

Features on our members

WHAT IS YOUR NAME AND TELL US SOMETHING FUNNY ABOUT YOUR-SELF?

My name is Lorna Hardie and when I laugh at something really funny, the tears come running down my face. It is very embarrassing!

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN INVOLVED IN HUG AND WHAT KIND OF THINGS DO YOU DO?

I have been involved since 1999 and started by attending meetings whilst still a hospital patient. On discharge (2000) I worked voluntarily for 2 hours a week in the HUG office typing poetry for the Moonstruck magazine, which I enjoyed. I did that for one year. Next, I was asked to represent HUG on The Care Programme Approach Management Committee, which meets six-weekly for severely at risk ex-patients. I sat on the committee for one year during which time I was asked to re-write the user/carer guide which I did and this is now being given to patients on the CPA scheme when discharged from hospital. This is also being used in Dykebar.

I have also visited another hospital with Graham and a HUG member to assist with setting up a Patients Council office in Argyll and Bute. I attended with another HUG member, a conference in Dundee on 'Hearing Voices' which was a two day event, at which Dr. Carr was doing a presentation. With Emma and Graham I went to Moray College and talked to students about Mental Health and then we split into small groups to answer questions. Stigma is becoming less and HUG has worked hard in achieving this over the last 10 years. I also did an interview with trainee Mental Health Officers and it went well. I am in the HUG Friday Forum and also for one year I represented the Patients Council on the HUG Round Table.

WHO HAS HAD THE BIGGEST INFLUENCE ON YOU?

Definitely Graham Morgan and also Frank Holmes, chairman (Patients Council Office), for their support, clear thinking and understanding. Also, of course, my family in every way. Deacon Jacques Cooke of St. Mary's R.C church who is a personal friend of mine.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE FOOD?

I like just about everything in moderation, but not sardines! But my favourite must be steak or lasagne.

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WHO WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO MEET?

I would like to meet Annie Lennox of the Eurythmics as I think she is a very talented, extraordinary woman. James Blunt as I find his voice very calming and soothing. I would also like to meet David Grey, Neil Young and Snow Patrol.

NAME ONE THING THAT WOULD MAKE YOUR LIFE BETTER

More funding for research into Mental Health. A cure for Bipolar Disorder and if not more funding so that we can improve on present services.

WHAT THREE WORDS DESCRIBE YOU?

Kind, caring and hopeful.

WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT

Bringing up two daughters who are now grown women and are a credit to me. And also my two grand-daughters and my new baby grandson Daniel who was born in December.

WHO DO YOU MOST ADMIRE?

I admire people who can work their way through all the problems that life can sometimes throw at you and come out the other side.....not bitter, but stronger.

Ghana—Mind Freedom

See how time flies since we of Mind Freedom Ghana struck acquaintance with HUG. It's a little over a year now when a carrier bag a friend brought to me from the UK had HUG email addresses and what you do briefly written on it. I then followed up with letters to Graham and he enthusiastically responded. There's no gainsaying that a lot of water has passed under the bridge since then with my articles being published in HUG newsletter and your reciprocal gesture of sending us various publications some of which are very educative, scintillating, emotional and amusing.

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Mind Freedom Ghana (MFGh) as you know is a mental health based organization formed in 2004 whose vision is directed towards the mental health and lives of sufferers and survivors of psychiatry in Ghana. Our objectives are inter alia to support and assist those with psychiatric labels in their treatment regime and further advocate for conditions that would not infringe on their human rights and dignity; Promote activities and schemes that would make persons with mental disabilities have a sense of belonging and acceptance into the larger society; Seek to improve upon the social, economic and moral conditions of those with mental disabilities and deal with the stigma they suffer.

Currently based and operating in Accra, Ghana's capital city, due largely to limited finances, membership of MFGh composed among others of survivors is 20. These are people with varied backgrounds in law, psychology, marketing, teaching, farming etc. Source of funding for MFGh's activities has been from its members and donations from some individuals. It must be stressed that inadequate funding has not made our operations smooth and easy.

Activities of MFGh are centered on advocacy, awareness creation, research and prevention. For now, the major activity which is ongoing in the communities being done by our members is one-on-one counselling with those identified with stress and depression related problems.

Some other programmes undertaken by MFGh in the recent past have been the 1st Mad Pride Event Ghana 2006 organized in July and a symposium. Activities organized during the Mad Pride Event which had the theme "Free Minds At Ease", were radio, and TV discussions, community rallies and climaxed with a street march involving about 300 people after which a petition was presented to Ghana's Minister of Health.

In November we organized a symposium with the theme " Psychosocial Disabilities - Stamp Out The Stigma". The programme had a psychiatrist, social worker, psychologist, lawyer and survivors making presentations on the theme. Attendance at the symposium was put at 240 among which were security personnel, civil and public servants, traders, students and the general public.

Some major achievements we would like to share with you are about the assistance we proffered to some patients who had recovered from their psychotic conditions having been admitted to the main psychiatric hospital in Ghana called Accra Psychiatric Hospital.

Just after the Mad Pride Event, some of our members went on a random visit to the hospital and among others met this young lady aged 23 years who narrated her thus being admitted there.

Named Abena Nyarko, she hailed from Agona Nyarkrom, a village about 55 kilometers from Accra. She had migrated to Accra to work with a restaurant as a dish washer. Not being able to afford to hire a room to stay in, she put up with a friend who was occupying a kiosk at a nearby place nearby.

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According to Abena, she fell in love with an auto mechanic who lived around the area. In no time she got pregnant. When she mentioned it to her boyfriend, he flatly denied responsibility and even beat her up on 2 occasions when she asked for money to attend ante natal clinic. Faced with this predicament and having no relative in Accra to intervene on her behalf, she had to care for the pregnancy with her meagre salary for the 9 months.

Not long after giving birth in April 2005, she got into serious financial difficulties where she couldn't get money to buy food to feed the baby. She had to go begging to get some money to care for herself and the baby. It must be mentioned that Abena was laid off from her restaurant job just after child-birth. In the midst of these serious challenges, she broke down mentally and some good Samaritans who found her, took her to hospital and someone among proffered to care for her baby when she got admitted.

At the time our members met Abena, she had recovered very much from her condition and remembered every aspect of her family background and personal life. She was due to be discharged from the hospital but because of no relative had showed up coupled with her apparent reluctance to move out of the hospital for fear of being maltreated again due to no fault of hers, this could not be carried out. Upon counselling from our members, Abena agreed to be discharged from the hospital and go back to her village to resettle there. It was also prevailed upon her that her child will also be given back to her.

On the work she'll like to do to sustain her, she mentioned trading in food stuffs such as yams, plantain, cassava, maize etc. MFGh was able to mobilize the equivalent of 225 Pounds Sterling from our members which was used as transport to take her to her village and part thereof used as start-up capital for her trading business. It is refreshing to report that Abena is currently pursuing her trade diligently and has been happily accepted back into where she came from.

We of MFGh feel profoundly proud and elated having been of assistance to this young lady whose life would have been ruined due to no fault of hers. The inner satisfaction within us can be more than what it is now if and only if our finances improve thereby enabling us to do more of such things in our activities.

As the year edges closer to the end, we wish to use this opportunity to reiterate our commitment to the links we've established with HUG. We do cherish our relationship with HUG and hope the coming years will not only strengthen it but make it more meaningful. HUG has so far demonstrated goodwill, fraternity and cooperation since we made contacts. These we greatly appreciate and pray are sustained.

Albeit we're miles away from each other, the magic of modern electronic communication means has brought closer sharing thoughts, ideas and interacting in different ways. Our sincere belief is that HUG can and will do more to assist and support us to realize our objectives.

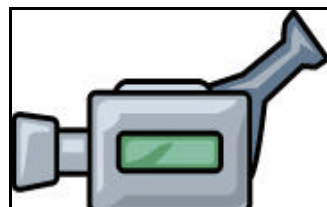
Wishing you the best of the Yuletide and may year 2007 bring the best of what we look forward to in our activities.

Workers Update

Quick update on the work we have been doing since the last newsletter. So here goes...

Karen - ICT and Media

Hi everyone. It is so good to be back although I am missing my precious wee Evie—she's growing up so fast.



I have been really busy since I got back with a new DVD commission from NHS Health Scotland. We have been commissioned to do a new DVD for the Mental Health First Aid course.

Apart from that my time has been spent filling out funding applications with Emma. I will have more news for you in the Spring newsletter.

Debbie - Awareness Training

Training the Trainers

We had a training day for awareness raisers on 1st November. The feedback from the day was very positive and we are all looking forward to a follow up day in the New Year.



Training

In October we went to speak with 1st year care course students at Northern College (Alness Campus). In December we trained Alness Key Housing and Fort William Key Housing staff. We also went to speak with a group of Young People at Thurso with Careers Scotland.

If you would like to be involved in any way with the awareness raising then give me a call on **01463 723558**

Newsletter Spring 2006

We are looking for articles for our next newsletter. In particular we would like to expand the discussion on Spirituality and restart our book review.

Emma – educational work with young people



STIGMA play and self-harm workshops with teachers

The last couple of months have been a whirlwind working with Eden Court and the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry to co-ordinate 24 high schools hosting this year's STIGMA play, which toured during September and October. The play reached around 2000 school pupils, aged 14-18 and has been an amazing few weeks with an excellent response from the kids and teachers. We have a huge pile of evaluation forms to wade through but at a glance the feedback from the pupils has been excellent.

To compliment the play we worked closely with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services to deliver 15 workshops to school staff on the issue of self-harm. These were very well received and included a DVD with two HUG members talking about their experiences of self-harm.

'Free your Mind' Youth Theatre Project

Our work with Eden Court and Inverness Youth Theatre started in early September. We are working with an amazing and inspiring group of 16 young people to educate them about the psychotic illnesses in order for them to then produce a film which will be used to raise awareness with school pupils about schizophrenia, hearing voices/psychosis. It is a really exciting, and challenging, project for all of us but is going really well and is great fun.

Bulletin Board

A quick reminder about our bulletin board.

If you wish to sign up to join our little community please go along to the HUG website and follow the link called online discussion on the home page.

You will need to sign up to the board and one of the administrators will validate your membership of HUG and then you can join in with one or all of the discussion topics on the board.

Look forward to chatting with you all—Debbie

The Stigma Play

On Thursday 5-10-06 I went with Graham to the final productions of the Stigma play. They were held in Glenurquhart High School and Kilchuimen Secondary School.

It is a very powerful play on the topic of self harm. I feel it was well received and taken seriously by the pupils who ranged from 4th – 6th years.

Three actors from Eden Court and one from Edinburgh staged the play which was very well enacted.

At the end the pupils had a chance to air their views and also state different ways in which things could have been said or done. Also many of them had changed their views on people with Mental Health problems.

Everyone was issued with material on self-injury and how to get support for themselves or someone they know. At the back of the booklet there is a list of useful addresses and contact numbers.

I found it very emotional, but I was glad that I did see the play.

Lorna
HUG Member.

Life's Voyage – Journey with the wind

Far horizons attract my gaze once more
My world of four walls has now expanded
My imagination now seems my only limit
I grasp opportunities that present
And create new ones, as change stimulates me
My sails catch the wind and I know it is recovery.
Life is a voyage with tempests and flat calm.
I am the helmswoman that steers my course now,
Knowing the harbours of friendship and support
In which to shelter when the waves get too threatening.
They do not stop me sailing for that is the thrill of living.
I am my own lighthouse now, warding myself away from dangerous rocks which may
bring me down.
Catch the breeze on your face and feel refreshed.
Be bold and charter new territory.
New resources within you are just waiting to be tapped,
So fill your sails and journey with the wind.....

Home Alone

All of us can feel lonely sometimes – winter can be long and the days short and we just want to stay at home and pull the blinds. Imagine how much more isolating it is if you live in a rural area with no transport and no friends nearby. Now add depression, or a mental health problem that makes you feel even more alone. When you feel low that's often when you are least able to maintain contact with people. It can feel like a vicious circle of isolation.

Well, Befrienders Highland has come up with a new befriending scheme that takes account of our Highland geography and offers befriending at a distance. Regular phone, letter or e-mail contact with a carefully matched volunteer can provide friendship for someone with a mental health problem who is also rurally isolated or homebound.

Yvonne Reid is the Co-ordinator of this new initiative and part of her role is to carefully match individuals with their volunteer befriender so that they have things in common and there is a good chance that they will get on well together. Yvonne explained "When people are unwell there are often a multitude of professionals involved, but to have someone in regular contact not because they're paid, but because they WANT to be in contact, can be so important and make such a difference in the person's life".

Volunteers too seem to get so much out of it – a new friend, doing something worthwhile, developing skills and building their own self-confidence to name but a few. One volunteer with a vision impairment thought she would never be able to do any voluntary work. Now she's phoning her new friend once a week. They talk about their pets, what they've been doing and the general goings on in the world. It's a friendship they value and from which they mutually benefit.

The different ways of contact suit a wide range of people. Some prefer the flexibility of letter writing or e-mails. For others the human voice on the end of the phone is more important. It is completely each person's choice which method of contact they use. The volunteer and person befriended agree together when they will phone, write or e-mail and this usually happens about once a week.

"I like hearing from him – I'm wanting to read what he's written"; "We laugh a lot, and I mean a lot!"; "Just half an hour a week and she's come to be a real friend," are just some of the comments from the friends and volunteers.

Yvonne is keen to hear from you if you would like to know more about getting a befriender or about how to become a volunteer befriender.

You can contact her at Distance Befriending on 01463 235675 or e-mail distance@befriendershighland.org.uk

HUG's 10th Anniversary

Earlier this year HUG celebrated (very quietly) its tenth anniversary.

I have been involved in HUG since its very start and thought I would mention a few of the things that have struck me over the years.

I have vivid memories of our very first ever meeting which we held in a Church Hall by the river in Inverness. There was such a buzz to the day as we gathered together to decide on our name, our aims and objectives, the way we would work and our ground rules.

Back then there was much less concern about smoking and I have memories of a cloud of smoke in the room we were working in and later on of lunch hours spent in the smog of Cairdeas Cottage smoke room. Times of comradeship, support and finding the will to change the world; a great exuberant, exciting, invigorating period when in a few short months we found that we were being listened to and that real change was happening as a result of the reports we wrote about what we needed, wanted and didn't have.

Those reports have become the bedrock that provides a voice for our members since then and have over the years involved more and more people and become a credible and powerful way of giving voice to our experience. We get great feedback from our members who are the reason for all that we do but also, from officials, professionals, managers, the Scottish Executive and even Government Ministers and MSP's.

We had a place on the Millan Committee when it reviewed the Mental Health Act and have been heavily involved with the Act since then through reports, speeches and meetings with officials and MSPs as well as through a secondment to the Scottish Executive when we researched user and carers views about what was most needed at the time.

From the very beginning our members have talked about the need to combat stigma and increase awareness around mental health.

We were fortunate 7 years ago to receive funding to get to grips with this subject and since then Emma, Debbie, Karen (and for a time Chris) have worked their hearts out with our members to achieve real and significant change.

This work was acknowledged by the Scottish Executive when they funded our anti stigma work as a 'local exemplar project with national significance' for three years. In that time our work with young people has gained national recognition. Just this year the stigma play reached between 2000 and 2500 young people.

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Other areas of work included our mental health awareness training which has been consistently successful (this summer the evaluation of our work with Comic Relief showed that our user testimony was regarded as 100% excellent.) and then there are the DVDs we produce. The one on the mental health act has been distributed far and wide and we recently heard that just one of those DVD's has reached at least 1000 people.

We have a target of making one media placement a month but have gained such a profile that we sometimes find that we are creating news rather than bargaining for it.

This December a group of us will be going down to London to attend the Community Care Awards because our young peoples work has been short listed for an award.

In the last 2 months HUG members and workers have attended 6 user organisation meetings to let them know how we do what we do and in November we went to Romania where we continue to build up links with users across Europe.

I can't tell you what has struck me most over the years, maybe the speeches to launch See Me and our subsequent partnership to manage it, possibly meeting people from across the world at a British Council meeting on mental health, maybe the exhilaration of knowing that a speech has really hit the mark. It is those things but it is more than that and much more basic. In the office there is a huge sense of shared ownership and commitment for what we are trying to do. It's the fact that we look out for each other and support each other and that doesn't apply just to workers its our members with their enthusiasm, encouragement and dedication to a cause for justice that keeps us going and knowing that what we are doing plays a big part in what, in times to come , will be a great campaign for equality and respect for people with a mental health problem across Scotland and beyond.

Maybe more than this though is the time we need to reflect – as usual we are nearing the end of the year with no clear promises of new money to support our anti stigma work. Work that we know changes attitudes and increases confidence and stops guilt and makes for a fairer world. The saddest thing is that although we are trying to improve things and change the world it is such a slow job and people continue to suffer dreadfully. Over the years a number of our members have died because of their illness, the tragedy of this, of lost, vibrant, warm people constantly reminds me why we do what we do. So for me this anniversary is a time to remember those that didn't make it and to celebrate the power of our voice.

Graham Morgan

Schizophrenia

Anyone diagnosed as "schizophrenic" or "psychotic" could possibly find themselves forcefully detained in psychiatric units for very long periods of time. From the sufferer's point of view it is usually a religious experience of some description.

Treatments are nearly always drug based. Patients often find themselves heavily sedated for considerable lengths of time. The idea that it could be a religious experience is thought to be an absurdity by the psychiatric profession.

Such patients have no talking therapies. Nothing of what is going on in their heads is ever explored with an effort to relate to what they are experiencing.

The non-existence of such therapy, heavy sedation numerous (often lengthy) spells in hospital must surely lead to a lot of frustration, resentment and anger building up in the sufferer. This all leading to the headlines we often hear and see.

There is a saying: "When you talk with God it is called praying. When God talks to you it is called schizophrenia."

Yours walking with "God",

George McGregor,

Bipolar Fellowship Scotland

Just over a year ago Alan Douglas was appointed Development Officer with the above organisation.

His main objectives are helping to establish more self-help groups and make himself known to established groups. He is also going to arrange some self-management courses and run some group facilitator training sessions.

If you are interested in joining the Inverness Self-help group it takes place at:

**Cairdeas Cottage
5 Bank Street
Inverness**

On the last Tuesday of every month

5.00pm – 6.30pm

Please phone Susan Anderson, Manager for more details if required
Tel: 01463 713928

Lorna Hardie HUG member

On Paganism

Continuing our look at Spirituality

Some of you may have noticed that there has been an upsurge in interest in Paganism in recent years. Druids and witches seem to be the most popular manifestations, but it can take many other forms. Personally, I would be happy to be called a Pagan, for three main reasons.

First, you can be a Christian and a Pagan. When Christian missionaries first arrived in India and tried to convert the Hindus, they were stumped by the lack of resistance they encountered. They gathered all the heathen Hindus together and told them about God and Jesus Christ and heaven and the devil, and the Hindus said, "OK, yes, we believe you", and proceeded to add God to the Hindu pantheon --- which is where the trouble began, because, of course, the missionaries had intended that the Hindus also give up believing in their own, old gods. As with Hinduism, so with Paganism: you can believe whatever you choose. The Paganism is the tolerance; you cannot be a Christian Pagan if you refuse to allow the validity of other people's beliefs, whatever they may be.

My second reason relates somewhat to the first, but it extends tolerance into the devils territory. Some forms of Pagan belief, most notably North American Indian, hold that there is no such thing as 'bad medicine' --- which translates as there is no such thing as 'bad behaviour' --- just that some medicines are difficult to handle. These ideas are rooted in a respect for nature, so that everything that is natural has its place and is needed by the whole, from poisonous spiders, to little lambs, from wolves with big teeth, to peacocks with big feathers. In this respect, one thinks of forest fires: for a long time these were viewed as major, destructive disasters. More recently it has been realised that they are vital to regenerate the forest. Of course, if they occurred too frequently, we would just end up with a scorched earth, so they are needed, but only occasionally.

So, in these terms, someone in our society who is an aggressive fighter, and might be denigrated as a 'bully ', would be seen as having a 'difficult medicine'; society, the Native Americans would say, needs its aggressive fighters occasionally (soldiers?), but in between times, these people need ways of channelling these difficult energies.

Butterflies

To begin with you have a caterpillar, finally, or hopefully you have a butterfly. In between you have a chrysalis. First, inside the chrysalis the butterfly develops, then it becomes a strong healthy butterfly by struggling free of the chrysalis. No chrysalis, no butterfly: no struggle with the chrysalis, no healthy butterfly.

I do not like, and do not intend to like, the illness which we now call depression. But recently; I have noticed changes that happen during that state. I have begun to wonder if depression can sometimes be a chrysalis. Every caterpillar has the potential to become a butterfly (unless something else nabs them for lunch before they make it to the chrysalis). Every person has the potential to become a really good person. But we humans get there by stages, and some of the stages are an almighty struggle.

When sensible people come on a chrysalis in a corner somewhere, they leave it in peace until the butterfly emerges. Silly people interfere and the creature is destroyed, or a not-at-all healthy creature emerges. When someone is in the grip of a depression, sensible people see that the conditions surrounding the person provide security, until the episode is past. Silly people are an actual pain in the neck at those times, and can do damage.

A caterpillar will become a chrysalis once in its caterpillar life. A human being may, as soon as they develop to their full potential go several times into the chrysalis state.

Sometimes this state may manifest as a depressive illness. What happens next is in the lap, not of the gods but of that person and their companions.

Garry

Website

I am developing some new pages for the website to include one page for every HUG branch.

If you have any news from your branch or links which you feel are important to your area then please e-mail me on dberry@hccf.org.uk or phone Debbie on 01463 723558

Awareness Work

As most of you will know a large part of our work is all about improving understanding of and increasing knowledge about the lives we lead when affected by mental illness.

We work with young people, provide awareness raising events, produce DVDs, work with the media and engage in a number of activities to raise the profile of mental health and people with a mental health problem.

The work we do has had a great impact and is reported and commented on across Scotland, the UK and even beyond.

Our work with young people has just been short listed for a Community Care Award and soon we will be travelling to London to see if we have won – do wish us luck!

It seems sad that when we do so well in our day to day work that we struggle for funding. Last year, as many of you know we nearly had to stop our work and were only rescued at the last minute.

This year we are in the same position – we have no guarantee of any continued funding for this part of our work although we have made applications to various trust funds.

If any of you have any bright ideas then do let us know. It would be so sad if we had to stop something that we know works so well.

Psychiatric Hell

It is easy getting used to being laughed at straight to your face or behind your back. To be blatantly patronised can be extremely distressing not merely annoying.

However there is a grotesque form of such patronising which is a speciality of the psychiatric profession which is a result of the world we have come to live in. They are becoming increasingly unaware of it, even ignorant that it is a possibility. R.D Laing in his book "The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise" did his utmost to expose it but that was in the 60's, 1967 to be exact. This unconscious patronising combined with an ever-increasing obsession with drug treatment goes way beyond causing stress eventually into the realms of the utmost torture of mind, spirit and even soul.

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If you are considered to be suffering from Mental Illness you must generally accept that you are ill before you can hope to get better. Furthermore, until your psychiatrist decides that you are well you must accept that you are ill.

People diagnosed as Schizophrenic, Psychotic and Manic Depressive are nearly all considered to be chronically ill for life and according to the Psychiatrists profession, will in all probability need lifelong medication.

The Psychiatric profession, this authority which "knows" best how to help you, has an awesome range of legal power it can quite easily enforce if it is unable to induce submission by threat or coercion when their attempts to "reason" with someone they consider mentally ill fail.

Estranged, alienated and all alone. It is so easy for mentally ill people to become sectioned, locked up for indefinite periods, drugged up and as inner-turmoil bites deeper – often drugged even more. There is still in this day and age very widespread use of treatment such as E.C.T. People who are sectioned can be forced, against their will if necessary, to receive any treatment thought required.

Increasing frustration leads to anger, resentment and even violence. These emotions combined with intensive inner confusion and turmoil leads to increasingly "inappropriate" behaviour, convincing Psychiatrists that such people are chronically ill.

To crown all this as such people become increasingly alienated from the Psychiatric profession efforts are intensified to convince them that they will not be able to function without medication. Also they must continue to have faith and respect for, and in, those who are doing their utmost to care for them.

Psychiatry's narrow mindedness, its obsession with drug based treatment and its illusion of one day perfecting it, is in reality spiralling the suffering of the people they so desperately believe they are helping. If there isn't a radical change in their outlook their hospitals will become unimaginable torture chambers.

I doubt very much if Franz Kafka could have ever conceived of such a scenario. After all, truth is stranger than fiction.

George McGregor

First written around 1996, revised July 2006

It was calm in the Bay

It was calm in the bay, in the shelter of the island. Only the ferry was moving, making a trip it made day in day out. Everyone knew the steersman and trusted him. Sometimes he would not take the ferry out, no matter what he was offered to do so. But that was right, because on those days the weather was too much for a small boat.

Once or twice he had gone out against his instincts, when someone was hurt and help was urgently needed. When that happened it was his skill that kept the boat's head to the wind, that kept himself, his crew and his passengers safe.

He remembered a day when he had been one of several boats, going to the help of a foreign ship, when the already fierce wind had worsened. It had taken him all his time to keep his own boat from foundering, so he was unaware till he made it back to shore that two of the other boats had been swamped.

As for the larger ship, he and his friends reached her in time to take the crew off, but as they were on their way back, and fortunately in the shelter of the island, an enormous wave had caught her and pushed her past tipping point. Now she lay on the sea bed and was sometimes visited by the local sub-aqua club.

When I am not very well I feel like that steersman, and my brain is the boat I am trying to steer through rough, sometimes dangerous, sometimes very dangerous seas. It is my responsibility not to be swamped, it is my responsibility not to get into an unsafe situation.

I think that is why I am very unimpressed by people who claim to be 'strong' enough not to become mentally ill. Just as the boat has not been built that can withstand any strength of sea, so the brain does not exist that can withstand any pressure.

Two points: first, every brain has a tipping point, those that have not tipped have not been exposed to the worse conditions. Second, just like the skilful steersman, everyone can learn how to keep balanced up to a point, that is the reason for therapy. But, just as the steersman does not take his skills for granted, so people in recovery from mental illness are better at taking nothing for granted. That way, like the steersman on a peaceful day, we can enjoy many pleasant times.

Garry