

# Bedlam And Tea

by Toby Abbs

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Also, by Toby Abbs.

[MAYA: The Mask of Creation.](#)

## WITH HUMBLE THANKS AND APOLOGIES

The path to sanity will always come with an associated cost, and the greater the pain endured the greater the destruction that shall exist. The leftovers are a legacy for all in society to witness and gossip about for eternity.

The tears born from guilt are like flashbacks of consequences from a diseased ridden mind and a tormented soul.

To everyone I have let down during my journey I am truly sorry.

## PREFACE

My deluded soul was riddled with the strands of insanity, and the years of chaos had taken its toll on me and those closest to me. Battle worn I would stumble from one day to the next with the occasional glimpses of normality appearing through the dark clouds.

Alienated through the actions of my past and present, my journey was often lonely, terrifying, and very destructive. Normality was reserved for the utopia portrayed in the films and certainly not for someone who had bipolar disorder. With nowhere else to go I had finally reached the pinnacle of my madness.

From that moment on I decided that I would no longer be defined by the bedlam inside of me, and there would still be lots of pain, tears, frustration and apologising still to come. My desire for normality was about to become a reality, and for the first time in so many years I could sense the freedom from the walls inside my mind.

It would be one of the hardest changes and decisions in my life that I would ever undertake.

## INTRODUCTION

Irrespective of our religious or cultural beliefs we must accept the fact that we all have an underlying flaw inside of us all, and I am not talking about the fragility of our minds. I am talking about our perception of how we manage the fear of uncertainty especially when it comes to the subject of mental health.

Shrouded in ignorance and fear we often allow our egoic thoughts to determine how we respond to a particular scenario that sometimes can be unfamiliar and uncomfortable for us. Often when stepping outside of our comfort zones we may revert to any sociological and cultural conditioning that we already have in place. It takes a brave person to stand tall and show empathy and compassion to someone suffering with physical or mental turmoil.

Our responses to any given situation in life are in a constant battle with what we know versus what we are being told. Closed minds and hearts can be opened with a small change in the right direction that can often lead to some amazing discoveries of knowledge. All it takes is a desire to show a little compassion and empathy, to show a genuine concern and a willingness to learn. A willingness to remove any preconceived ideas that you may already have regarding mental health. This desire to change cannot be forced as it must come naturally and the only way this can happen is through raising awareness and understanding.

Our egoic minds tell us that we are all infallible, and yet inside of all of us is the capacity to be afflicted with a mental illness at any stage of our lives. The irony of this is often only realised after the illness has taken hold. But why wait for after the event? Surely by raising the awareness of mental health we can revert this process of ignorance and turn it into something more powerful to help others. Long term this newly found awareness will also start to help with the prevention and the reduction in the associated impact.

Preconceived barriers are already being torn down by many great initiatives out there, which have been organised by some amazing people. Their tireless work in raising awareness of mental health is simply outstanding, and so much has changed into a positive direction because of their hard work and commitment. I hope Bedlam & Tea can help shine a light of positivity on your own journey and to also help you or someone else to remove another barrier of resistance.

We all have the ability within to change no matter who and what we are.

## THE LAYER CAKE

Our minds can only operate in a consistent manner based on the thresholds our minds can apply and process. The exposure to certain conditioning and situations can so very easily tip the scales from being sane to becoming insane. Therefore, our ability to deal with a particular outcome is only matched by the tolerances of our minds.

The watching of a scary movie that can leave us having a sleepless night may leave others sleeping well. In the same context a traumatic event or continuation of certain stressful situations can either leave us mentally drained or perfectly fine. When the mind is stretched too many times beyond its acceptable limits this is when we start to have a problem. We are all susceptible to the stretching of our minds, and this process of expansion can either be because of a negative or even a positive event that has taken place.

When expansion occurs, the mind can no longer cope with the changes, so it starts to become unstable and erratic. The continuous impact on a physical body part will promote a physical sickness. Why should the continuous impact on our minds be any different?

Overstretched would be the easiest way to explain what having a mental illness actually means. It may be a very simplistic analogy that is void of all the complexities involved, but it in my opinion provides the best representation. If we expose our minds to stresses beyond its limits, then at some point our minds will start to behave inconsistently. Normally functioning behaviour will struggle to co-exist with the process of expansion.

It is very easy to comprehend a broken arm in a plaster cast, but when we cannot see the turmoil in someone's mind we often struggle for empathy and understanding. It is very easy for us to walk away or close our minds to such events, as our very own minds do not allow us to process what we cannot see or understand.

The Layer Cake Approach takes this approach a stage further. I am having to use an analogy again so that you can visualise what is taking place in someone's overstretched mind. Imagine our minds are a sponge cake with a top and bottom layer, and delicious jam in the middle. The jam is logical reasoning with no signs of a mental impairment or overstretching. The top and bottom layer represent the acceptable limits of the mind and are the gentle walls that help to in keep the delicious jam in place. Additional layers of sponge cake will frequently appear, and they can represent either a negative or positive situation that has taken place during our daily routine.

When our minds are operating in a stable fashion our ability to maintain a healthy level of delicious jam and process additional layers of sponge cake is straightforward. (Keep remembering that the delicious jam represents reasoning and behaviour). When our minds are stretched to unacceptable limits, the top and bottom layers of our sponge cake will start to contort. The newly acquired layers of daily life will also not be able to be processed in an adequate way, as they will start to put pressure onto

the already misshaped top and bottom layers. The delicious jam filling is then forced out through the layers causing further disruption to the person's behaviour. Their mind has simply expanded beyond its acceptable limits.

The more layers of daily life that exist to be processed the greater the turmoil, and the greater the period of time to repair and understand the damage of the mind. The larger the flow of delicious jam the more destructive the mental illness will be. When in this state of mental turmoil, the most delicate of situations can have such a devastating effect on someone's wellbeing and recovery time. If the mind is unable to repair itself, then reasoning with itself becomes a very difficult process to do.

Just ask the many people who tried to reason with me when I was in the depths of my madness. Until I could start to prevent the delicious jam from flowing outwards, I was never able to be reasoned with or let alone to be fixed.

I am going to use another analogy again and it is known as the process of amplification. It is just another very simplistic approach to one of the primary traits that exist when someone's mind has become unwell. We have already discovered that when our delicious jam leaks outwards, and we are compounded by additional layers of sponge cake our ability to function normally is greatly diminished. What about the characteristics that make us unique, that make us identifiable as the individual person that we are? Why do some of us become strangers when our minds are stretched beyond acceptable limits?

The simple answer is that when we are battling a mental illness every aspect of who we are becomes amplified. The volume of this amplification and duration depends on how overstretched our minds are. So how does this work exactly?

Let us use the emotion of fear and in a normal situation we would be able to rationalise our fears of let's say flying or encountering a dog on a walk. When the mind becomes amplified so does our perception of this emotion and our inability to process this emotion. This individual portion of fear becomes another layer of sponge cake that we must process, whilst at the same time it is helping to squeeze out yet more of our delicious jam. This element of fear is also going to float around inside our minds and help to amplify any other emotions or thoughts that we may also be experiencing.

How can a diminished mind process the emotion of fear in a logical and reasonable response? It simply can't as there is no capacity inside the mind to do so.

Irrespective of our sociological and cultural upbringing we are taught from an early age about the hazards of life. Such as crossing the road without looking or not going too close to a hot oven and burning our hands. We all have an inbuilt guide that our mind uses as a baseline for when we undertake a particular activity. With normal reasoning we can reference past lessons to help us to make sensible and safe decision making. If our ability to reason is diminished, how can we reference our own individual baseline for safe and sensible behaviours?

We cannot as our erratic minds have no reference point to safeguard us. If logical reasoning is not available, then the person's behaviour will become erratic and destructive as there is no guideline of stability inside their mind. Therefore, some

people with mental health conditions are classed as vulnerable as their ability to act safely when they are mentally ill is not there. They have no reference point to help guide them as their ability to think logically is greatly diminished. Having bipolar disorder makes me one of these people.

We are all human beings with the most delicate of minds and we are all entitled to love and compassion when we become ill. When the mind unravels it can be one of the most terrifying experiences we may ever have to contend with. The amplification of everything, really is so gut wrenching horrible it will leave scars on your tormented soul. Those closest to you also become scarred, sometimes by their own ignorance and sometimes because they love you so much. Sometimes the scars run so deep that the person feels beyond repair, and they say goodbye to this world. It is the cruellest of ironies in a world blighted with the darkness and ignorance of mental health.

We all can become mentally unstable at some point in our lives. NO one is infallible from this and not one person is invincible from it happening repeatedly. No matter who you are, if your mind is stretched to its unacceptable limits, you will become mentally ill. Your ego may contest otherwise but life has a funny old way of throwing things at us. Why leave it to chance by having such a closed mind and heart?

Some people are still unable to accept the mental turmoil inside our minds and become dismissive of such talk. Unfortunately, their closed minds and hearts promote more damage than good. When someone who is mentally ill comes across such attitudes it can be soul crushing. It can hamper their recovery and unfortunately knockdown someone so hard that they never recover. Not a lifetime of souls will rid them of the finger pointing, disdain and alienation.

Mental illness is the bastard of society that most are happy to never acknowledge. It is the bastard that makes others close their doors, breeds ignorance, and talk with such fearful words of hurt. It cries out for empathy, understanding, love and support. It lives in a permanent state of fear, and it is inside everyone one of us.

Remember that ignorance comes from fear and fear comes from a lack of understanding due to a lack of knowledge. Mental health does not have to be this way as we are all so similar and so different at the same time, and yet we all have fragile minds. The threshold between the two is so finite that perhaps if you allowed your ego to see this finite line; it would bring you to tears of how lucky you were yesterday to stay sane when you saw a life changing event happen in front of you.

The most delicate of touches could help to restore love and empathy in your time of suffering, and the most delicate of touches could help to rob you of your sanity. Today a human being became mentally ill who yesterday was perfectly sane.

A fine line is all it takes.

## BEDLAM AND TEA

The short piece was written in the context of when I was battling my mental health. The inclusion is to demonstrate my mindset at the time and how different it is to now. It is important to understand that our road to recovery and acceptance of our mental health condition are vast and troublesome.

A sit down with a close family member and the offering of a cup of tea at the time was seen as an obstacle and not a gesture of kindness. It was just another opportunity for those who cared about me to condescend and patronise me. My deluded mind viewed their inability to understand my mental health condition as a deliberate act of sabotage. Their inability to understand any aspect of my condition made them weak and worthless. In my paranoid mind they simply could not be trusted.

During this period of time my psychosis was rampant and my capacity to reason was non-existent. Everywhere I went the delicious jam from inside my mind would leak outwards onto everything I touched.

*The antiquated pouring of tea is a British custom that comes with the delusion that a simple hot drink will immediately cure all ailments and troubles. The expected freedom from turmoil is always countered with the offering of yet another digestive biscuit.*

*The design and repetition of such an act affords the pourer the ability to hide from their emotions, and for the drinker the denial of any form of understanding. The veil of compassion only lasts until the very last drop of tea is drunk, and then the cracks of the forced smiles begin to show.*

*Tired of platitudes and weak gestured hand touching, I resided myself to the fact that my mental anguish would never be understood by my closet allies. The screams inside my soul resonated only with myself.*

*The irony of their compassion was quantified to the quality of biscuit on offer. It was just another pointless conversation that discussed everything else but my mental health. Avoidance is such an antiquated British custom, but it is not suited to the fragility of our precious minds.*

*This period of calm drinking tea is just an illusion that is carefully created for the appearance of normality.*

Years later I would reflect upon this in sadness. I eventually came to understand that their love and support over the heart-breaking topic of my mental health was never theirs to understand. The cup of tea was the only support they could give at the time and how I wish I could turn the clocks back to say thank you and sorry.

In the same way you cannot bend someone to your will, you cannot force someone to understand and help you with your own mental health journey. It must come naturally and if those closet to you do not have it in them to comprehend your

situation, then this is how it is. Please do not let your frustrations over their inability to help you, become one of your triggers. Please do not let their lack of understanding compound your emotions and make you become bitter and twisted inside. It did for me, and it was just another layer of sponge I would eventually have to deal with further down the line.

Bedlam and Tea can mean so many different things depending on your own personal experience and mental state. A chance to have a cup of tea and to talk about mental health is now met with great excitement and empathy by myself. My mindset is healthy and an inner built desire to help is strong again. My whole outlook changed once I came out the other end and the days of chaos were firmly put behind me.

Please say thank you to your loved ones right now when they offer you support no matter how small it is. No matter how hard the journey is that you are travelling, gratitude and appreciation will go a long way in keeping your close family supportive.

It is important to understand that our road to recovery and acceptance of our mental health condition is vast and troublesome. Your journey is just as hard for those closest to you as it is for yourself.

## A TIME OF CHANGE

My ears were deafened to the sound of my own anguish, and this was the only sound that I heard for many years. It was a pattern of anarchy that came from within the very depths of my soul. It twisted and tormented my every move and clouded my judgement with sorrow and pain.

My diagnosis six years prior in 2006 was nothing short of a theatrical showmanship to appease the masses. My lack of concern for all aspects was hidden with well-placed frowns and the subtle nodding of my head. Inside my mayhem wanted to play, it was a bipolar creation of myself, and it fed on the turmoil of my overstretched mind. Keeping still and pretending to listen took much discipline and concentration, and my bedlam expected nothing less than a full set of Oscar awards.

*How much longer is this charade going to go on for?* I asked myself.

The dreaded words were spoken, the Psychiatrist Nurse was recommending me for a course of psychiatric medication. This was now an immense problem as medication comes with responsibility, it comes with regularity, and then wanting to stop my fun. My worst nightmare had just played out right in front of me and I didn't even see it coming. My deluded self was so wrapped up in a blanket of my own arrogance that I was caught completely off guard.

Vowing never to be sucker punched again by the medical establishment I was already planning my next destructive episode. The mental health team had just wasted four hours of my precious time.

Diagnosis for me was all about the restriction in thought, the slowing of my body and the shame of having to be told what to do and when. For someone who was such a high calibre bastard this was the worst possible outcome I could ever have imagined. Diagnosis left a scar on my tormented soul, and it was time to take my bipolar to a whole new level of destruction.

Six years later in 2012 I had made some progress, but I was still unleashing pain and my delicious jam out onto the world. My every impulse, behaviour and thought exhaled the pungent chaos of my bipolar. My mental health had deteriorated to such a point that I had become conditioned to act in no other way. In the summer of 2012, I became a whisker away from becoming sectioned. My delicious jam had spent six years oozing out its contents with no attempt from myself to remedy the problem. My reign of anarchy had finally caught up with me.

*Like a log floating on a river no matter how hard I tried to strike a balance, the metaphorical log would always spin or move to the exact opposite of what I wanted. As the current of the river increased so would my attempts to stabilise the log all to no avail. The river was my sanity, the log was my sticky plaster and the futile action of trying to save the situation was the same repetition of my bipolar.*

Something in me changed that night. It was the undeniable fear of being arrested and taken to a mental asylum for a not so enjoyable period of detainment that initiated the necessary change from within. It was time to finally tackle my mental health in a serious and consistent manner. There was no more room for excuses as my soul was

tired of fighting itself. I was about to do the unthinkable and over time I would learn to use my bipolar for the betterment of myself.

First, I had to find a starting point or at least some component of my diseased ridden mind that I could start to understand. There was no option left but to ask for help and this meant I would have to establish an ongoing relationship with psychiatric trained medical professionals.

As my bipolar mind cried over the shame of asking for help, my soul cried over the shame from remorse of every chaotic decision I had ever made. The bastard inside me was not finished with my soul and it certainly wasn't finished with those around me either. Fearing the loss of power like a treacherous dictator my bipolar came our fighting again.

My fine line of insanity was about to be stretched in so many ways different ways that sometimes it was easier to recede into the darkness than to change for the better.

## THE ILLUSION OF ONESELF

Our beautiful egos curated from our precious minds mimic every aspect of who we are. When emersed in our own mental anguish they can become amplified just like every other emotion we feel. This amplification when left unchecked can so easily spiral out of control with some very damaging consequences.

The following short stories are to give you an illustration of when aspects of our mental health spiral out of control. Our own ignorance of our mental health status is just as destructive as the ignorance from those around us.

### DENIAL

It was the main event of the night, and the crowds were packed to the rafters. The lights of the stage burned lightly onto my skin and left me feeling warm inside. I had been rehearsing my illusions for a long time, it was my turn to step forward and to dazzle them with splendour and awe.

It was my turn to tell them what they wanted to hear, and it was my turn to tell myself what I wanted to hear. Denial the greatest magic trick of them all was now about to make me the greatest magician of all time.

Instead of the rabbit, I pulled out my mental anguish from the top hat and laughed as it flooded the audience with its chaotic and pungent smell of deception and pain. With the audience transfixed I never saw the look of fear in their eyes or their desperate attempts to escape the madness from within my soul. Instead, I conducted my madness to weave and flow entangling all in its path.

*'You will live my madness, and you will taste my fear and loneliness'* I screamed at the top of my voice.

For this night will be remembered for generations to come, it was a time when the audience sampled my very own personal taste of bedlam, and what little empathy they had left was eroded when I pulled out the top hat. Tired of my deceptive behaviour their only recourse to rescue their own sanity was to walk away from me.

In the end I would be on my own with only my cold tears of delusion to keep me company. The same tears that would eventually tell me that the night of the magicians never happened, and I would end up denying the undeniable. It was the ultimate and cruel betrayal of oneself. It was the illusion of oneself fed by the very strands of insanity floating around inside my mind.

For many years I was in denial about my mental health and my destructive behaviour was an attempt to cover up how terrified and lonely I was.

Often our fear of the unknown can sometimes only be comforted and managed by the familiarity of previous behaviours. We all have inside us the ability to ignore and close our minds to a particular situation and denying my bipolar existed was one such occasion. We gain comfort from the illusion of lies that we persist in telling ourselves to help shield us from the actual real problem to hand.

*As my delicious jam oozed outwards my denial pushed open the floodgate a little further with every fable I told.*

#### MR BASTARD

Nurtured and controlled a mental disorder can be used in so many wonderful and creative ways. It allows one the ability to process lines of thought over multiple connections, to see ideas, solutions, and other aspects that most will never see. Left untreated with no supervision, a lack of understanding and it is the bastard of all bastards. It haunts your dreams, disturbs your thoughts, and can unravel your whole world in under thirty seconds.

It is a tornado of carnage that leaves a legacy of destruction that can be life changing. A tornado driven by your mind, acted out by your body, and visible all over weather maps on television for everyone to see.

It makes you scream on the inside whilst you rip the whole world apart piece by piece. You scream because this is all that you know. You scream because later today and tomorrow you will be doing the exact same thing again. You scream because you are Mr bastard, and you just want the madness to stop.

No one likes who you have become, let alone yourself.

*As my delicious jam oozed outwards the bastard inside me pushed open the floodgate a little further with every destructive behaviour I acted out.*

#### THE BLACK HOLE

He had been waiting patiently in the background and now was his time to come out and play. He had endured much hardship and investment in you, and he now owns you. He is now your life, and you owe him everything. The black hole is very jealous, manipulative, deceitful and selfish. Exactly how you have been with others before joining him, you are an exact mirror image of each other.

For you are now the black hole.

It is a cold bottomless pit of despair. It is a coldness so profound that it etches marks into the very fabric of your soul. It is a coldness so dark and twisted that time itself no longer obeys the laws of the universe.

My complete rejection of professional help, my lack of desire to learn about my bipolar and overall erratic and very dangerous behaviour had put me into the hole.

I remember the longing of a simple cuddle, a touch of my hand or a loving smile. Instead, my arms wrapped around myself in an icy embrace and the frozen tears of regret hung from my soul for everyone to see. Outcast and rejected my repeated loop of sorrow was rapidly defining who I had become. I had pushed too many people away.

*As my delicious jam oozed outwards every time I tried to climb out of the black hole, my fingers pushed open the floodgate a little further with every attempt towards freedom.*

## THE KING OF KINGS

For many years my arrogance made the incorrect assumption that only those with the severest forms of mental disorder could ever feel the greatest amounts of pain. Other mental health conditions were swept aside in a grotesque manner of contempt and belittlement.

*How dare you attempt to feel my pain, how could you ever fathom the depths of my bipolar? Only those with the greatest of bedlam inside them can dare sit at my throne.*

This perverse logic was my deluded ego assuming the mantle as the King of Kings, the one at the top who was most hard done by. The King at the top wallowing in self-pity, the King who had no regard for anyone else but himself. The King who's crown of bedlam screamed so loudly that the very universe would shudder with every vibration unleashed.

*Eventually my crown of self-pity with sparkling tears would become just another crown to wear along my journey. Even the King of Kings can have more than one crown to wear at a time and who was going to tell me otherwise?*

When a mental health condition is not treated in the correct manner and left unsupervised, it will eventually lead to a serious decline in the person's ability to function. Alienation and seclusion will be further exaggerated due to the lack of professional help and understanding from the person afflicted. Every mental health condition is just as serious as the next one, the symptoms may vary but the outcomes are always similar in nature.

The predictability of a mental health condition is only as good as the allowed outcome from the prevailing chaos. The pain an individual feels at their most traumatic is exclusive to them and has the potential to unravel to limitless possibilities. There is no King of Kings or competition based on a particular label or diagnosis. There is only chaos and destruction when left untreated and unsupervised.

The fragility of our minds is only as strong as our understanding.

## FACTORS OF THE MIND

There are many different factors that can have a direct impact on our minds and how we go about managing our mental health. These factors are prevalent in our daily lives and some of them cannot be avoided, but some of them can. They help to shape our responses to any situation that we may come across with a positive or negative outcome. When we can learn about the factors that can impact us in a negative way, we can then start to base some of our coping mechanisms and strategies around them.

### OUR PHYSICAL HEALTH

A temporary physical ailment or a long-term physical illness can both have the potential to overstretch the mind if certain conditions are in place. Frustration of our physical situation can often lead to mental anguish through our inability to comprehend the impact of our physical problem.

Surely a physical illness is separate to a mental illness? Under a normal functioning situation then yes, this correct. But what if the mind was already under multiple layers of stress and a physical condition was to manifest at the same time. The physical problem could become a catalyst in overstretching the mind and not just in the present but also going forward.

Therefore, our physical health has a direct impact on our ability to manage any form of mental illness that we might also be suffering from.

### SOCIOLOGICAL

Conditioning can come in many forms, and it helps to shape our responses and decision-making ability to a particular situation. Ignorance or understanding are only as good as the information we have to hand, and it is up to us to decipher this information accordingly.

We are all susceptible to sociological factors such as culture, religion, work, family, and technology (social media). In the same way our minds are only as good as our tolerances, our responses are only as good as our exposure and understanding of such situations.

Closed minds and hearts are a direct result of conditioning from misinformation, negative experiences, peer pressure and a lack of natural inbuilt empathy. Sometimes the perception or response from an individual regarding your mental health will never change no matter how well informed they are. Their hearts and minds are closed so much as they are deeply rooted in their beliefs. Unfortunately, nothing you can do will ever change this.

*My insanity was forever chasing the carrot of approval from my closet family members. This endless cycle of acceptance detracted me from my real purpose.*

Once you understand that some people can never be changed, you can start to accept them for who they are. The moment you let go of an expected change in response from others is the moment they no longer have an impact on your mental health. They still love you but their inability to accept any aspect of your mental health condition

is not their fault. Forgiveness around their lack of empathy is sometimes just as hard to understand than it is moving forward with your own mental health battle.

#### THE GOLDEN TICKET

It was the illusion of an immediate fix; it was the golden ticket that was going to save me from an eternity of madness. It was the ticket to freedom and acceptance from society that I so desperately craved. It was an illusion created by my denial and my lack of acceptance over my diagnosis. It was a vicious cycle of stalemate with every number pulled out from the draw.

#### TOXIC WORK CULTURE

For many years I helped to manage very large (Information Technology) infrastructure networks and associated services. It was a predominately hands on technical role that required me to babysit a global network as and when necessary. It was not a 9-5 working environment for me. The working hours were so excessive that on occasions I had to sleep in the office overnight because of the hours necessary to do my job. Weekends were for work and the expectation from the corporate monster was for me to continue to say YES.

A profitable path does not always have the best interests of employees. Monthly KPI reports have no concept of emotional pain as they are target driven based on profit-based decision making. The corporate monster often views mental health as a weakness in their ability to make profits. Their politically correct attempts to show empathy do nothing more than appease the shareholders and obedient HR departments.

We spend a considerable amount of our lifetime in a working environment, and we expect to have the same loyalty returned to us when we need support. Nothing hits your soul harder than rejection from a company you have spent many fruitful years working for. Their love and support are based around your ability to work and has no concern for any deviation from this. Their mindset holds back your recovery and crushes your confidence at the same time.

*The disdain on my work colleagues' faces was clear to see with their limp handshakes and their eyes staring aware from me. Not even a shirt and tie could remove the stigma of shame that I now felt as their corporate rejection penetrated my soul. Marked as an outcast of the office my high-grade professional work ethic no longer counted. Their toxic work culture showed no compassion to the mind of its employees but instead only to KPI driven targets. Their loyalty was only as good as the ability of the individual to make money whilst staying sane.*

The corporate monster's inability to understand and contribute to the improvement of my mental health as an existing loyal employee left me bitter and resentful. It took many years for me to overcome the corporate rejection.

When I finally left the role, I was broken in so many ways thanks to a toxic work culture and my inability to say NO. With no other options available I turned to negative coping mechanisms to cope with my mental turmoil. It would be the last time professionally that I would maintain a corporate network, and the last time I would not be able to say NO.

Thankfully not every work environment is like this. If you work for a company who has empathy with your condition, then this major obstacle in your recovery will no longer be a factor. Support from work is often just as vital as the support from home as it will help to speed up, your understanding.

#### TREATMENT

The dribble slowly descended from my mouth and onto my shoes. My motor functions felt like they were cased in cement and my parched tongue had spent a lifetime in the desert.

I could see but I could not respond. I could breathe but I could not speak. I could cry but only on the inside. My sedated mind was so SLOOOOOOOOOOOOOOW, there was no room for any emotion, thought or action. There was just a paralysis from the medication and the shame of being turned into a clinical zombie.

My quality of life had diminished, my madness was compacted into manufactured tablets and my soul was crushed. I wanted to cry but the sedatives had closed my tear ducts and my eyes lids drooped downwards in shame. More dribble flowed from my mouth followed by the release of urine onto my jeans. The sedatives had finally stopped my madness, but the cost was too much for my soul to bare.

Was this necessary at the time? YES, it was.

Has it left scars on my tormented soul? YES, it has.

Did it allow me the time to slow my brain down so that I could start to recover? YES, it did.

On one hand this form of treatment can often be seen as barbaric and on the other hand seen as necessary. There are many stories surrounding the treatment of mental health that are far more perturbing than mine. Not every story is a horror story, and not everyone has to be turned into a spoon-fed zombie to overcome their mental disorder.

If you can remember the layer cake analogy that I talked about earlier on; imagine that I was so out of control that the only way to stop this destructive behaviour was to heavily sedate me. When most motor functions are limited one's ability to perform magical acts of insanity are removed. It is a necessary barbaric act that exists until we discover other ways of treating destructive behaviours from an overstretched mind.

Times have fortunately changed and the level of care and treatment options available have greatly improved. Having a mental health disorder no longer means it is a belly full of pills or urine-soaked jeans.

The type of treatment that you will receive will be carefully coordinated by your mental health team and your doctor. This process in some cases will take time and

please do not see this as an immediate fix to the turmoil inside your mind. There may be periods of adjustment, and this may have an impact on your current state of mind.

It is also possible that you may also move backwards before you move forwards in your recovery. All that I can advise you to do is to be as honest with them as best you can. Even when your paranoia is at its most rampant the mental health team do have your best wishes at heart.

#### ACCEPTANCE OF HELP

Acceptance can come in many forms such as a cry for help, a realisation of one's predicament or hitting rock bottom with the situation you currently face. Past actions and behaviours no longer matter as it is what you do right now that counts. Sometimes asking for help with your mental health condition will be one of the biggest steps you may ever take in life. It takes immense courage and strength to do this as you are putting your complete trust into someone else's hands.

## COPING MECHANISMS

Coping mechanisms are strategies that we can apply on our journey to help improve our mental situation and to keep us on a smooth as path as possible. The options available to us are endless, and the ones that you find that work for you should be treasured with love just like you would with a family member. They are going to help keep you going through the choppy and smooth waters of life so please hold them close to your heart and don't let them go.

Not all coping mechanisms are a solo affair and many of them can be jointly undertaken by your close support network as well. Finding the ones that work for you can take time and I recommend perseverance along with learning to listen to your mind. There are no hard and fast rules with this, and you must use your desire for a more stable mind to help drive this. Coping mechanisms can also be a fantastic supplement if you are having to take any form of medication as well.

Please do not become complacent and incorrectly assume that the coping mechanisms that work for you today will do the same for you tomorrow. They need constant tweaking and fine tuning to adapt to your changing environment known as the journey of life. Without coping mechanisms your journey of stability will so much harder to achieve.

### A QUIET PLACE

To de-escalate the mind sometimes the only option is to remove yourself from a particular situation. This will allow you to gain your composure and reduce the levels of stress that have become escalated. A quiet place such as a bedroom, garden or going for a walk will allow you to shift your focus onto something different. This will help to break the cycle of overthinking and anxiety driven thoughts.

Sometimes this is not viable especially if your mind is operating at such a chaotic pace as silence can on occasions amplify the emotional pain. Listening to the radio or music with headphones on may help with this.

### DAILY JOURNAL

Writing down your fears, thoughts and interactions can be very beneficial in helping you to deal with your mind's behaviour. Keeping note of events or situations that became elevated will allow you to form a pattern of behaviour and to help identify triggers. A daily journal is a great place to start with this. It will also allow you to track your progress which you can present to a medical professional if you need to go down that route at some point.

### EXPECTATIONS AND RELAPSE

Once I had come to terms with having a lifelong mental disorder, I dropped the illusion of the golden ticket that I have already talked about. I realised that no matter how sane I became there will always be the potential for me to become mentally unwell again. The acceptance of my situation allowed me to adjust my expectations, and it makes it easier for me to recover if I was to relapse.

I manage my bipolar on a day-by-day basis with the operative goal being to stay sane. I also plan to prepare for specific scenarios that could have the potential to make me unwell. There is no cure for my bipolar disorder. Why should I waste valuable time in

deluding myself that one day I would be free of the mental turmoil. This coping mechanism is one of the strongest tools in my chest that I use.

By reducing your expectations, you will be able to spend more of your valuable time exploring other coping mechanisms that could potentially work for you. Most of all it will allow you to start living in the present and helping you to learn your limitations.

#### LIMITATIONS

Who I was before and who I am now are two entirely different people and it has taken me many years to learn the limitations of my new life. These limitations are not a hindrance, but clearly defined rules of what I must not break to stop myself from becoming mentally unwell again.

One prime example was my old career in Information Technology as the hours, the stress and the workload were not conducive for a severe mental disorder. The role was a massive trigger for me and even in current times of stability it would induce chaos inside my mind again. This experience taught me many things and it helped pave the way in knowing the limitations of my mind.

I was luckily enough to eventually change my career path by writing books and my fine art photography ([www.tobyabbs.com](http://www.tobyabbs.com)). Not everyone is in the same position due to geographical and financial restraints. A career change to help reduce your long-term exposure to stress may seem scary at first, but your mind will thank you for it later.

#### MEDITATION & MINDFULNESS

Meditation was often seen as a mystical science that was only applicable to a certain group of people or mindset. Western culture for many years now has started to welcome meditation into our daily lives due to its positive benefits on our mental health. With the right guidance and a little practise, mindfulness via meditation is a fantastic way to help calm your brain during periods of stress.

#### TRIGGERS

Learning to identify triggers that can cause your mind to overstretch is a great way of helping to understand how your mind processes your environment. Prevention is sometimes better than the cure and becoming aware of your triggers could reduce the impact of your behaviour over time.

By listening to and observing the chemistry in our bodies we can detect a sudden change and expected response to a given trigger. This will allow us to adapt much quicker to a particular situation in our environment and allows us to prepare accordingly by using one of our already established coping mechanisms.

#### LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE

Our emotional pain, when in an elevated state, is amplified and our ability to reason constructively and calmly is sometimes just not possible. A psychotic episode severe enough to place someone into the depths of chaos makes it harder for them to communicate effectively.

It is vital that when the opportunity arises and we have periods of calm inside our minds, that we learn how to communicate about how we feel. When we can convey aspects of our mental disorder it will expedite the correct types of treatment. Part of this process could be writing how you feel in your journal.

#### LEARNING YOUR SYMPTOMS

The symptoms of our mental health condition manifest when our minds have become overstretched, and in many cases become very damaging to the person afflicted and those around them. Although similar in nature these symptoms are often unique, and the frequency and duration will depend on the state of the mind when they first appeared.

Symptoms are not always classed as a negative trait of someone's mental health as they are direct signs from our mind that something is wrong. Once we learn about them, we can also learn as to why they happened. Over time a clear pattern will appear that will link these symptoms with a particular trigger and situation. This will then allow you to plan accordingly and hopefully make you more aware of your environment and the likely responses.

#### SPEAKING TO A DOCTOR

Contacting your doctor is the first line of defence at your disposal if you become unwell. They are a gateway to additional help from NHS such as psychiatric help and other talking based therapy. In some instances, your doctor can provide the necessary help to get you back on your feet without the need for further help. A simple phone call can merit such rewards and may prevent your mental health from spiralling out of control.

#### PRIVATE COUNSELLING

One way to bypass the NHS waiting list is to go down the route of private psychiatric care. The NHS waiting lists are lengthy due to the Covid 19 pandemic, private counselling could get you the help you need faster.

#### MENTAL HEALTH CHARITIES

Times have changed since my original diagnosis of bipolar in 2006 and there are some amazing mental health charities providing lifelines in a turbulent world. Their services can range from telephone support, information booklets, advice, and websites full of useful information. Many of the counsellors who work from them have come from the same background as yourself and their knowledge and ability to listen is excellent.

I have personally used the UK mental health charity [SANE](#) on more than one occasion especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### WORK RELATED HEALTHCARE

For those of you that are lucky enough to be involved with a private healthcare scheme at work it could mean a fast-track to some form of private counselling. Often with private healthcare schemes the level of income you pay towards your work-related healthcare and their existing policy cap will determine the level of help

available to you. Another option is that some companies have dedicated Mental Health First Aiders who can also point you in the right direction for help as well.

#### SMARTPHONE APPS

Many leading mental health websites, charities, and other organisations produce smartphone applications for most leading mobile phones. Features such as guided meditation, tips, stories, and a wealth of other information are a great way to read from the comfort of your own phone or tablet. Recently cognitive therapy has also become available on smartphone applications.

#### NEGATIVE COPING MECHANISMS

As we battle for the stability of our minds we are only as consistent as our minds allow us to be. Negative coping mechanisms are a short-term fix that may leave us feeling good about ourselves initially, but ultimately they hold us back and lead to a further relapse in our mental health.

Behaviours such as:

- Spending Addiction
- Emotional Eating / Eating Disorders
- Drug and Alcohol Abuse
- Excessive Spending
- Excessive Hand Washing
- Denial and Lying
- Self-Pity and Sorrow
- Seclusion

Until these negative coping mechanisms can be reduced and removed, one's ability to move forward is severely hampered.

## FAMOUS MINDS

Some of the most gifted people to ever walk this earth have all had some form of mentally illness that blighted their lives. Their contribution to mankind is still prevalent today even in this vast technological age we live in. Extremely gifted individuals such as Beethoven and Sir Isaac Newton all had a mental illness to contend with. We speak of their brilliance with admiration to the joy they have brought to our lives. On the other hand, we fail to understand or show empathy to our neighbour who is also grappling with their own mental health battle.

Does it really have to take a piece of classical music or the laws of gravity for society to finally accept the mental illness in someone? Surely, we can all start doing this right now by changing our mindset and showing compassion to those in need of help.

We never stop to consider that our mental functioning could one day become unstable and that we may also be blighted with mental turmoil.

We all have the ability within to change no matter who we are.

## THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC

The irony was manifesting before my very eyes, a duplication of thought and actions from my past that was now coming back to haunt me. Strings of insanity hung like spaghetti from my torso and my very own hands were struggling to contain the mess. The years of my hard work were falling to wayside like a crumbling kerb on a once trodden path.

My ego had given me a false sense of security and my guard had been dropped. The global COVID pandemic had taken its grip, and my mental state was declining faster than the flushing of my medication down the toilet from years gone by.

My years of successful rebuilding worn like a medal no longer applied and my finely tuned coping mechanisms incomplete and abandoned. As my soul cried out for help the bastard inside of me started to reappear again. The amplification I spent so long containing was now ripping apart my thoughts, behaviours, and my life. My delicious jam oozed freely, and my layers of sponge cake were contorted and broken.

For a while I wallowed in self-pity, denial, and all the negatives described in this book. Then a moment of clarity appeared, I realised that I would have to afresh, that I would have to rebuild myself mentally all over again. In that moment the whole world collapsed into my soul and the dejection of it all sent me to new depths of madness.

*'This does not apply to me; I do not need to rebuild myself again. I am perfectly sane'* I would scream out.

The realisation of having to start again brought back too many painful memories. It was a bridge I did not want to cross again but I knew I would have to. First, I would have to wallow in self-pity as it was an old friend of mine, and it complimented my other friend Mr bastard very well indeed.

It is now early November 2021 as I write this this book. It has taken me a long time to become adjusted to the global pandemic and the impact it has had on my mental health. Thankfully I am now stronger again and better prepared.

The pandemic has taught me even more about the fragility of our minds and the fine line we all travel. The horrible situation for so many people thrown to the mercy of COVID and hearing horror stories of their sanity falling apart is heart breaking. For those of us with previously diagnosed mental disorders it is an ironic twist of fate as we have become very fortunate indeed. We at least know what is wrong with us mentally and we have an associated label to define our condition along some sort of roadmap to recover.

For others who have had their minds newly overstretched during the pandemic and are desperately crying out for help, they are not so lucky. The fear of the unknown whilst they wait for the intervention from a mental health crisis team is vast and terrifying. They are unable to quantify the turmoil inside their minds that has become so alien to them.

The mental health crisis that now exists courtesy of the global pandemic is a cost to society that is destroying families all around the country. No matter who we are, the global pandemic has overstretched all our minds to some extent, and there is no indication that this is going away anytime soon. It is a ticking time bomb with limited resources and burdening numbers. The new mental health crisis is consuming all of us and will leave a generational legacy with too many scars to heal.

Now is not the time for closed minds in society as there is no more room for such views and behaviours anymore. We can all change and all it needs is a little step in the right direction. Mental health should no longer be viewed by some in society as a stain on their bloodline.

The global pandemic has ruined so many lives in so many ways, why should we let certain parts of society to continue to do the same with regards to mental health.

## MOMENTS FROM THE MIND

*The ignorance, fear, and rejection from family members over your mental health condition leaves a legacy of scars that stitches and plasters can never heal. One day you will learn to forgive them, and your hate will be replaced with love for them. Not everyone has the capacity to understand a mental illness, so please don't judge them on one single or continued actions.*

*When the guilt-ridden tears flow down the side of your face, they are a constant reminder of all that you have lost and all that you are now. There is no longer time for regrets or sympathy, not anymore. The chaos inside your mind has so many new and wonderful plans for you that don't include sentimental feelings.*

*A sanity sandwich was the holy grail of the lunchtime menu. Perhaps today I could be sane if only just for a little while, perhaps the guilt and pain could recede enough so that I could enjoy my delicious lunch. And then the medication kicked in again, the dribble slowly slid down my face from my mouth and the urine slowly saturated my jeans. Today sanity would not be my new friend, today would be just another day of shame. The sedatives had again turned me into a spoon-fed zombie and my jeans needed another wash.*

*How they floated, how they swirled and how they spun in a spiral of unison down the toilet. There would be no rescue attempt for my medication as they were already confined to a watery grave of toilet cleaning products and a freshwater flush. With every drowning my sanity would become more volatile and more unpredictable. The pain of those around me simply did not matter and for the medication? What medication I would ask myself?*

*'Snap out of it' someone said to me. How the irony of such a statement was riddled in their own ignorance and stupidity. My contempt for them grew larger and my frustration at their lack of empathy left me feeling cold and numb inside.*

*Mirror, mirror, on the wall who is the sanest of them all?', 'Why you are' replied the mirror to me, whilst the chaos rolled around in my eyes.*

*It is OK you tell yourself; another appointment was missed and an opportunity for help was rejected. Instead, you buried yourself in a blanket of denial and deception. Your inability to accept your mental illness is about to become your greatest downfall. And unlike the fall of an empire, no one will be reading about you exploits as no one will care.*

*Sometimes the sedation process left me feeling void of hope and my individuality felt like it was slowly being taken from me. Although often seen as barbaric in nature it is sometimes the only remedy available in slowing down the mind. When administered long term with excessive quantities it makes people become ghosts with no aspirations, desires and stripped of their dignity. Their very fabric is forever confined to a dark and cold place that is now their mind.*

*The body tremors from the medication became worst, the facial twitches turned me into a circus performer and some people thought my misfortune was funny to them. They thought the side effects from my medication was something to amuse them and keep them entertained.*

*When the chaos finally started to recede a brave new world came into focus and with that came a mixture of emotions, memories and desires all wrapped up from the aftermath of a storm. The taste of normality would eventually replace my pain, rejection, and madness. I would stand tall again in society with a simple desire to help others and to ease their pain.*

*The remorse of progress is often the hardest lesson to learn, and it can often be compounded by guilt ridden memories of past behaviour. Sometimes moving forward with our mental anguish can unravel aspects that are just too hard to digest. One day your memories of guilt will clear, and the pain will be replaced with acceptance. The acceptance will eventually be replaced with love because as you learn to forgive yourself, you can then forgive others.*

*One day a smile appeared upon my face, and it came from the very depths of my soul. It was a smile that contained the dreams of serenity and plans of normality. On that morning I knew that the years of chaos would soon become a thing of the past. For the first time in my life, I no longer felt like an outcast.*

*If we can remove the ignorance, fear, and the perception of mental health in society then someone's ability to deal with their mental anguish would be so much easier. The internal pain would still exist, but the external pain caused by others would be completely removed. A major obstacle in their recovery would no longer be present.*

*When a love so profound knocks on your door and for the first time in your life you have the touch and feel of the universe inside your heart. For the new person will love you 100% with empathy, support and with so much love inside them that the pain of your mental anguish will fade away with every precious kiss.*

*One day your strength will overcome the rejection, ignorance, and the repeated stares and pointed fingers. One day you will learn to control your mental anguish and the people that doubted you will still fear you, but not for your condition but for the strength inside you that you now have.*

*Her cuddle of love replaced the years of rejection, the warmth of her body made me feel safe and wanted. Her smiles would last a lifetime, the beating of her heart would last for eternity. The tears of pain were replaced with tears of joy and the simple act of holding her hand was all it took. A love like no other and her acceptance of my bipolar was finite.*

## EPILOGUE

We all have many similar traits inside all of us and our uniqueness as individuals is only as good as our experiences and our understanding of life. They say that wisdom often comes with age, and it is based on the very journey of life that the person has taken. Their ability to understand and adapt to their experiences through life gives them the very wisdom they now possess.

Fear and ignorance develop from conditioning and does not come from birth. When we are born, we have no such understanding of such ideology. It is an emotional response that we all have inside of us which becomes triggered through certain experiences of life. The same can also be said for any other emotional responses we have.

The fragility of our minds that binds us all together and the acceptance of this notion is only as good as the understanding we all have for each other. Closed minds and hearts through negative experiences make our ability for empathy towards mental health so much harder to achieve. Generational conditioning that has been hardcoded into the upbringing of so many has helped to create the biggest of hurdles to overcome. Often alienation for a person with a mental health disorder comes from those closest to them such as a family member or close friends.

Thankfully bigotry towards mental health is changing, it is finally moving in a positive direction that is paving the way for current and future generations to come. Media coverage is starting to become more positive in the UK with a changing perception towards mental health. Community driven projects that are both publicly and privately funded are starting to appear everywhere. The stigma of mental health is starting to erode by changing mindsets and educating people. There will always be barriers present, but over time these barriers will start to fall, and the alienation often felt will be replaced with a genuine love and empathy.

Getting help for a mental health condition can be in some instances one of the biggest steps someone could ever be asked to take. Yet their achievement often goes unnoticed, but the pain of rejection they can experience can last a lifetime. Learning to understand a mental health disorder takes immense courage, desire, love, and a lifetime of strength. It needs support from all sides and not alienation and ridicule from narrow minded people.

As a human race we are so much better than this and there is no more time for closed minds and hearts. Should we continue to be defined by our ignorance of matters of the unknown? Or unite as a collective to help free those from the depths of mental anguish? To finally see the soul that exists inside someone and not to define them by their behaviours from a shattered mind.

*Please do not define someone by their overstretched mind, as it could easily be you in the same position tomorrow.*

Ignorance can be defeated by knowledge and the more we learn about mental health the more we can educate others. Please try to show those afflicted with a mental health condition the compassion they so desperately need and desire.

For when you can laugh again so freely that it touches the very fabric of your soul, not only can you start to help others, but you can also start to help yourself.

Toby.

## MORE INFORMATION

You can also visit my fine art photographer website ([www.tobyabbs.com](http://www.tobyabbs.com)) to view my photography portfolio, short article and contact information.

## OTHER BOOKS

Are we to be defined by ideology, religion, borders, and banners? Surely there must be a better way than all this fragmentation we experience in our lives. From the dilution of truth of who we really are, to the avalanche of materialism and our never-ending search for happiness. The endless questions regarding our reality that we have no answers for and yet they frequently appear over and over again.

Our egoic thinking structures help to prison us in a constant world of materialism and duality. These are the same thinking structures that shield us from our own divine light and our true purpose.

To spiritually awaken is to finally understand Maya (माया) and the illusion of oneself which is the very mask of creation. It is only then that we will be finally able to answer the questions we have spent so long searching for.

[MAYA: The Mask of Creation](#)