

## Foreword

The author of this book, Kennan Taylor, is my friend and my analyst. He has not always been my friend. Once upon a time he was just my analyst – but that was along time ago.

If it had not been that my wife and I had one of our rare arguments, I might not have met him at all. My wife threatened me and gave me an ultimatum, “Meet him or else.” So I met him. It was the softer option. I am a coward when it comes to threats from my wife. She still hasn’t told me what ‘or else’ really meant.

When we met I was convinced that I was going, or was already, quite mad. Kennan wouldn’t agree on my self-diagnosis of madness. But then perceptions, I have learned, can be different from reality. First define reality.

I certainly was a mess, we both agree on that. I had been diagnosed with acute depression. Long ago it was called melancholia but depression is now the accepted word. There is an epidemic of depression in the world we are told.

There are many drugs for the treatment of depression, yet there is still an epidemic. I wonder why that is?

Over a period of many, many months I took many anti-depressants. Doctors who genuinely cared for me prescribed them. I frustrated them all, particularly my family doctor who is a wonderful man. The pills didn’t make me better – I think they made me worse. They never ‘kicked in’ after a couple of weeks. Maybe I’m different?

When the pills failed, I agreed to have Electro-Convulsive Therapy (ECT) three times a week at our Regional Hospital fifty kilometres from our home. They told me it would make me better. I was convinced that I was incurable so it was worth a try. The ‘black dog’ was now a permanent member of the family.

Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday we would leave the farm at 6 am and my wife would drive me to the hospital for 7 am. I remember it was dark and cold on those trips. I would be left, dressed for the occasion, cold and alone on a plastic chair outside the operating theatre waiting for my turn.

For months and months, three times a week, I was anaesthetised and electric shocks were passed through my brain. When I woke up my wife would take me home again, wrap me in a blanket and go to work. That was my day, three days a week. I was, still, taking the pills. Because I was very tired I asked and the doctors agreed that the treatments could be reduced to twice a week.

It is said, I was told, that ECT has a proven record of helping those who suffer from depression. It didn’t help me. I was told that there would be little permanent damage. Why then have I forgotten so much that happened to me during and after ECT? Am I so different?

Why did I suffer from a frightening fog of confusion after being ‘treated’? One time I was in ‘*crisis*’ after a treatment, the confusion in my head was immense. The doctor who led the team that was treating me was, for hours, *in a meeting* and unavailable. I cried. When I did eventually speak to him his first question was to ask me to define

confusion. I replied that I couldn't. He asked me if I knew where I was. I told him I was at home. He then asked me if I was suicidal. I put the phone down.

Had I then committed suicide at least he would have been able to say at the inquest that he had asked. I think that's what this life is all about for so many - at all costs limit the risk. I stopped the ECT.

My self-diagnosis was that I was very ill. I was also sick of talking to people who didn't understand my head and what was in it.

Incidentally, that was not the first time that I was asked if I was suicidal. My stock answer was always, "No, that's far too dangerous." I don't think that the intention to suicide is something that one volunteers. Isn't that the real challenge? Nobody except me, thought my answer was funny!

I was tired of meeting with well-intentioned counsellors. Some told me their life story as an example of their own life-trauma. Some told me about Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT).

The life stories were boring - they were just about life's ups and downs - everyday, ordinary, mundane and often I think exaggerated for effect - the big message was 'You're not on your own you know?' The connection didn't happen. I didn't care. They didn't know how alone I was, where I was.

CBT on the other hand, gave me feelings of irony, even humour. Setting goals when you are not sure of your tomorrow and searching for answers in the tealeaves or through the bottom of a glass can be a very personal, mysteriously secret experience - not to be shared with anyone. It's difficult to concentrate on goals sitting on the edge of the chasm stroking the black dog.

To tell you what happened next is not possible without writing a book instead of a Foreword for a book written by my friend. Suffice to say I met Kennan.

When you read this book you will understand something of the journey that I have been on. Has my journey finished? No. My journey will finish the day I shrug this mortal coil - that's what makes life exiting again.

Am I cured? I don't know what that means. Most people would say being cured is being normal again. I see that as *the* trap - *who* decides what is normal? Is it the person driving the shock machine, or the person prescribing the pills or the person who understands you?

My recovery, to where I am now, has been without pills or electric shocks. I am myself again - for me that is normal. I am also changing, I am exploring life again. How did it happen?

Like Noah, I was encouraged to build a boat, a lifeboat. I was helped. I was taught new skills. I was encouraged, challenged and cajoled. At times I was frightened but never insecure, never alone. My friend was there. With his help, slowly, I learned to sail my boat on my own.

Leaving the mainland was not easy; many times I felt that I had failed. I scuttled

back to the comfort of the knowledge, values, attitudes and beliefs that made me what I was. Slowly I learned that my life is *a work in progress* and that I do not have an inalienable right to a permanent grin. I am gaining new knowledge, values, attitudes and beliefs – so change I must if I am to be honest with myself.

I now sail the ocean of life stopping at the many islands of mystery as they appear and not leaving until I understand. The challenge is in the navigation, not in the time spent on new shores. Sometimes I am melancholy, sometimes very melancholy. For me that is part of being *normal*. I am beyond the crossroads.

The strangest thing that happened to me when I started to feel *normal* again was that I was diagnosed as having cancer. If ever I was going to fall into the black abyss again, it should have been on that day. It didn't happen. It didn't happen in spite of those who told me to prepare for the worst. I don't have cancer anymore.

This book is not a pill. If you look at it carefully – it's the keel of a boat.

*Roger Crook  
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