

My Ongoing Journey of Recovery.

Recovery is a word that is used a lot at present within the various mental health services, but what does it mean? I like to think of mine like a car journey, sometimes the road ahead is clear. Sometimes it can be foggy so difficult to see the road ahead. It can be a straight road or at times a long and winding one. Then at times the car will break down and that brings me to a sudden standstill. What I am clear about is that often I need help reading the map to my destinations.

My first episode of being unwell was when I was 19 years old; I spent some time as an inpatient with depression. Two marriages, one of them abusive and 18 years working as a dental nurse/receptionist later I moved to Devon.

The only person I knew when I moved here was my partner, who became abusive. At 37 I became unwell resulting in me taking a large overdose and being referred to a psychiatrist. My then care co-ordinator introduced me to the day services of Community Care Trust; this was to prove a source of ongoing support through difficult times. In late 1996 I spent 4 months as an informal patient in the old Edith Morgan Unit and in 1997 5 months on a section in a locked ward. Here I met some helpful staff and others less so, but one stands out, he believed in me when I didn't believe in myself, he inspired me with hope that I could come out of the darkness and back into the light. He was right. I was discharged from secondary services in 1999 age forty.

I decided it was time for me to face my demons from the past, so started seeing a private therapist. Then shortly afterwards, I started a degree course. I had periods of ill health throughout my time at university but with the support of a good G.P., and my therapist, plus the friends I made, both whilst in hospital and at university were invaluable in times of self-doubt and in 2003 I gained my degree.

During a particularly difficult time in 2002 I was referred back into secondary services. In 2003 I started applying for jobs in my chosen career but had the uncertainty of not knowing if my past/present mental health issues would mean I was unemployable. This was an anxiety provoking time but my consultant psychiatrist proved a source of excellent support, she treated me as an equal partner in my care, giving me information and choices about my treatment including medication. I was eventually allocated a care co-ordinator, I wrote my own care plan, and on the day of my occupational health assessment she rang me to check how I was, even though it was her day off.

I was successful in obtaining employment but unfortunately I was retired on health grounds after three years. I was particularly unwell at times resulting in various inpatient admissions, often for my own safety. At times mental health services and some workers within those services dim my hope, they have exacerbated my mental ill health by seeing me as a label not a whole person, but there are many who have re-ignited that hope and promote my right to choice and control. It is those who have and still are supporting my journey, along with my social network, which includes some very patient and helpful friends. More recently I have started going to the women's network, which is another element of my recovery journey, meeting new people and a reason in the difficult times to make that effort to leave the house. When I am well I have a good and fulfilling life, but due to the recurring nature of my mental ill health, it can sometimes be a rocky road.

Sometimes I come to a standstill; this recently resulted in another hospital admission. I was locked up in London on a section. I am now once more moving forward, my journey is made easier through having many supportive friends, an excellent care co-ordinator who is caring and compassionate, she treats me with respect and works in an equal and collaborative way. I have accepted that at times I will have setbacks, but I now don't see them as failures, but as opportunities to gain fresh insight, allowing me to grow and change, to build on my strengths.

Diane