

At peace at last...
but still alive to '*tell the tale*'

thanks to my three 'Guardian Angels'

So, you think suicide is a selfish act. I challenge you to read this story and tell me that people like me are not in a living hell and it is society, our work places, the NHS, sometimes our own 'friends and family', the housing executive and just about everyone around us that give Satan the whips to lash us with, and you will never know the day they strike for you:

I'm sure you've heard the expression "**I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy!**". It is my belief good people (which most of us are), if we suffer long enough and severe enough we actually go beyond that expression and would do almost ANYTHING to ensure no-one suffers as we have and have **extreme** empathy for those that do.

I would like to assure you that my wish for this story to go out into the great wide world and especially across my beloved Northern Ireland (in spite of it's violent history), is in no way vanity. I am not that kind of person, but as I say, I am prepared to do almost ANYTHING if it in any way stops others suffering as I have and does anything at all to change the society I live in which attacks people like me from almost every advantage point there is.

I was extremely 'lucky' to have had the right '*Guardian Angel*' at the right time. How many other people out there, either don't have them or realise that they are right beside them, right now? But I very much doubt you believe me? I challenge you to read this entire story and tell me different! My further challenge to society in general is to offer your hand of help, rather than your pointed finger of blame, shame and damnation.

It is my hope that this story will take you on an amazing roller-coaster ride with tears of sorrow and tears of joy, entertainment and most of all enough information to protect yourself or a loved one should they ever have the misfortune to experience any of the lows that I have, or indeed the 'highs' which can sometimes be just as traumatic, especially picking up the 'wreckage' of the hours before. But I don't want this to be just a weepy, so I've added as much humour as I possibly can.

Besides, the keyboard is already getting wet and I've already been electrocuted twice (accidentally) and aimed for a third attempt trying to put up a computer shelf, boring through the wall and into the cable that was powering the drill. Let's just say the drill liked it even less than I did. I'm now banned from doing anything electrical anywhere around the house, maybe that's just as well.

I do not regard myself as any different or any more important than anyone else and it is my belief that we all have our own remarkable stories to tell if only we ever got the opportunity. I don't know about you, but I like to take every opportunity I get to achieve the things I really want to achieve and sometimes all I wanted, was to be 'normal'. I never wanted to be an astronaut (I don't like heights!), or a race car driver or anything like that. All I wanted when I was a child was to be a 'granddad'. Granddad was a special person in my life. He wasn't like a real dad - dads and mums tell you what to do, what not to do, when to do it and how you haven't done it properly. Granddad wasn't like that. He had lots of time for me and I had lots of time for him, so all I dreamed of was that, one day, I would be a granddad too!

Wherever I went with my farming grandparents, usually visiting 'old fogies' around the country, usually on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, I would hear my grandmother say the same thing, time and time again. "Melvyn is such a quiet boy, but one day he'll come out of his shell, one day." Often, particularly when attending primary school I dreamed of having a

shell. I would have climbed into it and never came out!

I would have participated in conversation, but what does a six year-old or even a 10 year-old talk to 'old fogies' about - "false teeth!" I didn't have any... so what would I know about false teeth, home baked apple pies or Joe Bloggs from across the fields whom I never met before or even knew existed. For all I know he's still out there somewhere, and someone should probably go and check to see if he's ok! Please take note of this as I hope you will be as amazed as I am at how my life has turned out.

It was just before Christmas and the Millennium celebrations were being prepared and the millennium bug was going to wipe out all of humanity. I have come to the conclusion now that I see the world differently to everyone else. In my world my eyes appear to be more open to everyone and everything in it. This doesn't seem to be the case with most - or any - of those around me, including those I hold dearest. In my world, everyone else appears to be '**blinkered off**' or even '**blinded**' by one or more of the great sins - Greed, Lust, and Fear being the most blinding of all I think!

Through my eyes

Take greed for example. Do you see that giving a pound to a charitable organisation is a pound out of your pocket? What I see is that if I had all the money in the world, I still couldn't be sure of the safety of my children, their children or their children's children or any other loved one.

If I knew they were going to have cancer, I could raise funds for cancer research and trust that a cure could be found. If I knew that they were going to have difficulty with drug addiction, I could donate money to a drug addiction charity, or if I knew that they were going to marry a madman and suffer violence at home, I could give money to Women's Aid... but I don't.

I have no way of knowing what life is going to throw at any of my children or any other loved ones, what God's plans are (if there is a God), or even what they would do with all the money after I died.

The best way to ensure the safety and well-being of my children and their children and so on and so on is to ensure that I do what I can to protect those around me. Sometimes that will be donating to charity and

sometimes it will be donating something far, far more precious - TIME.

You can always get more money, even if you have to steal it from a bank. Can you get that time back to do the things you would have liked to do, after being sent to jail for stealing the money? If we all did our best to care for those around us then we would be safe in the knowledge that our own children and other loved ones are also similarly protected. Of course there are bad people about, but there are far, far more good people out there than bad ones - just open your eyes, be honest and look around you!

Alas, I'm a dreamer I hear you say. Well so what if I am. This is the world as I see it and it can be a very, very lonely and hurtful place to be if you are the only one who seems to see things as I do. Perhaps, this was the reason then that as others prepared for their millennium celebrations, my preparations were rather less happy. Almost overnight I began craving suicide. I knew not why. And it was the WHY? bit that really bothered me. Perhaps if I had known why, I would have been able to do it, but I didn't, and I couldn't.

'Guardian Angel'

Dear grandmother stepped in and demanded that I be taken to see HER doctor. I may have been 26 years old but I had never been to a doctor before. What were they going to do? You can't change what someone thinks, CAN YOU? Actually, it turns out, THEY CAN!

I don't remember what I said to what would soon become **my** GP, but I know I was talking about God and that if I knew if he was really there or not it would be very helpful. I still remember her answer so clearly, "I hope you don't expect me to know!" It must have seemed to her as though I had gone there simply to ask her if she could tell me if God was real or not. Yea, yea, laugh now, but it wasn't funny at the time. I had tears tripping me and my grandmother beside me not knowing what to say, do or where she could hide!

My GP would become my first **'Guardian Angel'**. Guardian Angels can be one of two things. If there really is a God, and he really does have angels, and those angels can take human form, then these people are precisely that. Sent by God himself to guide or protect me. When my mind is more settled, they are simply key *'strangers'* in my life, complete

with 'normal' lives of their own, but without them I probably wouldn't be alive today and I owe them everything I have.

I was immediately put onto anti-depressants and assured that if these didn't work there were any number of others to try. It's now over 13 years since these first events and with memory problems among my difficulties (particularly when it comes to times and dates and even the order of things) it will be difficult to get things exactly right, but I'll do my best. Soon after taking the anti-depressants, I felt great. They really did change the way I thought. So, now that I'm thinking 'properly' again I can come off the anti-depressants - RIGHT! Oops.

It was a difficult process finding medication that I could cope with. Sometimes I had all the side effects on that list inside the box - all except for one. I guess you can't both need to sit on the toilet and not need the toilet at the same time - so I managed to miss one of the side effects. Another, made me feel like I was having a heart attack. What a strange feeling. In my head I was craving suicide, but my heart was pounding like it was about to burst, having it's own little craving never to give in - I both craved to live and die at the same time.

All I really remember is that it was terrifying, but should I tell?, or could I really have a heart attack. At least then it wouldn't be my fault, and with that thought came so much relief. I think in the end I decided to tell, or maybe someone noticed me, I don't remember, but I'm back on yet another type of medication, after a GP physical check. Physically, I'm fine - I don't know whether I'm pleased or disappointed. I think of others who are physically ill and desperate to be well again, so now I feel guilty as well. If only I had the ability to swap places with them I would, I really, really would.

I returned to my GP again and again head in hands, tears flowing and nose - well you can guess the rest. Time and time again I was put back on medication. Each time I went back to my GP I felt absolutely terrible. The worst in the world. My GP provided intolerable patience and empathy, and it is clear that what she is annoyed about the most is the needless suffering I am putting **myself** through, simply because I won't stay on my medication. As I sat briefly with my GP, everyone was more important than me and all I was doing was holding up the next person in the waiting room.

But remember, my GP is no ordinary GP. She's a '*Guardian Angel*' who assured me that I was just as important to her as any of her other patients and that I was entitled to the same amount of time as anyone else, perhaps more so for I never felt pushed out and great care was taken to assure me that I could make an emergency call if I needed it.

I don't believe I abused that option, but I did use it from time to time and I don't know what goes on in the back offices of my GPs surgery but it appeared when I called to ask for an appointment it seemed as though they knew who I was straight away. Mind you I was always in tears, so perhaps that gave them a clue! These days I get to wait a few weeks for an appointment, just like everyone else and while you may complain about it, I am so glad to be in the same position you are.

Craved Suicide

I craved suicide on a daily basis and usually for hours at a time, but I strive to go to work as much as possible for four more years. I even remember my boss calling me down to his office one day. I couldn't help myself doodling little coffins and crosses on pieces of paper, but I thought I was very careful to get rid of all of them.

Unfortunately, my boss found one of them when he was using my computer one day. Having called me down to his office, he questioned me about it and I assured him that it was nothing. It made me a bit uncomfortable that he had found out what I was trying really hard to keep secret. Up to now, all he knows is that I suffer from 'depression'. When I first told him, he asked what I had to be 'depressed' about? I shrugged my shoulders, I didn't know why?

I am NOT one of those people who see sick days as an extension of their holidays, yet I exceed the limits. This gives my mind another stick to beat me with. During this time I would be off numerous times with my doctors note simply saying due to 'Depression'. Each time, my absences would get longer and longer, but why? Everything got very slow.

I remember never being able to get enough sleep. I would go straight home from work and into bed, get up late for work and even come home during my one hour lunch break and sleep, often running late to get back, and then straight back to sleep after work again. I wasn't hugging the

bed, I simply couldn't keep my eyes open, sometimes I even fell asleep in work. (how embarrassing!)

I was a 'people pleaser' and whenever someone said jump, I said how high. No wonder then when I was coming down or up the narrow stairs at work, people would normally stand to the side to let me past. I worked in a local newspaper and the editor always needed things done at least 10 minutes ago, so although I was polite, I never had time to walk slowly behind someone else who was on the stairs and delaying my 'whatever'. But that was when I was well, now I was different. Now I was stopping, to let others past who weren't even in any particular hurry. I don't recall my exact thoughts at the time, but if you can put yourself in my place at this time, perhaps you can imagine them as well as I can.

I do remember feeling like a zombie, going up the street and literally holding onto the walls and shop windows; holding onto the railings on the staircase and almost tripping over every step both up and down the stairs. I couldn't even sit on the chair sometimes without being frightened of falling off. People would stare and wonder, and even come just to look at me as I tried to hide away in an empty office.

You call me selfish for wanting to take my own life, yet when I am having those thoughts all I ever think about is how everyone else would be better off if I was dead. I have no idea, what will happen to me after I die. Flames of hell for all eternity? Well, maybe that's just what I deserve. Sent back to do it all again, well then maybe I'll be a better person next time around. Or just nothing, aaaah, peace, it is all over - it is done!

But what if there is a God and God does forgive me. Will I be an angel looking down on the world below me and I get to see the rest of my family in mourning and watch the inevitable effects on them for the rest of their lives? My mind is in torment, my compass has no idea which way to go any more than I do, so all I aim for is the path of least pain, even if it is just curled up in the fetal position somewhere, anywhere.

It was not selfishness that drove me to tears. It was the 'knowledge' that I would never be able to achieve any of what I wanted to - girlfriend, home, reasonable income, job where I felt even just a little sense of respect, friends and family that thought as much about me as I thought about them.

Please remember that during these times I am unable to think rationally, so

why are my family - even those closest to me - '*making me*' feel guilty about taking my own life when all I really want to do - NEED to do - is to be 'put down' so I can escape the world of laughter, cruelty and torture, that glees at pointing their finger in my direction. And it was the knowledge of the effect it would have on others, in particular my parents, brother and sisters that left me in pools of tears many, many times. How is that selfish?

On one occasion, I think someone was leaving work, I was at a bar with colleagues. One of them leant over to speak to me. "I don't mean this in a gay way or anything," he said, but you know you have to "Love" yourself. I don't remember my reply, probably just nodded my head in agreement, but in my head I was thinking if only you knew. If I go through an entire day, just 'hating' myself, I've done extremely well.

I didn't know what was happening and I always questioned whether I was just 'putting it on'. One day, when I was feeling well, I tried acting like a zombie and I felt completely 'idiotic'. I had made sure no-one was around me of course, but I still felt completely 'stupid'. It was at that point, because I felt differently, I knew for sure I wasn't just 'putting it on', but how could I be sure others didn't think so. So let's introduce ourselves to *Paranoia*.

'Paranoia' & 'Stupidity'

I think I was introduced to my friend *Paranoia* in primary school, although I can't be sure. Nowadays he's an old friend who likes to drop in just now and again, especially if your feeling a little down. What a nice friend to have! But at least *Paranoia* just drops around now and again, my other friend is one of those friends you simply can't get rid of no matter how much you try.

Her name is 'Stupidity', I'm sure 'Stupidity' is a girl, at least I hope so - and trust that you know I mean no offence in saying so - because she has a bit of a crush on me and simply won't go away.

I really don't like 'Stupidity', but she definitely likes me. 'Stupidity' was in many of my classes at primary school because she helped me a lot with my schoolwork, and especially when giving answers out loud in class. I've never been able to get rid of her ever since and when I am with her I often wish the ground would just '*swallow me up*'!

One day, when I was in P4 or P5 (about 7 or 8 years old) the teacher drew an oval shape on the board and asked us what other shape it looked like. If you know who I am and were in my class you probably will remember this day just as well as I do.

Of course the answer is a circle, and I knew the answer, I really did. But everyone had their hands up, 'pleading' the teacher to ask them to give the answer. Had you been asked and said 'circle' you could have been the 'teacher's pet' all day!

But, 'Stupidity' knows a better answer. "You don't want to say the same as everyone else, you know you have a better answer." I do know I have a better answer because I just watched a science programme only the night before or something, explaining how you can never have the perfect circle.

Of all the people in the class, who do you think the teacher chose to ask? Yep, and Yep, I gave my 'better' answer than everyone else. I think "Stupidity" almost choked herself laughing that day as I gave my answer. So knowing that you can't have a perfect circle, I said "Square"! I thought if you can't have a perfect circle, surely you could take an oval and turn it into the perfect square.

I wasn't asked by the teacher to explain my answer. She was too busy dragging me by the ear to spend the rest of the day in a P1 class.

"No matter what I do or say, 'Stupidity' will not, go away!"

Strangers

I was once in tears in my own car outside a shop when I heard a loud knock on the window. "Are you ok," a man asked. I didn't like to say what I was really thinking about so I said I was suffering from a migraine, only for the man to tell me a whole story about how his son suffers from migraine and how terrible it is. I told him I was ok now and we parted company.

On another occasion, I was at the citizens advice centre about something. I was outside waiting on a family member to pick me up. I felt very dizzy and was sitting on the edge of the kerb, trying to hold back uncontrollably

tears, only for a complete stranger to ask me if I was ok. I think he came from the Samaritans office across the street but I'm not sure. I tried to reassure him I was ok. These incidents are a little awkward, but it's always nice to know that the people around you care and that if someone I loved needed help, there are many who would offer that help, in spite of what society sometimes likes to believe.

Around this time I was also attending a psychiatrist and soon after that a social worker. Listening to my 'gibberish' about wanting a home and feeling lonely, I do not blame either of them for thinking - that because I was still living with my parents, getting me into a property of my own would probably help. I wasn't so sure, but I'm not sure if I said anything. I was definitely worried if this was the right thing to do though.

Remember, I am still having craving thoughts of suicide and I'm not so sure that being on my own is the right thing to do, even if I am complaining about not being able to afford my own home - but what do I know? Forms were completed and I was put on the Housing Executive waiting list and given extra points (I think) for overcrowding.

Housing Executive

Still being treated with anti-depressants my cravings of suicide would continue, still almost on a daily basis, sometimes for hours or days or minutes - you never could tell. I was offered a flat and immediately took myself to the Housing Executive.

Remember, I'm already having absolute craving thoughts of suicide, putting me into a property where I am likely to be mugged or burgled wasn't really going to help, so I thought it prudent to find out about the flat's previous history.

Regardless of the embarrassment, I did explain my situation that I was suffering severe depression, but was assured that this was a great area and even shown a glossy leaflet describing it as so, and it was just off a lovely, well-kept public park - perhaps this was tailor made just for me.

Tailor made my *backside!* Within a couple of weeks my car had been broken into twice with drug addicts seeking any change left lying in any of the pockets and was soon followed by a break-in of the property.

The police were very nice about it all. Two of them stood at the door, one laughing at me accepting the property due to the high level of drug problems in the estate. I have lived in my home town all of my life, but I've never even dabbled never mind be active in the drug world, so how am I supposed to know where all the drug dens were or are?

Another very nice officer, politely spoken, came to offer advice. I asked if there was anything I could do to protect myself better. "Because I'm on the ground floor and this door has been broken into a number of times before (showing me all the previous damage to the door frames), there's very little you can do," I was told. "Even if I did manage to barricade up the door somehow, they'd just come in through any of the windows. They'd be in and out before any police officer could get there."

I enquired about the likelihood of them being caught and was basically told that they wouldn't be spending very much time even looking for them. "They are drug addicts," said the officer. "If we spend time catching them, they'll just go to court and be let off anyway, so it's just a waste of police time."

Please don't misunderstand. I'm not actually complaining about the police. They're probably just right in what they said, but they are in a position to know where the drug dens are - I'm not, so laughing at me really doesn't help! So, I have no other choice but to go back to my parents home. Now with a brand new kitchen table, sofa, chairs and so on. If it was overcrowded before - I guess this is what you call 'sardines in a tin'!

By the way, my social worker was GREAT, really. A very nice lady who gave me an enormous amount of time, but if there is a lesson to be learned here, perhaps in future someone with a similar condition to mine could have the property checked properly for any history of crime. Here's another idea, how about the Housing Executive being required to tell any new tenants about any previous crime history over the last 10 years! But what do I know?

Had I known what I was getting into, it's not true to say that I wouldn't have taken the property. If it's a case of accepting this one or waiting months more for another, perhaps I still would have taken the chance, but I wouldn't have taken some of my most 'sentimental' items with me where they would

be stolen and never recovered.

I could have done more to put an extra lock on the door or just furnish the property with old second hand items, etc.. - but I was lied to by the Housing Executive who at best, either didn't know or didn't want to know the true history of the property! Does anyone else think this kind of thing is simply not good enough and needs looking into?

I called the Housing Executive and asked them why they lied to me and, of course, they claimed they didn't know anything about any previous crime history of the property. So I called the police to see why they hadn't told the Housing Executive about the previous break-ins. They told me that it was a matter of procedure to inform the Housing Executive about every crime associated with their properties. You know, the usual drill of one blaming the other.

I'm sure I took this up with my political representative by the way. I think we all have a responsibility, if we see a problem to try and do what we can to prevent others from harm, but I was too ill to keep chasing it and that is why I raise it once again - to prevent further harm to people already in great suffering - **PLEASE!**

Anti-Social

I know I am stepping way out of line here, because I have never been to college myself and therefore have no ability to come up with any sensible policies of my own. But let's try one anyway, this is after all an opportunity, and you know what I like to do with opportunities!

There is in my opinion only two reasons why the Housing Executive would have placed me in a house where there were numerous drug problems. Either they hate me so much (and if they do, would they please tell me why) that they actually want me to take my own life, either that or they are complete idiots! I'd love to know which and if they are idiots who were on those interview panels.

There has been a case recently on the news which I am sure we all remember of a lady and her disabled daughter being involved in a 'double suicide' because of anti-social behaviour, does anyone think they were

selfish, or was it the system who abused them to their graves.

There will always, unfortunately, be people who throw stones, shout abuse and steal personal belongings from others. But why does the Housing Executive assist them to steal from me and abuse me by placing either me with them or them with me.

Can I suggest that instead of Housing Executive spending millions of pounds building houses and then spending millions of pounds more to demolish them again because of the people THEY put in them, that they instead spend one million building a block of flats beside the local police station where, when the need compels them, people can throw stones and hurl abuse at the police who are much better equipped and trained to handle it.

Even better, why not build a ring of flats around each Housing Executive office building where those working in the Housing Executive can be pelted by stones themselves, walk over drug needles on their way into work and glide their own way into work through cheers of abuse towards *them*.

If someone has never been taught the manners or has the respect to live in a respectable area, then they shouldn't be given the opportunity to. Instead it seems clear that there are those in our community who would be much better suited to a 'mental illness' type of accommodation, while others who have the ability to live in 'harmony' with those around them simply choose not to and they should only be offered the opportunity to live with those who think likewise, or until they provide some evidence that they are ready to. But what do I know?

Craving

So now I'm back at home once more, still (as I recall) trying to go to work and when I come home the sun is literally driving me crazy. Perhaps it's just too bright, or I'm annoyed because I can't get out to enjoy it like everyone else can, but it's doing my head in - and not just today, this has been going on for weeks.

For some as yet unknown reason to me, I find myself just lying at the top of the stairs. I know I'm not seeking attention - HONEST, but don't ask me what I am doing there, because to this day I simply just don't know. But, it

gets a little worse than that, because if I'm not lying at the top of the stairs, I'm lying on the bathroom floor curled around the base of the toilet somewhere. Why? I don't know, so you'll just have to guess for me and whatever you decide that's fine by me. My craving thoughts continue, regardless of the numerous changes to my medication.

OK, let's look into this a little. What exactly am I craving? Death, yes of course, but how, where, when, do I write a letter, and to who, to everyone, to just one person, who do I want to find me and what state will I be in when they do, what will everyone say, how will people react towards my family afterwards whom I love so much and love me so much. I have a really close family, so why the hell do I want to kill myself? Why? Why? Why?

What will happen to my family, each and every member, my dog, what about my belongings, is there anything I want to leave anyone in particular, would they even want it. I would try to get rid of stuff but I'm in no state of mind to do that and when I would have the ability to do it, I'm not craving suicide that much so why would I when all I really want is to live a normal life and keep going.

How many times have I told myself, it's ok I'll be better tomorrow, I'll be better this time next week, I'll be better this time next month, two months, three months. But it never gets better and every little thing that happens triggers the whispers all the more. Even the things that are happening to other people, because you know if you were feeling better you would be able to help, so once again even what is happening to other people becomes YOUR fault.

Can I just say to anyone hearing this. If you have an argument with someone and they go on to take their own life - it is **NOT YOUR FAULT**. It is 'normal' to have arguments, you wouldn't be 'normal' if you didn't have arguments. Arguments and even saying things - you really wish you hadn't - is a normal part of life. As I will find out all too soon as I attend a 'speed date'.

Mental Illness isn't 'normal'. If I had had an argument with someone and went on to take my own life, it would have been because I wasn't well enough to cope with 'normal' life and 'normal' things happening. It wouldn't have been the fault of the person I had had the argument with. Further, it wouldn't have been their fault any more than not being on the right

medication, having the right doctor or any of the other 'imperfect' things going on around me.

If you really have to blame yourself, make sure you take account of how things could have been different if others had acted differently too! It is not your fault that you weren't made perfect - who is?

Letter

If I had taken my life and left my family in terrible mourning, I would have liked to have said this: "It was not any lack of love that led me to it. It was not an argument or any failure on your part. It was, if anything, failure on my part. My failure not to get back up onto my feet or have the ability to.

My failure to have the ability to fight the demons around me - whatever they be. It was not done with any malice to get back at you, although at times the system that was supposed to be helping me, did sometimes drive me further into 'madness'.

It is almost certain that I didn't have the ability to think rationally at the time. You would have been in my thoughts right to the very last breath and I would have been pleading for your forgiveness for all the pain that lay ahead for you.

I would have hated myself for doing it - but please try to understand that in my head I am already the worst in the world, isn't this the obvious thing to do when you think yourself as such a horrible, cruel even evil person and you hear the whispers in your head telling you that it is 'inevitable' and it is finally 'time', you have 'suffered enough'.

The pain I suffered, was at times 'unbearable' and all I could see was that you would be better off without me - really. And not just you - everyone! I would not have wanted you to spend the rest of your life mourning me. I would have wanted you to be thankful that I was out of my suffering, just as a terminally ill patient in hospital.

I would have wanted you to remember me during the 'happier' times and be thankful that we had them. I know I was, and yet would have been only too glad to give them all up never to have had them if it were to save you this pain. If it were possible for me, I would have chosen not to be born at

all.

If I were able to, then I would most certainly have been further tortured after my death by watching you have your own lives destroyed mourning me - whether by sadness, anger, blaming yourself, or whatever.

Do you see how my mind can become as two people. For now that I am thinking much more clearly I have at least the ability to say all of that. When I am craving suicide, I can't think what to say or even if I should try to say anything at all.

Bipolar?

Ok, then, I think that's enough of that because there's something more going on, that I haven't expressed to anyone I don't think. I've told my GP and psychiatrist about my suicidal cravings, but I haven't told them about my highs and I've just recently joined an organisation called Aware Defeat Depression and before long I'm getting more involved and going to meetings. Soon I become more aware of a condition called Bipolar and something called 'grandiose delusions'. Now, something is clicking!

I need to tell people about my highs. It's been literally years of taking and changing anti-depressants, but why would I tell anyone about the times when I feel as high as a kite - I don't need medication for those times - I feel absolutely on top of the world - in fact sometimes I AM the world and I have the ego/arrogance to prove it.

Website

I have this fantastic idea for a website - No, it's not because I'm a 'nut' it really is fantastic. If Google can profit by billions, this thing will generate 10 times, 100 times, 1,000,000 times the funds and it's ALL going to charity - because sometimes I'm on a mission from GOD!

But even when my mind settles itself down, it's still a great idea - everyone around that takes the time to look at it properly thinks so, and when I get it up and running for a short period I myself find it extremely useful.

I use it to access local services without being limited to just my own town/city. I link it to various cinema websites (Ballymena, Antrim,

Yorkgate, wherever) - and it's still going to have an enormous financial input into charities everywhere, as well as helping to promote their services to those who really need help and don't know where to find it and really could help save lives.

I first had the idea a few years ago when every Tom, Dick and Harry was building websites. Do you remember back then. You typed in where you wanted to go to, let's say 'TickTack' and half an hour later a page told you that you had arrived at 'TickTack'. That's WHY I typed 'TickTack' idiots!!! I didn't need a page saying 'TickTack', I just wanted to visit the main website, so now I have to click again and wait another half-hour. And there were little or no search engines back then, so if you didn't know the exact website name, you had no way of finding where to go. The frustration just got too much and I scribbled down on a little piece of paper how I would do things.

But I have one problem, I know nothing about websites. What really did start off on the back of a piece of scrap paper, has now turned into a lever-arch file, all about what I'm going to do, how it's going to look and how it will operate, but I am not a computer nerd. In fact, to tell you the truth - I HATE computers! I ask them to do one simple thing like print and... I don't know if you know this or not but printers don't have fingers - that doesn't stop them from showing them to me!!!!

Now, I've just spent nearly 10 years working for a local newspaper - and I'm still working there. I talk to my editor, get a meeting with someone higher up and surely the potential is obvious. There's enormous potential here for them to increase advertising revenue and the fact that most of the funds generated by the website will be going to charity will make great LOCAL news.

You see it's not just about giving them money, it will create a little news article about what the charity does and it is absolutely critical that the article explains exactly how these new funds will be spent. I'm not going to use up my time to generate new funds for them, just so they can drop it into a bank account somewhere. Do you begin to see how things are in MY world, through MY eyes?

I'm armed with my lever-arch file, but remember - I'm living in a world of 'blinkers' and 'the blind'. Worse than just being blind, they've lost the

ability to hear what I'm trying to say, or perhaps it's all my own fault because I just haven't explained it properly. They think I want them to put their news on my website or something and I don't, completely the opposite, but it's too late. I had a chance, not a very good one, but I did have a chance and I blew it. Not only that but I get a letter from my employer telling me that I'm not even aloud to talk about my website in work as it is deemed to be in competition with them or something!

Like I said - blinkers and blindness. Perhaps I was too arrogant, a personality flaw, or a result of my illness? It could have been such a fantastic partnership, but I blew it, and once again everything is my fault. I can't do anything right and people are suffering right now who don't need to be because of it.

I had talked to my editor frequently about it and he accuses me one day of having someone else, or some other organisation, in the background. I smiled - it seemed to me that for the first time in my life I wasn't a complete idiot and I had created or said something right. I told him, thanks for saying so, but there really isn't anyone else - it's just me. He looks a bit gob-smacked and shrugged his shoulders. I don't know if he believes me or not, but I feel really good inside and I don't really care!

I'm sure he seen the benefits and the potential (probably of great wealth), but it wasn't his decision and simply referred it on. He had clearly been looking over it, because he noticed my 'Robin Hood Initiative' which is what I called they way I was going to get advertising revenue and see it diverted straight to a local charity.

As we talked in the newspaper office, I was asked "Is this your baby?" "Baby", I thought, it's just an idea for a '*website*'. As I thought about it afterwards, actually, YES, it is my baby. I designed it from the very beginning, it's still only in a lever-arch file at this stage, but it is definitely my baby and I protect it and nurture it to the best of my ability. I only ever want the best for it and I look forward so eagerly to it's birth on the internet.

Anyway, I guess I just have to do it on my own - and I will. I've never been so determined to do anything in my life because, through my own illness, I know the need and you wouldn't let someone drown in a swimming pool would you without trying to help - well, I certainly wouldn't anyway!

God to the rescue. A leaflet has just come in telling me that I can buy this wonderful software for just 30 pounds or something and it's a simple way of building websites. Perfect! Talk about things happening at just the right time. I had never seen anything like it before coming through 'junk mail' and never since.

It's a bit difficult to understand at first and it doesn't do exactly what I want, but it's a start and before you can believe it, I've just taken my website to over 3,000,000 hits, yep three million, in spite of being told it wouldn't work - and not only that - I've raised a little money for three local charities. Add to that that it has a 90 percent success rate in attracting advertisers (from Google to Tesco to a local estate agents to Harrods, London and pretty much everyone you can think of) and you must be onto a winner, right!

One local club even asks me why this hasn't been done before? I'm not quite sure how to answer a question like that! By now I'm also putting small businesses and clubs on the internet for the first time and have space to provide them with a simple website for just a very small price (50 pounds I think).

They only get a small website, but if all you need is to say what you do and provide an address and a phone number or even just a photocopy of your menu, it works perfectly fine. At least until you decide you want something more professional - and that bit is over to someone else (I'm not a computer nerd remember, and I can't and probably never will (or want to) write my own computer programmes which others can). But, I really need one thing. Publicity.

Three local charities get the money direct from three different advertisers: Woman's Aid use their money to help in the costs of a Fundraising Ball; Samaritans use their money to help in the costs of a mobile unit to tour local schools in an attempt to stop suicide among schoolchildren; Commission based advertising from none other than web giant Google saw Ballymena Family and Addicts Support also receive a donation which they will put towards the purchase of bottle caps to help prevent 'drug rape'.

The sums of money aren't big - not yet anyway - but, especially to the smaller charities, they are absolutely critical and it's only a very, very first step for the website. With a little publicity, the potential is enormous and I have my eyes further opened to what is happening just around the corner

in a town I have lived in all my life.

I can't give up now, can I, knowing the need in the community. It would be like letting someone drown in a river as you just walk past. If you want to know my background, I'm from a *very* protestant estate. There is no love for Sinn Fein around here, we blame them for all the troubles and all the deaths - particularly on 'our side', it's easier that way, if you can put all the troubles onto the shoulders of just 'them over there'.

So, when I approach local politicians for help in promoting my website and verify that the money really has gone to charity, getting a DUP rep. is an easy option. But, this website is for everyone - oh no! Please no! I can't do that, not them! Yes, even them. I have no option, the next politician I contact for assistance HAS to be a Sinn Fein rep.. I meet her, get the job done and all is well. She didn't even have any horns that I could notice.

'coma'

This is news, right? A DUP rep. and a Sinn Fein rep. have both verified that I have donated funds (ok a small amount of funds), to at least two local charities, but it's really what those charities do and how they are going to use the funds that I thought were the real news. Perhaps even what I was trying to do was news, but what do I know?

I have a photograph of the advertiser, and a recipient from the charity and the political rep.. I've even done my own write-up on exactly what the charity does and how the funds will assist them. Like I say, financial and promotional assistance of local charities - why do one, when you can do both! I send the photos and details into my old employer and - as I recall anyway - am told that they *will* use it. To the best of my knowledge, and of course I remember looking, it never appears. Perhaps I've gone blind.

Knowing that support from at least one large charity could really assist in the promotion of the website, I approached at least two when an appropriate opportunity arose. I did this because I had thought that I was putting charities at the heart of my website and that, therefore, they should be prepared to help me. But I was wrong in two ways.

Firstly, it appears to me, at least, that as charities get bigger and bigger,

they develop a layer of beurocracy that cares more about protecting the organisation than protecting whatever it was they were set up to protect in the first place and secondly I was not putting charities at the heart of my website. No. I was putting the most vulnerable people in our society at the heart of this website - or at least doing my best to try to. It took a while for the penny to drop, but I did get there in the end, and quite simply - some charities aren't worth the bother. I don't think there is anything I dislike more than making the same mistake twice.

I joined the Federation of Small Businesses and talked to them, I went to various business functions and completed a Go For It, Business Start Programme, I talked to anyone and everyone I could. I asked questions at business functions until I'm basically told to keep quite and let others ask questions (but no-one else has any questions???).

Then one day I arrive at the Waterfront (I think) in Belfast, where there is a talk from a non-director (I think) from none other than Dyson. I get the microphone, but stress takes over my body, I can't find the words and my question turns into an appeal for help, which is 'scoffed at'. "Does anyone else want to make an appeal," come the words from the stage. Afterwards a lady comes down to talk to me and give me encouragement.

The stress is just too much. I have no help, no money and no means to promote the site - in short - in spite of everything and all that could have been - I have no real opportunity. Perhaps, only naturally, I blame God - if he's even there! What is the point of Him giving me this fantastic idea, forcing me to bring it to life by the realisation - through my own cravings for suicide - of the genuine need within my own community and yet no means to make it happen?

But it did work and it can work again, if only I get a proper chance and that vital component of opportunity that any good idea really needs. It's incredibly hard to stop working on it, but I have to shelve it - at least for a while - I keep thinking of all the organisations that could have benefited and the people who need that help the most. Worst of all I completely blame myself for what I am simply unable to do on my own.

It was my own illness and that phrase 'I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy' that drove me to get the site up and running in the first place - I'd had the idea for years before that, but never the guts - or drive - to get it out

of that lever-arch file! I guess I just didn't see the need. I certainly didn't see the opportunities that it could provide to the community. The compulsion of personal financial wealth, just wasn't great enough for me.

I **was** able to bring the website to life, but only briefly and it was possibly the hardest thing I have ever had to do to put 'my baby' into a 'coma' and place it on the shelf and await a proper opportunity to revive it. I'm still waiting for that opportunity.

I recall my grandfather saying once that he felt it was his job as a farmer to leave the farm in a little bit better condition for the next person. Imagine if we all did what we could to leave the world in a little bit better condition for the next person, each doing just a little - perhaps most of us do. But if there is any chance that this website could leave the entire world in a little bit better condition for my children and their children - and yours too - perhaps then, it would be worth all the blood, sweat and tears that has been put into it already never mind the ones prepared to follow.

Apparently, Ludwig van Beethoven experienced bipolar disorder, as documented in the book "The Key to Genius: Manic Depression and the Creative Life." Scientist Isaac Newton's mental illness is a subject in "The Dynamics of Creation" by Anthony Storr and "The Key to Genius: Manic Depression and the Creative Life" by D. Jablow Hershman and Julian Lieb. President Abraham Lincoln's first major depression happened in his 20s and he struggled with it for the remainder of his life, in addition to anxiety attacks, according to what I have read.

I don't put myself at the table of any of these great people, but I know I have a great idea for a website, even if it is completely unique and unlike anything anyone has ever attempted to do before. In fact it is because it is unlike anything that anyone has ever attempted to do before that makes it so great.

At least I know now, if I ever do get this website up and running again, any charity that thinks they can simply take the money and run without barely having the decency to say thank you, they are very much mistaken. Small charities are only too pleased to receive every penny and see exactly what I am attempting and are incredibly supportive.

Any future charity receiving donations from the website will have to do

more than simply say thank you - they'll have to prove that they mean it. Small charities have already done this in a number of ways, so why not the bigger ones?

It's easy to blame others for not helping me jump, get around, or indeed under the hurdles that came my way. But in the end, perhaps it is more truthful that it was my own failures. I had too many ideas and tried to do them all at once. I was impatient and wanted to do everything yesterday. I was too ambitious in the amount of advertising revenues I wanted to donate to local charities. It didn't have that professional look that it really needed and above all I tried to do everything myself instead of getting the right person for the job (even if I did look around every rock and under every stone to find that help).

These mistakes don't mean I have a bad idea, they simply mean I have a better understanding how to do things better next time.

Exercise

I attend Aware Defeat Depression meetings regularly, I'm trying to do just simple things like eat properly, get proper sleep and live a normal life as much as possible, but it's all getting me further and further run down. I try to tell my psychiatrist that I think I'm Bipolar and it's not a simple case of depression, but I don't think anyone believes me. No, I know no-one believes me - or is that just my old friend *Paranoia* back for a visit.

They may just see me for a few moments, every few months, but in the end, they're the doctor and I'm the patient, not that I even got much of a chance to see the same person twice (especially in the beginning). Anyway, the patient doesn't tell the doctor what to prescribe, the doctor tells the patient.

Besides, I've been diagnosed as suffering from 'depression' for probably seven years or so by now, and as I complain more and more about not being much better than when I started, it becomes clear to me that once again it's all MY fault. I've had practically every type of anti-depressant there is, and the answer seems to be if the medication isn't working, then there's something ***I'm*** not doing right.

Probably exercise. Exercise is the answer to EVERYTHING. If I'm not

'paralysed' on the sofa, my mind is racing and my body paces often for hours from room to room. Sometimes I just want to get to the bathroom, only for it to take several attempts. But of course, the answer to ALL my problems is EXERCISE, how could I think anything else?

Yes, I have tried exercise and if it works for you - FANTASTIC - it has never worked for me EVER. If I ever want to do 50 sit ups in one go and achieve that, then yes, I have the same good feelings as everyone else. But it does absolutely NOTHING for me when I feel suicidal. But of course, What do I know?

Sometimes when people tell you to do something that they believe will make you better and you don't do it, then it's YOUR fault for feeling the way you do. Other times, even when you do what others think you should do (no matter how ridiculous) and you don't get better - it's still YOUR fault. How does that work? Try it with a door still securely attached to the door frame and see how you get on.

Option A) I want you - I'm telling you - that if you pull that door off its hinges with one hand you will get better. You decide, don't be silly that's simply not going to work so you don't do it. Then Your illness is YOUR fault.

Option B) I want you - I'm telling you - that if you pull that door off its hinges with one hand you will get better. You decide you are prepared to do whatever it takes and try as hard as you can to do what you are being told to.

You pull with one hand, again and again and again until your arm pulls from its socket. You didn't do as you were told and pull the door from its hinges so, therefore, once again it's your fault. Oh, and others will be watching so you now have them laughing at you for attempting such a thing in the first place - congratulations!

Ok so you think that pulling a door off its hinges with one hand is an exaggeration. How about I back this up with an actual event. There are many more examples, but don't particularly care to try and remember them.

One day I was in a very, very bad state and couldn't help the tears flowing from my eyes even though I was in another relatives house. I was made

dinner which was very nice and a good thing to do because not having proper energy levels really isn't going to help. That said, I was no better after dinner than I was before.

It was suggested that if I take the lawnmower and mow the lawn I would feel better. What should I do? Will mowing the lawn make someone feel better? Mmmh, I've never heard of anyone not taking their own life because they had learned how to mow lawns before. Do you think it would really work? Well, let's see.

I did mow the lawn, because I was in such a bad state and the last thing I needed was anyone telling me that I wasn't trying hard enough to get better. I mowed the whole lawn, up and down, up and down and the tears flowed all the way - and after.

Can I just say that I have my own lawn now and my own lawnmower, so if you ever feel suicidal and feel the need to mow my lawn, I'm more than happy to let you.

On another occasion, I was accused of not trying to get better because I was upset and didn't want any ice-cream! Mmmh, somehow I don't think if I had taken the ice-cream I would have made a miraculous recovery and never needed the services of New Horizons - but what do I know?

New Horizons never did this. They had many courses and I attended most of them. But not once did they ever tell me, if I did this or didn't do that that I would get better. They simply offered me options and gave me the choice. If I'm desperate to get better - and I WAS - then I'm going to try everything I can anyway, I don't need to be pushed and pulled this way and that and then when things don't seem to make a difference, feel as though it's all my fault.

Even in the 'stress relief' class I started to feel more uncomfortable than comfortable and was told that it was ok to have my eyes open and sit up rather than lie down. I never said anything, but as I tried to close my eyes and lie back, whispers would gather in my mind telling me to do the opposite of what I was being told and I even had images of 'horror' in the darkness.

Could people please take notice. New Horizons are prepared to listen to

what people like me have to say about how things make us feel without having to explain everything (usually out of embarrassment or perhaps the whispers in our head are telling us not to say anything) - even if it is not the answer they expect. Everyone else seemed to find the relaxation course useful. As usual I completed this course as well, just in case it would help me.

It may be that I don't want to try things because in my mind I am 'embarrassed' about something that I'm not yet ready to tell anyone about, so if I don't want to do something and you really, really think it will make me better - why not ask me WHY and LISTEN or give me the time I need to make that choice?

Some people are so desperate for us to get better (sometimes because they are more embarrassed by our 'mental illness' than we are), that they try to make decisions for us that THEY think will help, but don't take the time to listen or consider that what they are really doing - or suggesting - is actually making things worse. People like me need options that we can choose for ourselves not dictated to. And can people please try to understand that when I am considering suicide my mind isn't thinking as RATIONALLY as yours and sometimes yours isn't rational either!

People seem to think that some mornings I think to myself, I wonder what I'm going to do today or this afternoon. Mmmh. I could watch TV, play a video game, go outside for a walk - no, no. I have a much better idea. I think I'll spend the day craving suicide, with tears flowing from my eyes and in my head at least, say goodbye to everyone and everything that I care about. Yes, that's what I really, really want to do TODAY!

Baby Sister

I guess it was around this time that my younger sister was coming over from London. I haven't mentioned her yet - fancy that. I used to teach her how to read, now she's in a big fancy London law firm. How time flies - and she flies often in many ways. She's the most wonderful human being you could ever meet in your life.

Not that I have favourites between my brother and sisters - I don't - but there's just something about her nature that is truly divine. We come from a rather run-down estate. Of course most of the people in the estate are

great, but for whatever reason it has always attracted its share of unsocial behaviour.

Do you remember a war in Bosnia? Our estate was known among us anyway as 'something out of Bosnia' we had our half-demolished houses and everything, bricked up windows, you name it.

Eventually for whatever reason the Housing Executive appeared to think that demolishing half the houses would solve the problems. It's nice to know that they have plenty of money to build the houses in the first place and then have plenty of money to demolish them again.

Only recently I had all the windows in my housing executive property replaced with double glazed ones. Two of which had already been replaced only a year or so before. Apparently, they needed to be changed again because the rest of the windows were being replaced with white windows and my front windows were brown.

This caused considerable stress and put in jeopardy my work placement and attempts to get back into employment. As usual there was no attempt made whatsoever by the Housing Executive to take account of my state of 'mental health' at the time. Several times I was told that either I got all the windows done on the one day, or none at all. I was just finished decorating the two rooms with the windows that had previously been replaced!

I was extremely anxious about the amount of redecorating that would need to be done, damage to personal belongings, etc. etc. my friend 'Paranoia' was having a party in my head and I was in a 'damned' if I do because of the stress of getting the work done, and 'damned' if I don't because of the effect the old windows were already having on my children due to mould, situation.

Of course, Housing Executive told me that there wouldn't be much mess, but I already knew the mess that was caused when they put in the two previous windows and I wasn't going to let 'Stupidity' tell me to 'trust' the Housing Executive yet again. If you had my previous experiences with the Housing Executive - would YOU? I have to say though, the contractor carrying out the work was much more understanding and ensured that as

little mess was made as possible.

I just don't understand why no-one at the Housing Executive could count how many brown windows, and how many white windows they actually needed?

Executive Again!

Like I told you I'm not getting things in the right order, but it was during this massive renovation of the estate that I had a 'collie' dog which we had taken in as a stray, having been at my sister's house for some time and although several attempts were made to find the owner, they couldn't find them.

My sister thinks that since I've always wanted a dog, this might help me and as I am living at home with my mum at the time, I can't believe she actually lets me. We've wanted a dog for YEARS and my mum has always made it completely clear there will be no dog at this house - EVER. The 'collie' breaks out from the garden and comes back pregnant.

A litter of pups is born and a number of locals take them in. All except for one - a lovely brown and white collie which I have right now. After a time, with our estate now a massive building site, I help drive my sister to her new university place at Cambridge. I debate doing it, but just can't help myself, the pup comes with me (how lucky was I?).

I call the Housing Executive because people are having their fences taken down and I have to leave the pup's mother in the garden. I think about having a chain around her, but I'm scared of her choking herself. 'Stupidity' encourages me to 'trust' the Housing Executive who have assured me that the builders will NOT be anywhere near our house for a number of weeks yet and certainly not while we are away. My brother is happy to look after her, but works during the day.

Obviously the fact that I'm writing about it, I guess I don't even need to tell you what happened. Yep, the fence is away with a temporary cage thing around the garden, with holes beneath it you could drive a herd of cattle through. Perhaps it was the noise of what was going on around her, or just the fact that I wasn't around but the dog has gone and I never know what happened to her.

I fear that she may have been shot in a farmer's field, but I'll never know. My brother blames himself and I blame myself both for the loss of the dog and for my brother feeling bad about it. If only I had taken the extra precaution of chaining her while my brother was at work.

Flossy

How glad am I that I still have the pup I took with me all the way to Cambridge and back! In time she too somehow ended up pregnant and with four pups I think. Again the pups find good homes, except for one (Yes, she's been to the vets and can't have any more).

This pup is just like her mum but has the coat of a stick of candyfloss. I call her Flossy and take her to Portrush one day, the mum on one lead and her on the other and everyone is talking about both of them, but especially 'Flossy', she really is that beautiful. 'Missy' her mum wont mind me writing this because Missy can't read!

If she has a flaw, it is that I am now living in my own flat again and she has become a magician. Time and time again she gets out of the garden, in spite of me time and time again raising the fence - where is she getting out from? I even cover up holes a mouse couldn't escape through.

I look out the window and what do I see? She's a fully grown 'collie' with the tactics of a monkey. My neighbour has a six foot 'pig wire' fence. She is able to put her paws through the holes and climb it paw by paw, and then somehow scramble her body over the top. I simply can't believe my eyes.

On her last escape I fetch her from the dog pound. Having spent so much time on a farm, it is common not to have your dog vaccinated. I know now that it's because generally there are no other dogs around to catch anything from. But I'm not on a farm and I think it was the day after I picked her up from the pound that I have a terrible truth to bear. Will the truth set me free - I doubt it, but I need to share this with you so perhaps someone reading this will not make the same mistake I did and save a poor dog a yelping, miserable, miserable death.

I find her one morning in my kitchen and the kitchen floor is awash with blood. It is as if you had a mop bucket of water and put red dye in it and then poured it from a height in the middle of the kitchen. I don't know what has happened, but eventually I conclude that it is from the dog. I take her to the vets and there is some hope, but only a little. She died in my bedroom and I will take her last breaths with me to my grave whenever that will be. I guess I just handed Satan a whip of my own to lash me with and he does it regularly to great delight, I will spare you any further details about her death.

Goodbye

Ok Melvyn, you digress, my sister is coming from London and I'm in tears again, I just can't hold them back, try as I might. She's only here for a couple of days, and as soon as I see her the waterfalls flow. In my head, this is the last time I will ever see her again. It's just gone on so, so long - the whispers in my head are right, it's inevitable! She hugs me and comforts me and needs to be back in London in just a couple of days.

We might be in one of the most run-down estates in the town, but I guess if you've got the talent and I think more than anything - the drive - I guess you can accomplish anything. She got the grades to attend the best school in the province and makes head girl before going to Cambridge to study law. I'm so lucky, and honoured to have the family I have and yet I still have these cravings for suicide. Why?

I now see that I am like two people. One is completely suicidal (and carries with him the means to do it - it just helps to ease the pain somehow). I am a burden to everyone, I am crying all the time and annoying those that I love and cherish the most. Society calls me selfish just for thinking about suicide. I am a NOTHING, a worse than nothing, I am a NEVER should have been.

If I weren't here, I wouldn't be upsetting them anymore. My mum, dad, brother, sisters. In my head I'm writing letters to them all, then I come to my niece and nephew. How do I write to them. How do I explain why their uncle (who is of course very fond of them and likes to be around them) doesn't want to attend any more of their birthday parties. CRAP! I was just saying goodbye to everyone (in my head at least) but how the hell do I respond to THAT! The pain must go on.

Yet the longer it goes on, the more pieces of the 'final' jigsaw are placed. I now know where to go, what to use, and I know I have to write at least one letter to the police so that - at least - I don't waste their time looking for a murderer. So much for being selfish. Even in my last thoughts, I try to be as little burden to society and my family as I possibly can be. As for the letters, perhaps there's just nothing to write. I just can't think clearly what I would want or could say. Besides, it's obvious, I did it because I am the worst person in the world.

Other me

And then there's that other side of me. This person loves his sisters and brother, mum and dad soooo much that he couldn't even think of suicide. What a terrible thing to do to your family (I still know it's NOT selfish), but why would you ever want to do anything like that. My circumstances are exactly the same as the day before, and yet, everything is rosy, better than that everything is absolutely GREAT.

So what if the newspaper I worked for so long doesn't see the potential of my website. So what if their vision of the world is so narrow that they see nothing but their own fears. I get myself a trailer, get a poster set up and plant it on the driveway into the Saturday market. Hundreds, maybe thousands of people walk past looking at the 'nutter' and his 'One Man Protest!' - I hear that my brother is mortified because his friends have seen it. Of course, I love him just as much as I do my sisters, but this other side of me simply can't stop. I don't even remember exactly what I was protesting about - but no-one was going to stop ME!

Could the ground, please, please, just open up and swallow me. My head lies buried in my hands as I write, I simply can't believe it. And it's not the only weird thing, but my embarrassment will only allow me to go so far. Try as I might, I just don't understand any of it. I guess my will to live, topped up by family, circumstance or plain luck simply outweighs my illness. At least for now.

My older sister is great too. No-one in my family understands what goes on in my head, yet they never blame me and I can see that it is incredibly frustrating for them, but they're always there with a warm hug and a pick-me-up smile. Something to do with pharmacy, my older sister was

advising hospitals on new drugs or something before she left, but now she lives in Australia with her family and - I trust - having a great time (better weather for sure anyway!)

Big Sister

When I was first diagnosed with depression and she often saw the state I was in, lying on the stairs or in the bathroom, crying my eyes out - whatever - I knew she felt absolutely terrible, given her training and yet didn't know what to do or where to go to get help. But she did help, she found a DVD where an Eastenders actor (Pauline's husband?), who had played the part of a 'depressive' explained all about the condition and told of everything that was likely to happen and when things were likely to improve.

It was a fantastic DVD and if you suffer, or know someone who suffers from 'depression' I urge you to try and find it, it's out there somewhere! So, I prepared myself for the next few months when things would start to improve, but they never did?

Before she left for Australia, I promised her I would be ok. We are a close family and we know that we all have to live our own lives and wouldn't wish it to be any other way. I was ok when she left, but despite my assurances I knew that it would have crossed her mind that this could be the last we would see each other. I know I did.

Before leaving though, attempts by her and other family members tried to make things better between me and my psychiatrist. I had requested a change of psychiatrist but that wasn't as easy as had been the case when I changed GP at the very beginning. I was persuaded to give her another try, but my trust had completely gone.

It must have been one of my last meetings with her, when I said, I feel like I would have to bring a knife with me and cut my wrists in front of you before I get the help I need. That didn't go down well at all and I was accused of threatening her or her staff and that was completely unacceptable. But I didn't have a knife and that wasn't what I said anyway! I told her I don't think I have depression? "No, I don't think so either," came the reply.

We looked at one another for a minute. In my head what she was really saying is that she didn't believe there was anything wrong with me at all -

but I'll probably never know because I didn't ask. She had changed my medication though recently, and I said at the time that I thought it was working, but I just didn't have any faith in a 'depression' diagnosis and I really needed to know what was going on - REALLY!

I walked out and no attempt was made to stop me. It was absolutely the lowest point EVER. Finally, I knew it - no-one believes me - they think I'm just making it up. I walked out of the room, walked down the corridor and found a seat just as if it has been placed there just for me. I felt like I was about to collapse! After a while I got up and went home. Can you guess what kind of thoughts were going through my mind, it starts with the letter S.

Please try to understand. When I'm feeling suicidal, my mind loses the ability to think rationally. Instead of remembering my love for my family, I only see that by taking my own life I am doing them and everyone in the world a favour - How is that SELFISH?

Anger

This part is extremely difficult for me to write and I would assure you as best I can that it was only a fleeting thought - really, honest. How easy it would be to keep this a hidden secret locked away from everyone and everything. How easy it would be to pretend that it didn't even happen, but it did. I have no idea how people will react towards me after I say this and yet I must.

People must know if anything is going to change, lives saved and families prevented tragic loss both directly and indirectly. I hang my head in both tears and shame as I write at what could have been and how it could have affected others - even to their own death. I am ashamed that it ever even crossed my mind, even if just for a second.

Is it any wonder that my mind will sometimes hear those whispers in my head cry "blame". Who is to blame for the way I feel? Who is to blame for the pain I am suffering? Who is to blame for the pain of mourning that my family will suffer? Who is to blame for the way **they** will be treated by society afterwards?

"Your psychiatrist," they cry. You have called out again, and again, and

again, and again. You have told the truth. But she will not hear, she will not listen, she thinks your making it all up. "She," "She, is to blame for everything". "If only she put you on the right medication, if only she listened when you told her that they weren't working. She, yes she is to blame. She is to blame, the system is to blame, and no-one will listen."

If you think I'm thinking of going after my psychiatrist - your wrong. I'm not and I wouldn't, and I never even thought about anything like that, but the system needs to change. What can I do, so that after my death, someone will investigate - they will have to investigate and perhaps things will be different for someone else.

Am I still being selfish? Is this why so many people choose to throw themselves in front of a train, park their car on a railroad crossing or jump from a motorway bridge during peak-time traffic?

Perhaps I am being selfish. I guess it depends on what I do and how you look at it. Thankfully the anger passes. It was a fleeting one-time event, truthfully it was, but perhaps I see now why some do things that could only be 'selfish' because no-one knows the truth about what you did or why you did it, or how rational you were able to think at the time. I see and, I at least, have empathy.

Anger and mental illness is a dangerous mix. Thankfully, my personality is naturally very dosile and it takes an awful lot to make me angry. But the pain I suffer and the pain that others will suffer after my suicide is all consuming and I do hear the whispers of blame and what's more I am tempted to listen to them instead of myself, even if only for a second.

I tell you now, if you are suffering as I have and you hear those whispers of anger telling you to do things you know you shouldn't - tell them to go and have a cold bath and back off. Make an emergency appointment right now and tell your GP. Play some music, a video game, take a chill pill if you have been prescribed them, do whatever you do to stay calm. Do not make things worse for yourself or your family by listening to those whispers of 'blame' telling you to do things you would not 'normally' do.

If your worried about being put into hospital, I really wouldn't worry about that. There are no more beds for people with 'mental illnesses' in hospital

than there are beds for people with physical problems - probably less. Only once was I asked if I wanted to go to hospital when I called the Crisis Response Team, I was so far out of it with stress that I could only think that a hospital was a place you went to have a broken arm or leg mended. I remember being extremely dizzy. Why would I want to go there I thought, so I answered "no" and they left minutes later.

God

Having reached home, I am on my knees before God asking for forgiveness for what I am about to do, when I make a mistake and instead ask him to take my life and do with it as he pleases. I have no use for it any more, but I really don't want to just throw it away. I don't expect to hear an answer. I have talked to Him many times before and as far as I remember he has always answered but this time I simply give up.

If you think I am a believer - don't be mistaken. When things are going well, I believe in God with all my heart and thank Him for everything. Everything good in my life is all down to Him. But, when I am feeling low, I have little or no belief. There is no God, there is just nothing. In spite of this, I usually like to say a little prayer just in case.

Occasionally, I feel like God has given me this illness 'personally', because great things are going to come from it and it is going to help millions of people everywhere. Even if it kills me, I am so grateful to God that he has chosen me, but those feelings simply just don't last long enough. If they did, I'd probably be lock up.

I thought giving my life to God would mean going to church and not working on a Sunday. I asked for a local minister to meet with me and even attended a workshop on Christianity as well as going to church, but I have problems believing all the stories in the bible. I get the spirit of the stories and believe in them, but I find it hard to believe that the stories haven't been exaggerated.

We all do it, so why isn't it possible that whoever wrote those stories in the bible exaggerated a little, perhaps it might even have been their way of trying to make God look as powerful as possible. But that doesn't seem to be acceptable and with current issues on the news I find it difficult to give thanks to the God I believe in, in a church setting. I'm not going to go to

church to be hypocritical before God.

At some point I came up with my own prayer which I will try to explain: Lord, take my hand and hold it tight, Ever keep me close to thee, Never let me struggle free. If you think about it you will see how each sentence was made up through my depression (unless of course, my mind has simply recalled it from somewhere!). Calling for help, fearful that the help I needed would slip away and above all knowing that I myself would squirm and struggle to get free because the pain was simply too much to bear.

Normally when I do pray, I like to say the words 'Thy will be done' which to me means that whatever God decides to do that's ok with me, even if he doesn't give me the answer I want Him to. Naturally, sometimes I get frustrated when I don't hear an answer, especially the one I want to hear. I guess when that happens, it's only ever really because of my own lack of faith or because I think that, little I, know a better way of doing things than He does.

When I think of current issues on the news, I have come to the conclusion that our mortal bodies are of complete insignificance as we will have no use for them in Heaven, even if we are offered a place. I can't see that God is any more interested in people's sexual activities than he is in how any of us sit ourselves on the toilet.

All I think God is really interested in, is do we point our finger at others, or do we offer our hand of help. If we point our finger, then I don't think that pleases God for pointing the finger is surely His job. I don't think telling people what to do is the right way to bring people to God. I think that telling them what you think and giving them the opportunity to think for themselves and allow them to choose to do what THEY truly believe is the right thing is surely the only way - but what do I know?

Star Trek

My mind races like a Ferrari powered by the engine of the Starship Enterprise and I have gone where Captain Kirk himself has never gone before.

If you liked my prayer to God, then you might like this little poem:

Love's Innocence. Love's Innocence, on the floor; Love's innocence, a creek from the door; Love's innocence, a hand, a kiss, then bodies meet; Love's innocence, a new heart begins to beat; Love's innocence, lost, no more to say!

I wrote this poem in my head one night and to my surprise it was still there in the morning. Actually, it prevented me from getting much sleep that night, but I was too lazy to get out of bed and write it down. A guess there's a little tip for you there.

If you find your mind racing or annoying you about something, having a pen and paper by the bed will let you write it down. I think your mind is frightened you will forget it and that's why you can't get any sleep, so writing it down really helps - but what do I know?

The next day, I was sitting at the top of the stairs again, but this time I wasn't just lying, I was writing poetry, over 30 poems - perhaps 60, I don't quite recall - in one day and over the coming weeks, probably over 150 and not on any one subject, on everything under the sun, whatever my mind picked out - loneliness, depression, brother, sister, Love, Family, Money, absolutely anything.

Finding somewhere to divert this new compulsion was difficult. In my head I was completely embarrassed, but I couldn't help my new compulsion and I read poetry out to family variously. I wrote a poem to my GP using the letters of her name down one side, and Social worker, similarly, and I know I even took it to work and wrote a couple of poems for staff. (Would the ground please just swallow me UP!)

Looking to divert this compulsion to somewhere more appropriate, I joined a local writing group and stayed there a while until this compulsion simply faded. Where or why it came I have no idea - do YOU? All I know is, if I could have done stuff like that at school, perhaps I wouldn't have left secondary school with an E in English (E meaning just above FAIL) and there was nothing wrong with me then, '*was there*'?.

Apart from the fact that I hated secondary school of course, absolutely hated it, but that was a lot better than what I thought about primary school! Thoughts of suicide sometimes terrified me to near death. What if I do kill myself and God sends me back to do it all again - back to ***primary school***

- could God really do that?

'Angel' Number Two

Is it possible that having a mental illness can actually provide you with a superhero strength - was it Churchill's depression that provided him with the talent of being such a great speaker.

Sometimes I read out speeches in my head to anyone and everyone, that would make Churchill hang his head in shame - HONEST.

OK, it's time I introduce my second 'Guardian Angel'. I've just about got off my knees (Giving my worthless mortal corpse to God, remember) - when I am reminded there will be a meeting tonight of Aware Defeat Depression. I go in and immediately break down into tears, I can barely speak. Everyone is completely shocked and surprised. There was usually one person needing help, tonight was my turn.

Having attended the meetings for years, I told them that I shouldn't even be here because my psychiatrist doesn't believe I have depression. I don't recall anything else of the meeting, except for one amazing thing. The lady taking the meeting - (from the other side of the divide, as we say in Northern Ireland) asked if she could take me home and ensure I was safe.

She then offered me counselling at her own home and did this for many years. I cannot thank her and her family enough for all their support. It was - to me - an incredible thing to do and she never once asked for payment, in fact insisted on the opposite, although I did like to bring a few scones or something as is traditional in Northern Ireland when out visiting. I used to go visiting with my grandparents remember - so I know about these things!

But I was very ill, even if I didn't always show it, I was still taking anti-depressants and as usual they weren't really having much effect. I would appear to improve, only to relapse time after time and this would inevitably and understandably have an effect on our relationship, although we remain friends I have not seen her for some time, but she remains and will always be one of my 'Guardian Angels'.

I know it will be uncomfortable, but please try to put yourself in my position

- just for a second. I feel completely worthless, am constantly contemplating suicide and the harm that it will inevitably cause on those whom I love the dearest. Just for a second, close your eyes and try to put yourself in my position and say goodbye to each and everyone of those you love - then comes this wonderful woman to stop you. OK, you can stop now and have your own life back again.

If that person is not an angel sent by God, then there are simply no angels anywhere and there is probably no God! Do you understand now why these are my 'Guardian Angels' and why they mean soooo much to me. Me the worthless!

Better

I guess it's time to start getting things better again don't YOU? So, I've finally changed psychiatrist and my worries that my old one had little or no knowledge of my real personality have just been confirmed by the fact that she has asked me to complete a questionnaire to find out if I have a problem against women in authority - which you will be pleased to know I passed with flying colours - and I COULDN'T CARE LESS!!!!

As I change psychiatrist, my old one has also arranged for me to see a psychologist. But please note, although my old psychiatrist had clearly no knowledge of me the real person, I would soon hear that others thought she was great - so let's not start firing rotten eggs - she just wasn't the one for me, hence the need to be able to change psychiatrist as easily as you can change your GP. Someone, please take note - **PLEASE**

My mind is a bit of a blur around this time, but things are definitely starting to improve. I haven't been told what these new meds are but I am sure they're working and don't want to change. I asked my new psychiatrist about them and my thoughts that I might be Bipolar.

So far - if I recall correctly - all he is prepared to say is that if I were Bipolar this is the meds he would try me on first. I do also have other meds which I can take, but am told they are extremely addictive, though they do help to stop my mind racing and allow me to sleep at night.

Now let's get things going a little faster. With my mind much more stable, I am offered a placement at New Horizons, Antrim, Northern Ireland (Action

Mental Health).

For years (since the very beginning actually) I have been trying to help myself. Numerous books and self-help literature (Have I told you yet that I HATE reading?). I am attending various courses. Where I found out about them, I don't remember.

'Angel' Number Three

I have completed a Go For It start a business course, to help get my website off the ground and found the help I needed somewhat lacking, and another course where I was attempting to try and get back into work. I even get nominated for a learning achievement award. So let's here if for 'Guardian Angel' number three, although I don't know it yet. She was one of two ladies helping to offer assistance to get people back into work. Little did I realise I would be meeting her again some years later at New Horizons as my employment officer.

By the time I am attending New Horizons I have been out of paid employment for about six years after being laid off due to my continual absence from work - by the way my employers were really great about all of that!

I have also attempted to cure my loneliness by going to a speed date. I manage to tell a girl there that she has a nice figure but I prefer someone more petite. 'Stupidity' has a crush on me remember, so she's probably not pleased that I've attended a 'speed date'. Could the ground please, please, please just open up and swallow me!!! Of course, I apologised profusely and bought her a drink afterwards, but I feel terrible just as I should - I am sure you agree!

Like I said before, my memory of these events and when exactly they happened is a little hazy, so forgive me if I don't get everything in exactly the right order of time. I am in a flat and living on my own again.

As I attend New Horizons, I have little or no normality to my life. Bed is whatever time I fall asleep on the sofa, morning is whatever time I have to go to the bathroom. I eat sugary foods and fizzy drinks to give me the buzz I need, only to find that I am soon completely knackered again. I continue to have suicidal thoughts, but they are much more manageable

due to my new meds. In short I have no structure in my life, but I do have a female friend that I walk the dog with. Despite this, most of the time I am bed bound - or in my case sofa bound.

"Your thoughts cannot harm you"

I have just about perfected the way to handle my suicidal thoughts by now. I no longer need to carry anything harmful. Instead, thinking of what my GP once told me when I was in a very bad state and assuring me that she would get me back to health again, she said: "Your THOUGHTS cannot harm you!" Those words ring in my ears to this very day. You remember my GP of course - Guardian Angel number one. So, as long as I do not carry out any actions, my thoughts cannot harm me. So, let's see what we can do with that.

I loved Jurassic Park when it first came out and have it on DVD watched over and over and over again. By now I'm just about as sick of it as I can get but it continues to do the trick. I turn the TV on really low (too much noise and the thoughts in my head will want to shout over them), so I keep it low. And it's important that it's a DVD that I am very familiar with, I don't want any unexpected dinosaur sounds entering my mind and making things worse.

I curl myself into the fetal position at the end of the sofa and cover myself with a blanket, both for warmth and as a kind of covering, or force field if you like, separating me from the rest of the world. Now I sit back and *enjoy* the ride.

If I told you that I can't stand blood on TV such as operating theatres could you get a picture of what kind of things go on in my head. Sometimes I can't even bear to have my eyes closed. I have visions in my head of monsters more horrifying and 'real' than anything out of any horror movie. The whispers in my head are terrible, frightening and other times they are my only friend in the world.

They tell me that it is OK, I have suffered long enough. It's all inevitable anyway. There is no God, God has forsaken me, and even that the comforting voices I hear **are** God and it's time. But no matter what they say, *'my thoughts will never harm me'* so long as I am curled up at the end of the sofa, with my force field around me.

Eventually I will hear the DVD in the background. Usually it has finished playing and all you hear is rarr, rarr, rarr as a dinosaur runs around the screen screeching at you to start the DVD again. He's probably been doing that for so long, I'm surprised he hasn't lost the ability to do so. Now I know that my thoughts of suicide are leaving.

Sometimes they will come back, but normally they're on their way out. At least for the next few hours. Time to get some proper food if I can manage it. But, sometimes I can't even make myself a cup of tea.

It would be my greatest wish that if copying what I do saves you from the whispers in your head telling you to take your own life, keeps you from doing so, then I guess it's worth a try isn't it. I don't see what harm it can do anyway, but make sure you tell your GP that your feeling that way - **IT'S IMPORTANT**, medication really can change the way you think - honest.

Cup of tea

Sometimes all I could manage is to get myself to the kitchen and perched on a bar stool that I like. I am beside the kettle, but where are the cups, the sugar, the teaspoons, the milk. They are all too far away and once again I feel terrible. And if you think I'm doing it for some kind of attention, who do you think I am trying to attract attention from.

I am on my own in my own flat and if that is the case, why do I not 'phone home' for help? I am such a pathetic individual that I can't even make myself a simple cup of tea. How could anyone think that me being alive is in any way helpful to my family, who I know are often worried sick.

I tell my friend Guardian Angel number two about it and she advises me to consider rearranging the kitchen. What great advice. Now I can sit on my barstool and reach everything I need to make myself a cup of tea and from there a piece of toast, a slice of cheese, a banana - which she calls nature's fast food.

Crisis Response

From time to time, although it is NOT ALLOWED, I call the crisis response team. I know I should be in hospital, it really is that bad. On this occasion, they come into my flat and ask me some questions from a

questionnaire. I am very suicidal.

They ask me if I have a washing machine? ***A washing machine?*** I am thinking of cutting my throat from ear to ear and they are asking me about a washing machine. What are they going to do? Bring me a washing machine, so I can cut my throat, then come back from the grave to wash the blood from my shirt?

I don't know whether to laugh or cry and when they leave minutes later, I sit on the bed and do both. In fact I think there's a photo of me on Google doing just that - you know that car they have taking all the photos of all the houses and roads.

Well there really is photo of my flat and of me sitting on the bed around that time, my fiancée showed it to me, as my brother said, "It's a good thing I wasn't doing something else!"

On another occasion, after a call out, I am in no state of mind whatsoever, but all I can think of is that when someone comes to your house, you make them a cup of tea, so I have a table with cups and some food on it. The crisis response team, come in, see the table and leave thinking that I am completely wasting their time.

I have no idea anymore what the crisis response team are actually for - are they just some kind of ambulance crew that pick you up after you are dead? Of course, it could be just me, and many others have better things to say about them than I do, I certainly hope so, so let's not jump to conclusions and start throwing rotten eggs at them either.

I had no idea how I managed to escape being put in hospital, but now I know - apart from my family, my Guardian Angels and a few of those around them - no-one really cares!

But things will get better, so if you want a happy ending, keep reading to see how things have really turned around.

'Stop it'

Oh, but just one more weepy before the good stuff. I've had another little addition to my illness. My mind races so hard that sometimes it takes me

to places I no longer want to go, whole memories of stuff. It happens so fast I don't even know yet what the memory is, and I literally say the words 'Stop it'.

It doesn't happen often, but sometimes at home or in the car, if I'm not busy actually doing something and actively thinking, my mind takes the opportunity to take me somewhere unpleasant. But I haven't had the memory yet - it is so hard to believe that I don't think my psychiatrist believes me or perhaps there's simply nothing I can do about it.

All I know is that I have said the words 'Stop it', and it is only after that that I have the memory. So if you hear me say 'stop it', don't worry. I don't think you have pinched my bum or stolen anything.

This wouldn't even be an issue, but for one thing. I am at home, my five year-old son is playing in the corner with his toys and all he hears is the words 'stop it' and he replies - "but daddy, I haven't done anything". This is the kind of thing people like me have to live with daily, but I promised you things would get better, so:

New Horizons

I am at New Horizons (Action Mental Health), taking various courses and attending regularly. I meet others with other mental health conditions and realise - for the first time - that I really am not alone and that there are others with other severe problems such as schitsophenia (spelling it properly doesn't matter, E in English remember).

I realise that I am not as unlikeable as I thought I was. I learn to cook and eat healthy and now that I am attending New Horizons regularly I have structure in my life again. My female friend who I walked the dog with is now my girlfriend and soon we will have a little baby boy.

I continue my progress at New Horizons for a period of about three years, before properly preparing myself to return to work. I get fantastic advice about what different types of work are available, advice on how to complete application forms and more advice on how to put your best foot forward in an interview. I sit there thinking that I am too old, out of work for too long, unreliable and so on and yet I see everyone else around me with so much

potential.

Some are already in voluntary work, others have great fun personalities and others have great musical talent - but what do I have? A head that can't make up its mind to be full-haired or bald! An ongoing mental illness and a complete lack of any self worth. I know all the key words to use in an interview, but I don't believe any of them really relates to me - they would just be lies.

As I proceed with the preparation for work courses, I am presented with a wonderful placement. "Where would you like to be" I was asked. "In a warehouse," I reply, "but I don't want to be anywhere near the public."

I haven't told anyone, not even my employment officer ('Guardian Angel' number three), but I'm scared to death of meeting anyone I know because I don't want to explain that I have a mental health problem, or feel pressured to make up some kind of excuse about what I am doing there or where have I been.

In the world of social media, where old school friends are re-united - who wants to reunite with someone with a mental health problem and how do I handle the embarrassment of it? My friend 'Stupidity' has ensured that I have a 'thing' about being embarrassed. All my 'schoolfriends' remember us being an 'item' almost all through primary school and I avoided her as much as possible through secondary school, but it wasn't easy.

UTV

Can you believe it. I don't know when it was, but I remember it so well. I attended a talk by Linda Bryans from UTV where she spoke about her problems with mental health. She talked about the importance of having great friends and a job that you enjoy.

While I appreciated her speaking out on such an issue and the publicity that it helped to provide, I couldn't help thinking: Woopy, Woopy, Do for you.

Perhaps you see it as another flaw in my personality, but in all honesty I thought - if only I could have the job you have, if only I could work at UTV, or have the friends you have, the education you have, the upbringing you

had - knowing nothing, of course, of any of that - or even thinking clearly that I wouldn't want to have anything other than the upbringing that I did have. I guess I was just feeling low. I don't mean to be cruel or unkind, but that is in all honesty what I thought at the time.

Now look at me. Following two work placements where I did extremely well and learned so much about myself and returning to work, my employment officer seen a job advertised in the job centre and suggested that I put myself forward for an interview with at least 50 others applying for the job.

This would be the first job I have applied for in many years and with the current level of unemployment, what kind of chance do I really have of getting it, even my employment officer is concerned about me getting my hopes up, only to be disappointed? But I won't be too disappointed because I already know this is just a chance to practice going to an interview, nothing more, nothing less. I completed the application form, sent it off and can you believe it, the interview went so well I got the job!

I didn't really know anything about the job, it didn't come with a job description. All I know is that it is for seven and a-half hours in a local supermarket. I completely assumed that it will be something simple like filling freezers or stacking shelves - ideally, it will be before or after opening hours - I'm still scared of meeting people, remember.

Why?

For nearly two weeks, my mind was racing again, this time asking the question WHY? Why did they choose me? And if I'm good at anything, it must be at asking why? It is physically exhausting, and difficult to concentrate on the simplest of tasks such as making yourself a sandwich, never mind prepare dinner!

It is difficult to sleep and I wake up much earlier than I want to, but I can't do anything about it, unless I reach for the meds that I'm not supposed to take because of the addiction risk. When to take, and when not to take - that is MY question?

Every now and again, I had a Eureka moment, wrote it down and off went my mind again, endlessly searching for the answer to the question, ok, but

WHY?. Before long I had a list of things I felt would be helpful to the next round of clients attending the New Horizons Interview course, spoke to my employment officer about it, and have lots of ideas.

Things that I had never thought of while on the course myself, but I guess we'll see what happens next. But if there is anything I can do to help improve the chances of those that follow me - I am more than willing to give up my time to do it - and you know what I think about the value of time!

Job

I work for possibly the most fantastic company operating in Northern Ireland who have three policies at their heart - Serious about Service - Serious about Standards - and Serious about Staff. What a wonderful, wonderful company.

According to what I read on their website they removed artificial colours from their own brand food some 10 years before Marks and Spencer and have so many wonderful things going on. I found out about them on their website under corporate responsibility!

I can't believe they picked me for the position - I just can't believe it. And what am I - a till operator and general retail assistant. They have put me at the forefront of their organisation. I am the face that meets their customers first and must reflect all the best aspects of the company and give a good impression of the company and their dedication to service and standards.

Each day I go in thinking how 'lucky' I have been. Each member of the public who goes through my till, I think of as my own personal responsibility and each day I go home, I am going over in my head what happened that day and how I can do more - and do better - for my customers on my next shift.

My till has so many buttons there's probably a button there somewhere to turn Simon Cowell's hot water cold - now if only I could find it. I am determined to learn each and every button so that I can deliver the best possible service to each and every one of my customers, and I am irrationally impatient about that, to the point that after just one day, my supervisor sent me a message telling me to calm down, I was doing brill!

Perhaps they will fire me tomorrow, I don't care. I will still have had the most incredible time since my now fiancée had our second little boy. I can't actually believe I'm writing this, but I LOVE my job. To you I am just a till operator, but to me - I couldn't be happier if you told me I was to be on the next mission to the moon. What's more, I no longer have any embarrassment about my illness. Like me or loath me, I am who I am, with all my qualities and all my frailties.

A famous boxer was asked if you hadn't been a boxer what would you have been? He replied along the lines of 'if I had been a bin man, I would have been the best bin man that ever lived' What an incredible approach to life and that's just what I want to be - 'the best till operator/retail assistant that ever lived'. I doubt I'll quite achieve that, but I intend to do my best.

Sir Richard Branson

I don't know Sir Richard Branson personally, but I guess I look up to him somehow. This quote is accredited to him and it is my favourite of all quotes: "Put someone in a position higher than they would expect, and they are apt to excel."

That's what happened when I was put in front of a till. Remember my fear of meeting people, I can barely use the self check-outs and often avoid them whenever possible. The fear of giving someone the wrong change, upset customers because I don't know what button to press, not to mention credit and debit cards, vouchers, bonus cards, who will be the next to arrive at my till, and so on.

It was terrifying at first, but I did it anyway and it has been the most incredible feeling - you probably still don't understand, because I am just a till operator.

Perhaps you should consider this. We can't stop our children and loved ones going into shops can we? In the event of an emergency such as a fire or terrorist attack, when they do, their lives are in the hands of those working on the shop floors. While in the vast majority of jobs, employees are expected only to get themselves out as quickly as possible, those working on shop floors have been trained and required as I have (I hope), and they will put their customers - including my children - before

themselves. I know I expect nothing less of myself with your children, though I hope never to be put to a real test.

But do you know the best bit about my job. I get to talk practically all day long. I have opinions and thoughts on almost any topic under the sun. Naturally, with almost 40 years experience of talking, I am as careful as I can be not to offend, cause embarrassment or offence (and yes, I have learned from that speed dating remark too!). I never would have thought that 40 years of talking would be an advantage.

So what ever happened to that little boy, who wouldn't come out of his shell. I guess granny was right - one day it just happened. I think it probably cracked and fell off into pieces as I attended New Horizons, but I don't really know. All I know is, as I look around I can't find it and I probably wouldn't fit into it anymore anyway. Good job I don't need it anymore then.

Eventually, after so many years, I have found peace at last, and the best part is that I am still alive to *'tell the tale'*, as I recall Granddad saying frequently.

Linda Right

So I guess, Linda was right wasn't she. We might not all be able to work on UTV, but finding that job that you enjoy really is a critical part in your mental well-being, and I'm sure she's right about friends too, if your lucky enough to have them.

Who knows what tomorrow will bring, but I am already determined and making every effort to ensure that those following me at New Horizons have as much support as I would be allowed to provide as a volunteer.

My 'Theory'

Oh, and it's been some time (weeks) since I was told I had got the job. My mind has been racing ever since, I have been pacing circles in the living room, between bedrooms and completely incapable of giving myself the time to make that cup of tea again, but I've finally got the answer!

It is Sunday, 11.09 pm on the 7 July 2013, my mind has completely stopped

racing and I have finally got the answer to why I got the job.

It comes down to just three magical ingredients, so if you want to know why I got the job following my interview, or even why you got yours or why your happy in your job or not - just as Einstein had his theory on relativity (or whatever), here's mine and just as any scientist will tell you. Take it and do with it as you wish, if you come up with a better one, congratulations.

My theory on achieving a successful interview is down to these three magical parts: Personality, Potential and Honesty. In an interview while the interviewers are the ones in control, you are the Star and you must shine so brightly that they simply can't see any of those competing against you.

I believe I shone with my personality (although I never would have believed that at the time) and especially by being honest, which of course is critical when working directly with the company's money and with customers money. But there's a lot more so keep reading.

Let's start with personality. It's quite simple really. Does this person have the right personality for this job.

If your very shy, that's ok, if your employer is simply looking for a hard worker and you are. If you are the opposite and very forward, you may find that a job in a supermarket operating the tills is exactly the place to be where you can talk endlessly all day to every customer that comes your way - just remember your hands must always be on the go as you talk, if not your holding up the next customer and asking for a reprimand by your supervisor.

You might have exactly the right personality for the job and every job will require a different personality, but if you don't show that in your interview and someone else does, their the ones most likely to get the job, even if all they have done is to mislead the panel about their own REAL personality. But, if you think they've been cheating by doing so, then there's a sting in the tail for them.

They are unlikely to be happy in the job they are doing or at least not as happy as being in a job that really did suit best their own real personality. So be careful about just saying yes to every question just because you

want the job. You might soon find yourself in a job that you find too stressful, boring or unhappy for any number of other reasons.

Potential. What does that really mean. That you have the right qualifications, yes you might have, but you don't necessarily have to have all of them. You will have to have the qualifications to pass the minimum 'criteria'. If that's what it says in the advert then those without those particular qualifications aren't going to be able to get the job as it would probably be against the law for you to get it. But if you haven't been automatically ruled out, then even if someone else has got better qualifications than you to do the job, you're still in with a chance.

What the interview panel should have the ability to see, is whether or not you have the potential for training either within or outside the company. So if the interview panel prefers your particular personality and/or level of honesty, then the fact that someone has better qualifications than you doesn't mean that they'll get the job - YOU might still be the one. Again, if they have lied, or misled the panel about any of their qualifications or experience, once again they may have to face that same sting in the tail if they are the successful applicant.

Potential is all about what the interview panel can see just as much as about what you can show. It includes ability to work the hours they want, assist in other departments if the need arose and if they can see that you would have the ability to learn even if you haven't got the exact qualifications or experience.

I never would have believed that I had the potential to operate a till (however 'silly' that may sound to you), and I certainly would never have believed that I would enjoy it. But I gave a true account of my personality in the interview and the interview panel simply matched my personality with what they wanted to happen at their tills/shop floor. In doing so, I found myself not just a job, but a job I really, really enjoy doing. Well, I haven't learned any of the other stuff yet, so fingers crossed.

Honesty - Again it's quite simple and straight forward, but you don't need to be the most honest person in the world to get the job. All the employer needs to know is that you are honest enough to do the job he/she is offering.

If you want to pick potatoes in a field, then honesty isn't really a big issue. When I was doing it they had someone checking how many boxes I actually filled so I couldn't get away with saying I filled five boxes, if I only really filled three. And how many potatoes can I actually hide inside my pockets? So for them honesty wasn't a big issue. The person checking the number of boxes I actually filled would need to prove a higher level of honesty.

In my interview I couldn't have shone brighter with honesty if I had given them the security number of my bank card - I shone like the sun! I am positive, this was a critical part in me ending up the successful applicant because I would be working with their money and yours if and when you approach my till.

I proved the highest level of honesty I could and they were willing as a result to give me the opportunity of operating the tills, in spite of the fact that - apart from my work placements - I haven't been in paid employment for 10 years.

Mind you I said I 'Shone' with honesty, I didn't say I was a 'complete idiot' and provide them with my personal health records and fill several A4 pages with all the information contained within, so that I could scare the living daylight out of them. They were frightened enough already by what I did say which was only that New Horizons was a part of Action Mental Health - that was all I said, and it was all they needed to know.

Personality

Mind you, even in my interview I was being told by those that interviewed me that they were only really interested in one thing above anything else - personality. But how could my personality even have a glimmer never mind a 'shone like the sun'. It simply wasn't possible.

My 'mental health' told me continuously for the last 13 years that I had the worst personality in the world. I contemplated suicide for so long and all that that would mean on those that loved me, especially my parents, brother and sisters and all they suffered as a result of my illness, regardless of whether it was actually my fault or not.

Society itself told me that I had the most horrible personality for just thinking about suicide, never mind the fact that I actually carried with me the means to do it at a moments notice. I have my place picked out and everything and even the means to scribble down a quick note for the police to cause as little 'trouble' as possible.

I am Melvyn the worthless, I am Melvyn the mean, I am even Melvyn, the most horrible person you have ever seen. Throughout the years at New Horizons, my course leaders would make suggestions that I had a nice personality - but that couldn't be true, it just couldn't be. I must be tricking them somehow. I know, they are just being nice, after all that's what their being paid to do, be nice to all their clients - that's all, that's all it ever could be.

Echoes of being told I was 'approachable' and 'kind' gave me a great warmth inside from comments made over the years. If only that could be true, was it true? I think maybe but, moreover what a nice thing for them to say. I had been a 'people pleaser' remember, but my mental health and torn that from me.

"You don't want to be a 'people pleaser", you only put yourself in 'damned' if you do and 'damned' if you don't situations," suggested the whispers - especially just above the editor's office. If I go one way to please my colleagues, I go against the wishes of my boss. If I go the other to please my boss, I go against the wishes of my colleagues whom I work with daily. "Much better not to try and please anyone," whispers my 'mental illness'.

But gradually I see that I AM a 'people pleaser' and that's just what I want to be. I love the customers that come to my till and I want to do everything I can to please each and every one. They want fast service most of all, and despite getting my fingers in a twist every now and again that is what I strive to deliver more than anything.

Most of my customers are happy to talk about all kinds of things and regardless of my own 'anguish' as I feel my own body parts squirm, some of my customers, if they had the time, would gladly tell me about every operation that they have ever had in absolutely any part of their own bodies. But I refuse to show any of my own 'anguish' and smile the best I can and try to somehow engage in conversation. Moreover, I am more

than happy to do so, if it gives the least pleasure to any of my customers.

But other customers, a very small number, come to my till completely straight faced, they avoid eye contact at any cost. There could be any number of reasons, a trip to the hospital, some sudden unpleasant news or just a terrible migraine. Nevertheless, if I can just turn that straight face or frown into a 'cracked' face smile, even if only for a fraction of a second, I feel warm inside.

"Do you have a bonus card?" - "NO" comes a stern reply. "I get the feeling you don't want me telling you about it either," I chance. 'no' a softer and just the slightest glimmer of a smile. I leave her on her way - "YES" - "I got one" - next.

'People Pleaser'

I actually 'LOVE' being a people pleaser, what I don't like is being put in awkward situations that others shouldn't put me in in the first place. And even more, I 'HATE' getting into trouble for it by my 'editor' and feeling 'responsible' for any unpleasant aftermath.

Imagine that - me having just the slighted possibility of having a 'personality' that others see as something 'bright'. Is it at all possible that my personality shone even 'brighter' than my honesty?

My 'illness' senses the danger and the hairs on the back of it's neck are raised - "Don't dare - don't YOU dare think anything other than what I have told you all these years." But, I do dare and more than that I dare to get up and stop pleading for 'mercy'!

In short I got my job simply because they thought I had the Personality, Potential and Honesty to do the job properly. The crazy thing is that had I known I would be operating the tills, I'd probably have acted in a completely different manner in the interview and not been given the opportunity because I would have been nervous and perhaps not been able to show my true personality.

I certainly didn't think I'd like working with other people's money or be able to work with credit cards, bonus cards and vouchers and so on. But, my

interview panel simply matched my personality that I showed in the interview with my potential and level of honesty and gave me a job that I absolutely love, regardless of whether it is highly regarded or not!

Brother

I haven't said much about my brother yet. Believe me, if I think I am a 'People Pleaser' I am nothing compared to my brother. If there is one person left in Northern Ireland who would take a bag onto a plane for a friend, it must be him.

It has got him into trouble too, but that's a whole other story. My brother hasn't had his opportunity to shine yet either. When he does, I have no doubt I will have to wear sunglasses just to look in his direction.

Other factors

Of course there are outside factors. If those on the interview panel are not in the business of giving women a reasonable chance then sorry, your still not getting the job. Or if they've already decided to give it to a friend, tough luck, and sometimes it is just about luck.

Finding out about the job in the first place will sometimes be luck. Did you just happen to be passing by that window at the time and seen the 'staff wanted' notice which was only up there for one day!

There is something else unfortunate about my 'answer'. It will not guarantee success. It only explains why you got the job or someone else, but hopefully it gets you thinking about what you need to do next time to succeed, or indeed if the job was really suited to you in the first place. My mind found only an answer, it didn't find a magic wand to zap the panel with so they would give YOU the job - I didn't expect it to either.

So, perhaps having a mental health problem really can have a silver lining - even if it's not one you would 'wish on your worst enemy'.

A lie

I have a number of qualifications that give a great impression of a person that would shine bright in the world of administration.

I am top of the heap with my NVQ Business Administration course (said to be equal to 4 A Levels), Stage Three Typewriting, Word Processing, 70wpm Shorthand and now even GCSE English Grade B, due to an evening class only a couple of years after leaving secondary school. Even audio typewriting to name but a few. But in truth it is all a lie.

I don't mean that the qualifications aren't real - they are, and I worked really hard for them, but allowing an interview panel to view them and make their own judgement, they could come up with no other judgement than the wrong one.

They are all a lie, because I am not a very good speller. I don't like reading and therefore never really picked up on the use of 'proper' English and I dropped out of English Literature because - to tell you the truth I just didn't understand any of it and had no interest whatsoever in any of the books they were going to study. My English was simply not good enough to take me to my true potential in that kind of work environment.

Were I to continue in that kind of environment I would have 'Paranoia' poking me on the shoulder every day at work telling me that people were laughing at me and I would have 'Stupidity' in stitches laughing at each and every spelling mistake or poor use of wording.

This is why it is important to 'Shine' with your real personality and 'Shine' with your true potential and not allow an interview panel to misjudge you, unless you really want a job that you will not be happy in and can never take you to what you could have achieved.

Suicide

I have something I feel very strongly to say about suicide. We all have our own opinions and some make them all too clear, so here's my chance. Now that I have it, I like to crack my own whip of opportunity as often as possible to keep that 'beast' away:

If someone takes their own life, what good does it do anyone to say that they will go to hell for it. Can you bring the person back and change their minds? All you have done is to cause further pain and anguish to a

family that is already in terrible mourning. As for God, - if He truly exists - He has the power to forgive whoever He likes. If knowing all the pain I have suffered and I choose to take my own life, and asking Him to forgive me for what I was about to do - and He decides to send me to hell for it - then as far as I am concerned he should come with me!

If I'm going to believe in God, it will be an all-forgiving God. Is God not supposed to be greater than any other? (and I take that to mean, even any kind of imaginary god you could ever think of - for you are only human, God is God).

In that case He has to be all-forgiving. How easy it is to want punishment or revenge and how hard is it to forgive and reach out to your enemy (as I found, reaching out to Sinn Fein and for me that was easy considering I haven't actually come to any harm from the troubles) - Which God then would be the greater? Speaking on my thoughts of suicide to a social worker, I remember I mentioned God. "You might want to think about that," she said.

I thought if only you knew, I've spent years thinking about it and talking to Him about it. I wonder how much time she has really given to it, or is she so used to believing what others tell her that she has lost the ability to think for herself?

If there is a God, then perhaps the most precious gift he has given us, is the ability to think for ourselves. We must all walk our own paths to find God (or not). Perhaps he will send someone up a mountain to bring down another 10 commandments, while he sends you to the river to help someone in peril. Which is better, to be told what God is and what he wants from us, or have the freedom to think for ourselves? Personally, I am prepared to listen to what others have to say, but if I don't agree, then I simply don't agree and God will have to find me Himself.

When I do die, and if God is real, I hope to have the courage and strength not to expect, ask or plead with God to enter the gates of Heaven. I hope instead only to have the words to thank him for this life and the opportunity to help others in need. Then I would hope only to apologise for all of my failures and walk towards those other gates unless he tells me to come back.

Riverbank

As I played on my grandfather's farm. I used to like jumping from one river bank to the other. I was good at jumping that river. Not that there was really any danger, the banks were low and even when I did miss, the water barely went over my boot. Yes I did miss sometimes and when I did, I took a step further back, ran a little harder and jumped again.

I hear that 'beast' of mental illness shouting at me that if I try to follow my dreams, I will surely fail. He tells me that I simply can't, that I shouldn't, that I will never succeed to do any of what I want to. But I am on my feet and I will not lie down to him anymore and plead for his whipping to stop. He will not stop whipping me with negativity so I must whip back with positivity and do what I can to succeed.

Opportunities backed by Honesty, I think, make personalities 'Shine like the Sun'. Further I now see my mental illness for what it really is. It is 'hate'. It's hates me to the point that it wants me to take my own life, but now I see it, I have the opportunity to 'hate' it right back - and I do!

Why does my mental illness want me to believe it is ALL that I am? Because it wants to control everything I do. Why does my mental illness tell me to keep secrets? So it can make me paranoid about people finding out the truth.

Why does it not want me to take opportunities? In case I succeed and get praise for something. Why does it tell me not to be a people pleaser? Because it doesn't like me getting praise by making others happy.

Why does it not want me to have confidence in my own decisions? Because it wants to trick me into doing the wrong thing and then feel bad about it afterwards. Why does it not want me to speak out? Because it only likes me to listen to it.

Why does it not want me to be who I really am? Because it knows I will be unhappy being otherwise. It hates me - so instead of 'pleading' for mercy, I guess I'm going to have to just hate it right back!

I sat on the bottom of the stairs, wondering. Those whispers in my head, where were they coming from. I hear them pacing their own circles

cursing me that I refuse to listen to them anymore. I can't help myself grinning at how angry they are with me for finding out the truth. As I do so a mist lifts to reveal where the whispers were coming from.

At first I see only feet furiously pacing this way and that, but now I see clearly. I never knew they had a face, all I ever heard were the whispers encouraging me and telling me that they were the only 'ones' who understand me and that they were my only real friend in the world, but now I see and I see the face of those whispers, and what face do I see. I see myself.

Perhaps I was so desperate for someone to understand my pain that I created in my mind someone I knew I could trust and someone who really understood. Perhaps there really are 'demons' that like to play games with your mind and try to trick you. I don't know and I don't really care. Just as long as I know who they really are, what they really want and refuse to give in to them.

Bulldozer

If you feel you have seen into the world of someone who has suffered from severe thoughts of suicide, I know not why?

I have said nothing new. It is all already all too well known, but 'mental illness' tends to be kept hidden away, even locked away, in corners of society, corners of family life and made invisible with 'confidentiality' in work places, the NHS, and so on. That is my only explanation.

Many poems have been written and stories told by those in organisations such as Action Mental Health, Aware Defeat Depression or Depression Alliance.

Perhaps someone needs to sit on that single seat on the 'bulldozer' to bring these issues, thoughts and feelings out into mainstream society. If you think your up to the job, go ahead, I'm more than willing to let you. If not, then I guess I have to. For I am tired of being told that I am selfish for contemplating suicide and I am angry for others to be told similarly and be further driven to it.

If you looked out of your window and saw someone being kicked to death

in the street in front of you, how would you feel? Would you want to do something to help? Would you help? If you would want to help, if you would help, then you will know how I feel. I cannot sit back and watch others suffer as I have.

I cannot sit back and know the suffering that goes on in the minds of those who suffer from thoughts of suicide and allow society to punish them further because of ignorance. I just wont do it and I will take every opportunity open to me to open your eyes to the truth and do what I can to give everyone the same opportunity I have had to fight those demons that whisper 'to death'.

Like me or loath me, I am who I am - and finally, perhaps for the first time in my life, I like being just that.

I know longer see that me having a 'mental illness' is any worse than you suffering from ignorance, him suffering aggressive tendencies, her inability to have empathy, or even them throwing stones. In comparison, I think - I know - I prefer being just who I am.

Mental Illness

As I write, I once again feel like the me I vaguely remember, and certainly the me that I wished I could be. Ok, I'm still a little run-down and I wish I could have a little more interest in housework because it gets me into too much trouble, but then again, I don't want to 'waste' my life having a perfect house! Like me or loath me, I am what I am. Mind you its good to know when its best to just do what your told.

After reading all about my years endlessly searching to get the right meds, you'll understand if I'm not ready yet to give them up - my GP would probably kill me herself if I did (even if she really is an 'Angel') - but I can't help but wonder if one day I *will* be able to.

I wonder now if there aren't two types of 'Mental Illness'. 'Real' mental illness suffered by those who have visions and talk to people who aren't there and have no ability to control their thoughts, feelings and even actions:

But is it possible that there is another type of 'Mental Illness'. Are some

of us 'mad' because the world around us drives us mad and can't see the 'blindingly' obvious pen right on the empty table right in front of them.

How many of us are 'driven' by stress at work, when it would have been much easier and cheaper to just make a few simple adjustments or provide further training to make your job more enjoyable and suited to your personality.

How many of us are 'driven' into mental illness because the world around us wants to simply treat us like robots and tell us continually that we all need to look like that, wear those clothes, act that way, chase only money, aim for that job, drive that car, live in that kind of house, or we will never be happy and we then (if we are able to achieve any of it), find ourselves unhappy because it doesn't match our individual personalities.

Are our personalities not like that of the prints on our fingers and we are all uniquely individual and should be happy and content to be so. Is it not our individual personalities that really make us shine - whether you are a boxer in a ring, a nurse in a hospital or indeed sitting at a till in a supermarket.

Is that what makes someone glow in an interview because your - personality, potential and honesty - shine a light on who you really are and what really makes YOU special? Perhaps then you too can be a 'Guardian Angel' to someone. Just the right personality, at the right time, in the right place.

Reason

I wonder now if the reason for my illness becoming so severe - although sparked by some family issues - was at least in part, my determination not to fail those who were suffering as much as I.

Seeing the need in my community and having an idea for a website that could help so many, I was determined to overcome every obstacle. Sometimes I had to jump it, such as my dislike for computers, sometimes I had to go around it, such as my lack of knowledge of how to build a website (or any real interest), sometimes I had to go under it, such as lack of vision from my local newspaper which I had worked for for almost 10 years.

But my final obstacle was that of publicity. I couldn't find a way around,

under or over that, so I tried to step back, lower my head and charge. I guess that didn't work so well!

Now I find I am back on my feet and just as determined as ever to find the solutions I need to succeed. New Horizons taught me what I need to do to get a job and "shine" in an interview and it starts with preparation.

You don't simply give up when you aren't successful in an interview. You review what you did and if it was really the right job for you in the first place. Then you decide what you could have done better and next time, hopefully, you will do better. Keep doing that and eventually you should finally see yourself get where you really want to be. I think so anyway.

Some people are driven by fame. I'd rather not be famous. I like my privacy and being able to go to work as an 'unknown' and talk to people as an 'unknown', if I was famous I'd probably be unable to go to work because people would be talking to me too much and holding up the queue.

Some people are driven by money. Maybe I was driven by money when I first had the idea and it was the drive for wealth that took it from a scrap piece of paper to a lever-arch file, but when I was faced with the difficulties of computers, websites and lack of money, I simply decided it wasn't worth the bother and there was always going to be the risk of failure and that fear of 'embarrassment' which I carried with me since primary school.

But others are driven by "I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy". Have you ever thought about those individuals who are suffering terminal illnesses and they choose to do something 'outstanding' such as run a marathon or climb a mountain. Perhaps I now begin to understand why they do it.

Demons

I know now what 'demons' really are, even if my faith in God is somewhat lacking. I have seen them myself, I have heard their whispers and I know that they whisper to you too whether you have a 'mental illness' or not.

I know what they want and what they are willing to do to get what they want and in spite of what they are telling you, they are not your friend, they are not your defender and they only want to take you to a world of pain and suffering, as they try to trick you into thinking the opposite.

They tried hard, and sorely, to take me to my grave in a pool of blood, while at the same time telling me that they were my only friend in the world and the only 'one' who knows my true pain and suffering. Why I never gave in, I cannot say, perhaps you can!

They are the whispers in your head that tell you that it was 'his' fault regardless of the facts or what you really know. And they tell you that because it is his fault you should throw stones at his house and hurl abuse at his family. They whisper that he, she, or them over there are your enemy, even if you have never met them before in your life.

They tell you that 'they' (whoever 'they' are) are coming for you and everything will be lost, you must attack first, for it is the only way you will be able to defend yourself. They whisper FEAR until it is all that you can hear. They whisper GREED until it is all you desire. They whisper SPEED even when you know you are already going too fast and putting yourself and others in danger.

They whisper LUST so you will never know true happiness and share your life with someone who really cares about you. They whisper LONELINESS that you will never find someone who really loves you, for you are loveless. They whisper DEATH that you will not see what you could have achieved for you are useless, worthless and no good to anyone.

They whisper these things in your ear, because they cry out for a world of chaos. Eye for an eye does not leave everyone blind. If I kill your brother and I don't have a brother, what are you going to do? If I plant a bomb and kill 50 people, how are you going to plant a bomb and kill the same 50 people?

The troubles in Northern Ireland are a true example of an 'eye for an eye'. When something terrible happened to one side, the whispers cheered and cried out for something more terrible to happen to the other side and they continued whispering until they got what they wanted. This became a ping pong game and the atrocities got worse and worse as each side tried to 'outdo' the other. Few ended up blind, but everyone ended up in pain, suffering and in chaos, until someone, somewhere eventually heard something other than those whispers of FEAR, they heard whispers of PEACE and whispers of FORGIVENESS, driven by "I wouldn't wish it on

my worst enemy"! Think about it yourself.

Your whispers will tell you not to forgive, not to forget and not to trust that you are being told the truth. But I at least see who and what those whispers in my head really are and I will listen to them no longer. I will make up my own mind whether someone has done enough to be forgiven and I will do what I can to achieve everything that I aim for, regardless how much they whisper that I can't or that I shouldn't.

Writing about the demons in my head, I wouldn't blame you for thinking that I am completely 'insane', but even if I am does that make any difference to what I am saying?

A pencil is a good invention whether the person that made it is 'sane' or 'insane', a good invention is a good invention, a good thought is a good thought, regardless if I am 'mad', 'bad', male, female or whatever.

I trust that no-one will insult me by telling me that by saying all this I am 'brave' - I am not. Bravery is a soldier laying down his life for his country. Bravery is a fireman, risking his life to save another. Bravery is a police officer choosing a career knowing the risks. Mine is one of desperation - desperation to try to help others, even if it just makes you have a little bit more empathy.

Wish List

If I could have a wish list of all that could come from just telling the truth. I would just want you to have a little bit better understanding of what goes on in the minds of someone thinking about suicide and the torture they face on a daily basis.

I would plead, if I can say so without offending or causing any further harm, for forgiveness for those who have taken their own lives and left loved ones in perhaps just as much pain as they may have been in before taking that final action.

And I would ask you to consider that they weren't, perhaps, able to think 'rationally' at the time. Perhaps they weren't even able to write a note because they simply couldn't think clearly what to say.

I would want you to have read and understand what things help and what things simply make the torture worse. I would want changes in the Housing Executive (truth for a start), and the ability to change psychiatrist as freely as you can change your GP.

I would want people to know about the different symptoms of mental illness and how important it is to tell them to your GP or psychiatrist. How can you tell, if you don't know you need to. I would want people to be able to confide more in their families and friends as they are more likely to see changes in your behaviour that needs 'reporting' in order to get the right diagnosis - perhaps even your workplace - instead of having it made invisible by 'confidentiality'.

I would seek changes in the way the Crisis Response Team operate, though I don't know what changes that would be - perhaps just a little more empathy and definitely more time. I would want to be able to have a safe place to stay even if just for a night until my mind becomes more rational again, even if that is just the Crisis Response Team ensuring that a friend or family member has been contacted and knows that I have called them. Perhaps even a befriending service set up to give someone company for a little while.

And, of course, I would want every town and city across Northern Ireland to have a little place of heaven called 'New Horizons' Action Mental Health, so that everyone had the same opportunities to turn their lives around that I was given, with gates to protect them from the dictators of do this and you will get better, don't do that and you will get better - and either way you don't get better and either way it becomes more and more your fault.

Finally, dare I say it, that if someone - anyone - has an idea to increase funding for local charities and promotion of their services either through a website or any other means, that they get even the littlest crumb of support from their local news-paper.

With my deepest, best wishes to all those who suffer mental illness, in all its forms.

Northern HSC Trust

Inspirational Recovery Group

After my employment and as I questioned why they gave me the job, I found myself sitting at the computer typing this story at the same time.

It wasn't planned, it was just another of those 'compulsions' as if God had personally grabbed me and sat me at the keyboard. And I was there for hours just typing, barely having time to go back and correct typing errors, never mind rephrase anything, or find the correct spelling for 'schizophrenia'. I did go back and add a few things, but it seems too big a challenge to go back and try to get things in that 'perfect' order.

Everything just seemed to pour out and as I wrote things that never made much sense at the beginning just found a way of making sense towards the end. Talking about my 'Guardian Angels' for example, and then explaining to myself what a 'Guardian Angel' really is - that perfect personality, in the perfect place, at the perfect time.

Even the title of the story, At Peace at Last, but Still Alive to 'tell the tale', not knowing or realising at the time that the 'tell the tale' bit was a familiar phrase of my grandfather's when something would go wrong, say dropping a box of something made of glass and he would say "that'll tell a tale".

I passed my story onto my key worker at New Horizons, Antrim, not knowing what - if anything would come of it - or how. Then, only a few weeks later, I was told about the Northern HSC Trust looking for 'recovery stories' and would I like to take part. Sometimes it's really hard NOT to believe in God when things happen to you the way they seem to happen to me - regardless of whether I want them to happen to me or not.

I never used to know what I wanted to be when I was at primary school. Nor did I know what I wanted to be when I was in secondary school. Nor did I know what I wanted to be when I left school and went onto further education. I just 'stumbled' my way through, re-sitting my Maths and English and somehow ending up in a class full of girls studying 'Business Administration'. I had been studying for a Diploma in Business and Finance, but a double in French with 'Stupidity' in the corner egging me on, put paid to that!

Now again, I look back and see why I never knew what I wanted to be. When I left primary school I had learned one thing more than anything else - I was 'stupid'. That's why I never knew what I wanted to be. I didn't want to be a 'stupid' policeman. I didn't want to be a 'stupid' doctor or vet. I didn't want to be a 'stupid' astronaut. I didn't want to be a 'stupid' anything. So what could I be, what should I be.

My work as part of the Northern HSC Trust's Inspirational Recovery Group has made me question what happens at primary school and how primary children are judged. I was judged on 'academics' but what about being judged on 'empathy' or 'compassion'. I never got into trouble at school and I like to think that one reason for that was that I always had 'empathy' and 'compassion' for others - even if sometimes I got 'led astray'.

I know I'll be accused of being a 'Dreamer' again, but just imagine if someone had seen my 'empathy' and 'compassion' for others. I had good training in this, for I grew up with an aunt who had both physical and mental disabilities who was really more of a sister than an aunt - and we often fought as brother and sister too!

Imagine if the Health Service searched for those with natural skills in empathy and compassion as eagerly as multinational organisations search for young natural talent in football. Would we still have had those terrible incidents in hospitals in England due to 'lack of empathy and compassion'? But what do I know!

At least now I know what I want to be. I want to do what I can to care for others. That's what I want to be and that's all I want to be. And I don't care if it's doing voluntary work for Northern HSC Trust, a website or sitting at a till, giving my customers the best service I can - even if it's not perfect service!

I know too now why and where my illness came from. It was diagnosed officially when my grandmother insisted that I went to see HER doctor. But... like a heart attack it started much, much earlier. If you had a heart attack or a stroke, could you trace it back to that first 'fry-up' you got as a school child - or those chips - or those crisps. Did you get them so much that one day they built up and you were eventually diagnosed with that heart attack or stroke.

Then I trace my illness back to my childhood too. Started with that first negative thought, probably by that first pointed finger of blame, shame and damnation. How dare I think differently to someone else, not give the 'right' answer or give the answer 'others' wanted to hear. Those negative thoughts confirmed in 'certificate' with my E's in Maths, English, Business Studies, Computer Studies, Accounts and practically everything else. I got a C in History. I think my school made the mistake of giving me one teacher who actually cared if I left school with As or Es.

And they finally came to a head due to a family dispute everyone thinks of as 'minor' or my fault - yet again - because I don't think as they do. But perhaps I will get the opportunity to explain that at another time, another place. Perhaps I will get the opportunity to explain to you the benefits of living in an estate that you don't know about because you always lived in the country. Perhaps I will get the opportunity to tell you about all the benefits of living in the country that you don't know about because you always lived in an estate. For I had the benefit of both worlds.

Perhaps I will get the opportunity to tell you about all the benefits of living with an aunt who had severe mental and physical difficulties, when all you do is look and feel pity or sorrow, while I got to see the benefits that they too can bring to the world. That hand of friendship, song of joy, friend in need, friend indeed, or just someone to fight with when your real brother and sister aren't around. That wise 'craic' remark to pick you up when you are down - that 'Guardian Angel' in just the right place, at just the right time.

And what about the 'benefits' of living in Northern Ireland, torn apart, divided and tortured by the idiots who lead us all 'astray'. Dare we stand up to them, dare we condemn them, dare we criticise them - we dare not for they are our 'DEFENDER' and all will be lost if we do.

We must 'force' the march, we must 'stop' the march, we must fly THAT flag, we must not let them fly THAT flag, we must pull down the 'flag', we must burn the 'flag'. We must throw stones, retaliate, shoot, bomb, destroy, hurt, kill - 'For God and Country' - but what kind of God would ask you to do that, not mine for sure, nor would I if he did? And surely not for **my** beloved Northern Ireland, where lives 'Guardian Angels' of all faiths and colours, sizes and shapes!

Are any of these the reasons why I see things different to you? Do I see things different to you?

Inspiration

During my time at New Horizons, all I ever knew I was doing was a few courses on cooking, relaxing, preparing for work, learning about citizenship or any number of other courses.

You will not be surprised to hear that I didn't take the opportunity of the book reading class, but as far as I recall I took pretty much all of the others and never failed to complete any that I started and sometimes it was a simple case of just packing simple nuts, bolts and screws into a bag.

They watched over me for a period of about four years and I vaguely remember being told that they were providing me with the tools I would need for a life outside, but what I was really doing was absolutely spectacular. If you, or you know someone who has suffered as I have, I hope you get some inspiration from this:

Opportunity & Honesty Protects My Mental Health

**A POEM DEDICATED TO NEW HORIZONS, ANTRIM
(Action Mental Health)**

"I am Thomas the doubter, never really sure. When it comes to believing in God, my mind sees only a blur. But I know hell for certain, for I stayed there 13 years. My 'illness' was my 'master', but I'll listen him no more.

"My 'master' was pure evil, and his whip was just as he. The torture I got from that whip, was as terrible as terrible could be. When they would strike I knew not, and when or if they would stop. He lashed, and lashed with passion, regardless of my sores. My pleas for mercy were laughed at, and the lashing went all the more. My tears would soak the ground, but the lashes lashed for blood.

"The only thing that stopped them, was the good that came to me. A stranger knocking the window, or a smile that made me glow. My Guardian Angels three, worked hard to set me free. My 'master' hid disgusted, that any should care for me. He hated it so, he couldn't stay, the lashing stopped by a friend - at least until the next time, and perhaps then the end.

"Yet, now I see a heaven, with gates a open wide. I doubt it looks like much to you, but have YOU the wounds 'inside'. These gates have not been made with gold, nor are they studded with pearls. Instead in truth their rusty, and there's no Peter to be found. Perhaps he's playing hide and seek, but I haven't time to seek. I think I'm playing football, or preparing myself for work. But now I see, I've been stitching, stitching a lash for me.

"As I lash this whip in my right hand, I see it's perfect, *just* for me. But just as in the one hand, there's another in the left. Opportunity now whips to the right, and Honesty whips to the left. As I whip with both, I'm in glee, as a job is offered me.

"I know longer plead for mercy, for my 'master' has **none** to give. So, instead I lash with my right hand, followed with one from the left. My lashes are just as painful, and my 'master' 'squeals' as I. But *my* lashes have been made with 'good' and his are old and 'bad'. So mine strike harder and harder and my 'master' chooses flee.

"He promises me, he'll be back, as I dare him **come and see**. For I strike with, determin-ation, and I strike 'good' for sure. I'll strike and strike again, until *he* is but a blur. My whip of *Oppor-tunity*, I hope - will know no end. And my whip of Honesty too - will protect me, I trust, till the end."