

## MY ROAD OF RECOVERY FROM BPD

Recovery from Borderline Personality Disorder asks me to change thoughts, reactions and behaviour that are deeply ingrained. It asks me to learn skills that will lead to happy, healthy and productive living. We all use sub conscious and conscious mechanisms to relieve our anxieties, worries and stress some helpful and some not so helpful. Mine have been **extremely** unhelpful **and** destructive I really didn't know how else to cope. I am reminded of the rhyme about the little girl who when she was good she was very, very good and when she was bad she was horrid! Black and white thinking indeed!

I diagnosed myself with Borderline Personality Disorder 3 years ago after decades of confusion, pain, despair, guilt shame and many other negative feelings and perceptions of myself of **MY** personality. Through the years I suffered severe and constant anxiety, panic-attacks, anorexia, bulimia, OCD, depression alcohol abuse and extreme and frequent mood swings. One of the most difficult things I have to live with are Mood Swings. They haven't gone and I don't think they will. I have always been **INORDINATELY** hypersensitive and believe they are genetically or biologically caused. I liken them to a pop-up on a computer screen. They make you jump, take you by surprise they irritate you and put you out of sorts. A press of a button on the computer and they will go, if you press the right button they can be stopped completely, I **DO** wish I had a button to press! My mood pop-ups trigger physical and mental pain, fear and panic. I still live with a constant level of anxiety and a sensation of restlessness that is difficult to explain or understand. A mini-recovery is required each time my mood swings.

I was treated individually for all these conditions and **could** give testimony to all the dreadful, traumatic things that happened but my aim in this discourse is to tell you of my **progress** --- and what has helped so far.

Diagnosis and its confirmation was one thing but starting on a road of recovery was entirely different. I am of the opinion that it is nigh on impossible to contemplate recovery unless (1) One understands the nature of the beast. (2) One **WANTS** to recover (3) One has had enough suffering and (4) One has a **radical acceptance**. After diagnosis I waited a year for a place in **DIALECTICAL BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY**. My group was the second to take place in Inverness so it was early days for all concerned. The most important and revealing thing was to recognise that I was not alone. It was astounding to learn that we all had traits that we shared so much so that one girl thought that I had been put there as a spy because **SHE** identified so much with **MY** thoughts and behaviour! It was all so **difficult** to grasp and when I saw a member of the group upset or in crisis it brought home to me how painful, chaotic and needy our lives were. There was a suicide in the group and this was devastating for us all.

Our weekly meetings were augmented by a weekly session with an individual therapist. As far as I am concerned this was where the **real** hard work took place. I repeated the course and although the second time round was easier to understand it was **FAR** more difficult for me personally. I began to see the **ENORMITY** of what I needed to do. I didn't want to let go of the familiar even though I was aware that it was damaging myself, and others. My reactions and behaviour had to change if I wanted to stop the pain, misery and destruction. During this second round of DBT I

had more crisis situations but having said that I recovered and got back on track more quickly

At about this stage I began, through the encouragement and patience of my therapist, to start to question or challenge my thoughts. My mind or Inner Life would not stop chattering, round and round it would go morning noon and night ruminating regurgitating and tormenting me -- I was aware all right! I was aware of the rubbish going round in my head. This compulsive thinking had always been there but now I was aware of it --**BREAKTHROUGH!** --I Think Not for it began a battle,--- **EGO VERSUS ENLIGHTENMENT.** You see my inner life habits had been formed and established for decades my ego was attached to these habits-- it **IDENTIFIED** with them. Who would I be without them and who was I anyway? I certainly wasn't comfortable in my own skin, in fact I hated myself, I was riddled with guilt, shame and confusion. My therapist pointed out my good qualities and those parts of my personality that **were** ordered or balanced and this really helped me to realise I was not **all** bad.

One day I was reading a self-help book and the phrase 'Pollyanna thinking' was mentioned. I instantly identified with this and bought and re read Pollyanna by Eleanor Porter it had been a favourite of mine as a child. The theory was expressed in DBT as lemonade from lemons. So now I was challenging my thoughts **and** finding the good in every situation. Mindfulness also started to play a very important part in everyday life simple things like if I was in a queue I would focus on things around me, tell myself I was lucky to have this time to reflect on my surroundings. I started to practise living in the moment, an invaluable tool to recovery. Towards the end of DBT I was definitely beginning to see a glimmer of hope. This hope was reinforced by my discoveries and recognition of habits that I had never really been aware of. One of these was that I was a people pleaser and would do almost anything to gain approval and affection. I would take on far, far too much attempt things that I wasn't able to do and even worse do things that deep down I didn't want to do at all and all because I needed to prove myself, make up for past failures and avoid rejection. Needless to say everything would crumble and the vicious circle would start again. I had to be mindful and fully aware of this for the future. Hope was also fuelled because after 8 years contact had been made with my eldest son, I attended my other son's graduation without mishap and a blossoming relationship with my sister had been established.

It is now a year since DBT ended and it was catastrophic for me. There was nothing except a pile of notes and the saplings of hope and enlightenment. It was insidious but the process was completed by March this year, I was in serious crisis, I had absolutely **NO HOPE LEFT** --**NONE**, I felt like the living dead, I was empty and I was angry I found myself, under the influence sitting on the floor in a corner of my doctors surgery begging for help. //I can see **NOW** that how I dealt with this situation **could** give the treatment of Borderline its reputation for being a hopeless and thankless task. In this case the doctor was compassionate and I thank him for that.

I had already satisfied 2 of my concepts of recovery (1) I understood the nature of the beast that is borderline (2) I wanted to get better and I now satisfied number (3) I had reached the point I could suffer no longer the only way out of the pain was to get

better. Suicide wasn't an option for me. I had experienced the effect it has on those left behind on numerous occasions and still felt guilt and shame at my own attempts.

I talked to a nurse therapist and as a result of that talk I achieved the fourth necessity of recovery I **radically accepted everything** --- I drove out of the cul-de-sac and onto the main road of my personal recovery.--- I re-discovered and more importantly practiced all the DBT skills. I read self-help books. I searched the net for helpful and informative websites. I sought out and used appropriate affirmations. I did a 6 week WRAP course and I have been accepted for a 2year Counselling Skills Course by Aberdeen University. I took a course in Philosophy and another in Mental Health Awareness and vowed to be involved in promoting this awareness and ending stigma. Finally, after being a member for 8years, I asked HUG if I could help them with their collective advocacy and anti-stigma work. I was ready for Action!

That is where I am at this moment. The skills need to be practiced every single day they need to become part of my personality. Recovery is not to be dabbled in. Recovery is a way of life and is very, very hard work. I firmly believe that it **IS** possible to recover from Borderline Personality disorder. It needs a non-judgmental, non-pejorative compassionate approach by professionals **and support is required THROUGHOUT recovery.** For me half an hour a month with a nurse therapist would have sufficed to satisfy this need of support surely that would be more cost effective than relapse?

This is my WRAP/DBT toolbox, my box of tricks. I can dip into it and choose a tool to soothe, distract or stop any thoughts or impulses that may lead to negative behaviour. This is Judith's box and unlike Pandora's box that contained all the evils of the world and a smidgen of hope Judith's box is full of hope and contains the tools and skills of recovery all I have to do is lift the lid!

**WRAP = Wellness Recovery Plan** A six week course that explores how to spot signs of relapse or approaching crisis and how to cope with it.

Judith's box is a card file box in which I have written helpful 'things' on the cards so that I can access them quickly when needed. I held this box up at the end of the talk!