

Light at the end of the tunnel

It was now eight days after the operation. My physical recovery from the surgery was going well. The facial swelling had gone down. I no longer had a fever or headache. However, I had lost my appetite and felt nauseous. Psychologically I felt terrible. I remember making a decision that as soon as I was transferred back to Southampton I would definitely find a way to escape from hospital to go and kill myself. I knew that I could not break out from this ward and even if I did, I would not know where to go. At this time I very much regretted that I had agreed to have the surgery, I thought that I had made a big mistake – although why I thought this I do not know, as I still firmly held the belief that I had now ‘tried everything’. I no longer felt any obligation to wait for the possibility of improvement. My impatience to get back home was growing.

28 September 2001 Friday

I'm not hungry. Saw Prof Matthews this a.m. and he said I'm going to have to continue 'the prison' (my words not his!) when I go back home whether that'll be 'obs' on A ward or back to Mayflower.

Had the jigsaw out but got fed up. Had a walk round the block in the rain and watched TV. Found it hard to get to sleep again.

This was the day it happened and yet I made no mention of it in the diary! I know why. I could not believe it myself.

I was sitting in the TV room with the nurse beside me quite late in the evening. L, the patient who had shared the room with me before the operation, came in. She had returned from home leave and was clearly fed up. She slumped into a chair, saying, 'All I want is to be at home with my husband and children.' I was thinking 'I wish she would just be quiet' when all of a sudden a light switched on in my head! It was as if a power cable had been connected and the generator had gone on; this tremendous sensation of light blazing through my innermost being happened in an instant. I was amazed, startled, almost bewildered. I started to cry, realising that the darkness had gone, the depression was over! Now I echoed her, all

I wanted was to be at home with my husband and children. I felt completely different and asked to leave the TV room so that I could be alone to assimilate what had happened. (Of course, I could not be truly alone since I was still on 1:1 observation.)

As I left the room, I experienced a very clear internal voice. It did not seem to have come from me at all. 'What about the self harm?' I answered it defiantly. 'I do not want it anymore. I want to be at home with my family'. It left me alone. This happened on several occasions and each time I answered it the same way. After three days it left, never to return again.

At first I was not totally confident that this was a permanent state of mind. I also realised that there was no one I could relate this to. After all, it was a Friday night and the nurse had not seemed surprised at my tears (of relief!) – I could hardly expect her to believe what had happened to me. I was pretty confused myself. I went back to my room and to bed slightly shocked and very puzzled. I remember lying there trying to work it out. I realised that I faced a considerable challenge as the other big revelation to me was that I became aware of where I was. Not just the physical surroundings, but the reality of my situation dawned on me. Here I was in a psychiatric hospital, on a Section in Scotland, 500 miles from home. I had a nurse with me wherever I went including the bathroom and toilet. I became quite anxious. How was I going to get out of this? No wonder I had difficulty getting to sleep that night!

From this day onwards, my memory improved in leaps and bounds. When I returned over a year later for post-operative assessment, I remembered the area, including the way from the Carseview Centre to the University Department of Psychiatry in Ninewells Hospital – no mean feat! But more so I remembered the beautiful rolling hills that surround the town, the view of the Tay river with the sunlight glistening on the water and the small airstrip running just beside it, envious of the light aircraft which could take off at any moment. I continued to write the diary, but only for the next 10 days; now it is only a helpful reminder.

Phil was arriving on Sunday and Rebecca had decided to come and visit me from Germany. The hope was that I would soon be transferred back to Southampton. But Prof Matthews still had the post-operative tests to run, as all his patients were being evaluated both before and after surgery as part of the NMD research programme which he was running in conjunction with Mr Eljamel. I needed to do the videoed interview, the computer-based neuropsychological testing, the re-evaluation by the clinical psychologist and the depression scores. It was hard doing the testing, I was asked about my symptoms in the previous two weeks, but there had been such a change. I wanted to be completely honest and I wanted to qualify my answers, but psychological tests do not give you that liberty. I would also need permission to travel by way of a warrant issued by the Mental

Welfare Commission to return to the jurisdiction of the English Mental Health Act.

Saturday was a real trial. I was *so* bored and impatient waiting for Rebecca and Phil to arrive. I was still reluctant to describe to the staff exactly what had happened to me. It sounded so way out and implausible, but I think they noticed a lightness in my mood. I kept crying with relief and the emotion of it all but I knew that it could be sending out the wrong signals! I told them that I was feeling better but I was not confident enough to say any more than that, mindful that the timescale for recovery was expected to be around 3–6 months. I was still confined to my room for most of the day and had little to occupy myself with. I had a jigsaw with me, but I was not really interested. I was desperate to get out. The room was of a higher calibre compared to the DOP, freshly painted magnolia, but nonetheless easily identifiable as NHS hospital. I was fascinated by the design of the bathroom. There was a small strip on the floor separating the shower area and a plastic curtain. When the shower was used, the water naturally spread as far as it could go, well over the strip, so for the rest of the day, there would be a puddle of water on the bathroom floor. I wondered who was responsible for this great design but at the same time mindful of the tremendous luxury of having an en suite in an NHS mental hospital.

Later I was taken out for my usual walk around the block accompanied by two nurses, I started laughing with them as we watched the decorating of a car taking place for one of the nurses who was leaving. Later I wanted to know how he had reacted to the jam they had placed beneath his car door handles! I would not have been the least bit interested even 24 hours earlier. Now I enjoyed the joke, but more than that I was noticing the weather and enjoying the fantastic views of the river which could be seen from our vantage point on the hillside. I became more and more keen to be taken out for a walk – not easy for the nursing staff on that busy ward to spare the time to go with me.

However, despite feeling so much better, I hated the imposition that the continuous observation caused.

I felt more of a prisoner during those two days after the 'light switched on' than at any time in the illness. Over the months I had really grown quite used to being on 1:1 observation, but now I was shy and I sneaked into the loo without my escort. The first time, the nurse did not seem to notice, but thereafter it became a battle. I started resisting but then thought better of it. After all, I would have to be co-operative and compliant in order that I would be believed when I finally could tell Prof Matthews what had happened – it was a bank holiday weekend so I knew I would have to wait until Tuesday to see him. Later on Saturday evening, I phoned Phil, but I did not know what to say. I was worried that I would just cry with the sense of relief I felt and that I would not be able to explain

myself properly, so I just said 'something has happened'. He was having a meal with our friends the Lloyds at the time and he said that the minute he heard my voice, he knew that there had been a change. I sounded different.

29 September 2001 Saturday

I can't wait for Phil and Bec to arrive tomorrow. I have decided that I am not going to harm myself any more. I just want to go home. Thank you, L! I suddenly feel this change. I just want to go home. Thank God and please may I go home next Sunday.

I did the jigsaw all morning and then went for a walk round the block before lunch. The nurses are all playing games and had done up Dave's car; two of them were putting jam under the handles!

I ate lunch in the dining room but I am still feeling sick. My tummy is not right at all. I am just trying to patiently let it settle. I don't think having Bran Flakes for breakfast was a good idea. Never mind! Phil and the kids are going to the Lloyds for a BBQ tonight. I wish I was there and Bec.

I watched quite a lot of TV and then spoke to Phil on the phone and said how I feel. I was able to be quite unemotional about it thankfully. He's coming 5-6 p.m. and I need to get hold of Prof Matthews to confirm that I can go out with him. I'm so looking forward to it. I'm so tired. I've been chatting with L. It's been lovely weather here this evening.

30 September 2001 Sunday

I'm waiting for Phil and Bec – they could arrive any time now! I'm allowed 2 hours out to have tea! I hope they won't be late. The weather's not too bad and I've had a few walks. My tummy is a bit more settled today.

I'm just trying to fill my time. I got up late today, have done jigsaw, crosswords, read book and a rubbish newspaper! I still feel the same but no tears today. I've thrown the can away. (I had kept this as a potential instrument for self harm!)

I went out with Phil and Bec to Nosey Parker (a pub/restaurant) – it was great and lovely to see them. I just keep talking to various nurses about how much better I feel. I can't wait to tell Prof Matthews. I told Mary on the phone, she sounded really sceptical about it. But I just want them to see how different I am. Thank God! I really mean that!

1 October 2001 Monday

Had a great day with Phil and Bec. We went to St Andrews and trotted around, had a sandwich. We then returned to Dundee and

had a little rest at the Guest House where they are staying before going out for supper.

I spoke to my mother and Alastair on the phone. He's engaged to Natasha!

Phil and Bec are going to a film tonight and they're coming over in the morning. I need permission from Prof to take Bec to the airport tomorrow. I also want permission to go to the bathroom alone.

I have asked the nurses to be quiet outside my room tonight – we will see! Often they have been talking which has kept me awake!

3 October 2001 Wednesday

Yesterday: I went for the interview with Prof and managed to tell him how much better I feel. I have been taken off obs, moved to a single room and allowed to go out afterwards. We went to Edinburgh, visited the shops and then took Bec to the airport. It all went without a hitch but I was upset at seeing her go. Afterwards we went and met some friends of Tony's who live in Edinburgh.

On the way home, I spoke to Steph – the travel warrant had arrived at home! Phil had to get her to take it to her singing teacher to fax it to the Guest House. We found another place to have supper and I returned for 8.30 p.m. My room is not warm so I go to bed well wrapped! I met up with L and we had a long chat.

Today: I got up having woken myself at 8.00, showered etc. Last night I slept better except I woke cold in the early hours. I'm a bit fed up with the way the nurses keep on asking how I am, but at least I'm no longer being watched in the bathroom etc.

We went to visit the Discovery and then went back to the Guest House ...

I was so relieved that Prof Matthews did not doubt me. He has told me that he was pleasantly surprised but that he could tell from my face that my experience was genuine – he saw the real me for the very first time! The level of observation was stepped down on that day – my liberation had commenced! I was still very worried about how I was to cope with the continuing expectation of me as a patient. Suddenly being in hospital was all wrong. I was so aware of the situation, so aware of the way I was spoken to and how I was expected to behave. Having to queue for medication seemed belittling, especially now when I was wondering why I even had to take the drugs. I wanted to stay out with Phil in his hotel, but Prof Matthews was not prepared to go quite that far. I was also still on a Section and kept thinking forward to how I was going to cope on my

return to Southampton and the DOP. I was excited and happy at having my life back but very apprehensive of the approaching need to persuade Dr Baldwin that I really was well. The enormity of the situation was sinking in. I still had to go back to the Carseview Centre each evening as a patient when for most of the rest of the day I was living and behaving as a normal person on holiday in Scotland! The very act of walking into the ward and being signed in was increasingly painful. I wondered how any well person would feel if they were in my situation, held against their will in hospital on a Section. Yet I knew that I had to bide my time, be patient, not make a fuss and 'play the game'. I think that's what kept me from being totally ecstatic, as I was gaining confidence in the fact that I really was no longer depressed.

Phil now felt that I was secure enough for him to let me know what had been happening back home without my knowledge. He said that he had been reluctant to tell me since I had been so opposed to the idea of anyone praying for me prior to the surgery. (I had told him that it put me under pressure to 'respond'.) A group of Christians had started meeting together specifically to pray for me. These were not people that I had known; in fact I had never even met them. They did not all come from Southampton or our church even, but had heard about my desperate state and felt called by God to pray for me. They started meeting with Phil at David and Marie's house a short time before my surgery. I was deeply moved by their dedication, that people who did not even know me could do this for me. I felt humbled by their kindness.

4 October 2001 Thursday

I've been out with Phil all day. Feeling so much better physically as well as mentally. We went to Glamis Castle, home of the Queen Mother; it was very interesting.

Spoke to Steph and she's out tonight so Jona will be on his own. I've just phoned him and he's OK having his tea. I can't wait until I'm discharged and I admit now that I am worried about sorting out the leave etc. BUT God did not give us a spirit of fear, but of love, peace and of self-discipline 2 Tim 1:7. The Lord has done so much for us, I really must learn to trust Him again, even though it seems such a big thing to me. I want to sleep better tonight, not be so cold. The wind has dropped so hopefully that will be possible.

5 October 2001 Friday

Just two more days to go – I can't wait! I know it'll be back to the DOP but at least it's near home. I can start packing tomorrow. I want to NOW! My hair looks like a Mohican when it's wet with

the hair loss from the glue by the scars! I did sleep better but I heaved on those ghastly tablets again this a.m.

Phil and I saw Prof Matthews: he was telling us all the possibilities and I know he had to but I had to keep saying (not out loud) NOT ME – deteriorating at 3 months when the oedema (swelling) has gone, needing further surgery etc. etc. my overwhelming thought is stick to 2 Tim! He thought that it would be OK for Phil and I to just go home for a little while after we arrive back – but we won't tell anyone, as we should go straight to the DOP! Good. We can see the children and I can unpack.

Apparently Dr Baldwin is in Japan, back next week! Prof Matthews maintains my hopes by suggesting that he (Dr Baldwin) might assess my need for detention and observation from a fresh perspective.

We went to Perth, to Scone Palace. We went out for a nice meal, but I could not eat much. However, I had some wine.

I've been chatting to L most of the evening. Bec phoned and she sounded very cheerful.

I have noticed how discoloured my teeth are and my gums are bleeding – I do hope I haven't neglected them too much. I am also so fat! I don't know how I could have let myself get like this.

6 October 2001 Saturday

My birthday – 42 today. Oh heck! Last complete day here.

Phil took me to St Andrew's and we had a walk, lunch in the pub and read the paper. We were invited to L's house and met her husband and children! She had prepared tea, snacks and a cake for my birthday!



Phil and I at St Andrew's. My smile is back!