for the first three months until her flat was ready for her to move into. The man opposite was called Michael Ward and he was

friendly and a functioning alcoholic. But I was not tempted to drink myself as I had realised what devastation alcohol had already caused in my life. At this time, I used to go to Belgium for another resident who fancied himself as a bit of a 'Del Boy' and brought back cigarettes for him to sell, when I was ill. Eventually, our relationship deteriorated and ended up with him being very nasty to me. He just used me really.

I remember Brenda crossing the courtyard every morning to bring me porridge and I admit that I had lots of driving lessons when I was unwell (OCD) and consequently failed my test once.

One good thing that came out of this period was doing voluntary work for Barnados and for a shop called Trade for Change, which was located in the middle of Leeds. This was a shop that solely sold fairtrade items, long before it became popular and in the mainstream. My main job was standing on the door welcoming people and watching for shoplifters. I had a walkie-talkie that kept me in touch with the other shops in the centre of Leeds.

It was nice to be doing something worthwhile even if I wasn't feeling that well at the time. I have managed to cope with this illness by carrying on regardless of what I am thinking or feeling. It was also good that I organised a Salsa night to raise money for the shop. This was a big success and Brenda cooked for it.

Another memory I have of this time, was finishing work early and going into the Duck and Drake pub, in Leeds, to watch David Beckham score a vital freekick against Greece.

Today, I am still good friends with Andrea Hill, Ruth Minich and Sarah Fishwick who I met at the TFC. I have lost touch with everyone else from this period of my life.

Me and Brenda used to visit Otley a lot, and in fact, were lucky enough to go to many local places as we had free bus passes and some disposable income. To be truthful, it was DLA (Disability Living Allowance) that really changed my life, as, for once, I had money to go to cafes and to save up to go on holidays with Brenda. It was Liz Oxtoby, a support worker, who managed to get me DLA when she was my support worker. At the time I was living in Harehills. I am very grateful to her for this because my initial claim was rejected.

It is fair to say that I went through a period of being a Christian tourist, visiting many churches (including All Hallows, in Leeds) and even doing an Alpha Course. I did this because, like many people, I was looking for some kind of healing. Today, I think there is probably no rhyme or reason for us being here on Earth and that the universe is not all about us. I have been influenced by the work of Christopher Hitchens, Albert Camus and Richard Dawkins.

In 2004, we went to Halifax for the day and (we were now vegetarian - thanks to the influence of people at TFC) and noticed that a new vegetarian, Buddhist café had opened on what I now know as North Bridge. We got off the bus immediately and apparently were the first customers that the café had ever had as it had just opened its doors. The café was called the World Peace Café and served wonderful, cheap food which is probably why it had to eventually close and become a meditation centre. Once a month, the Buddhists there ran Stop the Week evening which included a three-course meal and meditation session. I actually cooked for it on one occasion! And even visited the lovely temple in Ulverston.

The Buddhists that I met were really nice people but some who had been monks for a long time and later de-robed and decided it wasn't for them anymore. Some of them said they didn't like being celibate anymore and went on to have consummated relationships with women. I did read some of the books about New Kadampa Buddhism, but it did not grip me like it did some other people I knew.



Chancery Terrace, Halifax

I was still living in Simmons Court, but had realised that I would never really improve health-wise living amongst other sick people. Fortunately, a monk called Dzogden, in Halifax, told me about a property that was up for rent in Skircoat Green, Halifax. I looked around with a man called Geoff Wilson and decided to take it. It was a very old property with a small garden but it seemed wonderful to me at the time.

I moved in on the 28/04/2007, and even though it was my dad's birthday, he agreed to drive a hired van, and, with my brother, helped me move in. I remember my new neighbours wondering why I didn't have a job, so, I told them the score which may have shocked them. But at least I had not been on a psychiatric ward since 1996.

My dad helped me to put stones down in a small area in the garden, and my mother bought me a table and chairs, so I could sit out. They also visited me when they could, even though Halifax is quite a long way from Kippax.

The property itself, reflected the landlady's apparent 'buy and rent as it was' philosophy and this was okay with me. It was great to have a new start and I made sure that Brenda stayed the first week with me in order to indicate to her that I wasn't leaving her behind in Leeds. In fact, for many years, I went to Leeds for her on a Tuesday afternoon and then took her home on the Saturday morning. We must have spent a small fortune on train fares over the years, but Brenda has kept me going and helps me as much as she possibly can.

At this time, we went to the DW gym in Halifax and walking in the pool was clearly good for Brenda. I did also improve my fitness by going for early morning walks, but when I tried to go jogging at 4 am, the police stopped and checked my details.

Skircoat Green was a very nice area, which I perceived, was inhabited by people who on the whole, had a bob or two. There were no supermarkets nearby and the local shops had a near monopoly for essential, small items.

Having a free bus pass at the time was a great help as it also enabled me to get half-fare rail travel and to travel by bus away from the area. I did however, get some funny looks from some bus drivers for having the pass, but they did not know my history and had no right to judge.

Me and Brenda, used to use our passes to visit a town in Calderdale called Hebden Bridge, two or three times a week. We really loved the place at the time, but it is prone to flooding which has badly affected people and commerce over the years. I have now fallen out of love with the place for private reasons. However, I recognise that some lovely people live and work there. We used to go regularly to the Town Hall Café which still serves wonderful and reasonable-priced food and drinks. My friend Amber Roberts is still one of the managers there, I believe.

The government of the day, told me I had to do some voluntary work so I did an autism course with the wonderful tutor Audrey Smith. I also met a Muslim woman who told me to say she was my support worker if we bumped into one of her brothers. Happily, my GP stopped me having to do voluntary work soon after.

Whilst I was in Chancery Terrace, I managed to get local musicians to arrange and perform two albums of my songs called: One Foot in Front of The Other and If I See You in Heaven which you can hear on my website: www.fromthehorsesmouth.org.uk

It was at Chancery Terrace that I decided to restart my magazine From the Horse's Mouth as an e-mag as I realised that there would be no expensive printing costs this time around. I was helped by Michael Conneely and Robert Williams to get it all started. For a few years, I did print out paper copies to get the magazine known locally in Calderdale.

My stay at Chancery Terrace was tainted by a neighbour having fires every night and putting smoke directly into my home. In my opinion, the council didn't do enough to help me.



Current Home

Six years ago, I moved into the ground flat I now live in, as the former landlady wanted to sell the property at Chancery Terrace. The flat is perfect for Halifax railway station and for the city centre. At the time of writing, I still am able to get help with the rent as I am registered disabled.

Lockdown was a difficult time for everyone and Brenda stayed with me for the duration. We had one other person called Graham Townsend in our bubble. Graham had no income at the time and, in a small way, I helped him out financially. He has proved to be a valued friend. Brenda cooked for both of us. I remember, on one occasion, Amber Roberts kindly went shopping for us which was a great help. I can also recall buying some shears and making a dreadful effort at cutting my hair!

At the beginning of 2025, I realised that Brenda needed more support, so, I asked her to move in with me. This was a wrench for her as she had been with St Anne's for many years and in possession of her flat in Simmons Court for nearly 25 years. Hari and Alice helped with the move as did Maureen Ruddock, Brenda's last support worker.

Conclusion

Well, that's a literary photograph of my life! I hope you have enjoyed reading it and have learnt something new, especially about mental illness. My project From the Horse's Mouth is ongoing and you can join in with it if you want by contacting us at: dean@fthm.org.uk – New blood keeps things moving forward. Bye for now. Dean. X

Please note that our website address is: www.fromthehorsesmouth.org.uk