

A 360 degree view of the world: Broadening the approach to madness

Presented by : Debra Lampshire

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I live in Auckland and like most major cities which are not the capital am cursed with the desire of its local council to claim itself and subsequently it's inhabits as, sophisticated and deeply refined with flamboyant displays of pretension. What we have adopted as one of the mediums to demonstrate our cultural superiority to other cities in NZ is 'The Art Festival'. Recently one was held in Auckland during these times one is accosted by people of whose behaviour on any alcohol fuelled Saturday night would be deemed as a public nuisance and they would be arrested. But under the guise of art is now labelled "Street Theatre". I have always found those approaches somewhat cringe worthy and uncomfortable, but schooled in the social graces of polite custom I plaster a fake smile on my face and patiently endure the 'craft'. There was of course amongst the Avant guard the more traditional performer's one of which is the 'mime'. You know the people whose faces whited out to both nullify and exaggerate expressions, striped T-shirt, baggy black trousers. And so it was on one particular day whilst walking in the main street among a small group of unsuspecting fellow unappreciative barbarians we were subjected to a spontaneous performance from one such individual. He went through his repertoire and there was of course the classics the rope pulling the walking up and down stairs and a number of other feats of silent wonder, he finished with the invisible wall, hands pressed to an imaginary obstacle which then proceeded to constrict and crush him into a smaller and smaller space until finally he was seated cross legged on the ground palms extended outwards to indicate his reduced state and the dimensions of his cubicle. Physically restrained by a commanding external force, all control relinquished to an invisible but invincible power. Performance complete people scurried away offering minimal applause, mumbled expletives, but no cash.

But not me I stayed. I stood there mesmerised by his act. I stood and I wept openly not because the performance was particularly poignant, the artist was not even particularly skilled. I wept for it was a subliminal representation of my own life trapped, suffocating, controlled by absent antagonists a life lived entirely internally, a life lived completely alone. I knew what it was like to feel the pressure of unrelenting penetrating forces imposing their will on you. I knew the powerlessness and fear that comes from sustained *psychological* and emotional assaults. I have witnessed my own sublimation to unseen forces and the dynamic destructive power of my own mind. I had confronted that invisible force field constantly charging into its repellent energies only to be whipped into a subdued state. This invisible force field protected the passage that connected me to the outside world the incredibly desirable world I so craved a world of compassion, affection and autonomy it remained elusive but such was my resolve to inhabit it that I continued to batter for entry. With unabated arrogance I endeavoured to smash my way through that barrier only to have inflicted an intense electrical current that surged though my body the current borne from intolerable pain and pure unadulterated fear.

I felt like a caged animal and I responded as one reduced to the most instinctive and primal of behaviours I slowly relinquished control over my own life. I learnt like young elephants learn when chained to a pole that you cannot move beyond the boundary set by the chains that bind you, so eventually you stop trying. Even when you accumulate great mass and you evolve into a mighty and intelligent beast the learning from the past is so entrenched you maintain the belief that it is impossible to be free of the chains grasp, no matter how flimsy and insubstantial they become, it is the memory of its embrace that is stronger and so you remain immobilised. It was the same for me I remained in my self-constructed 'Box'. Subjected to the whims and wiles of my own evil delinquent mind with its unlimited access and resources, I played host to such wickedness and rather than take charge and acknowledge my own devious shadows I chose to become it's victim a much more familiar and practiced role for me. Better to be a victim than a perpetrator. But the role of victim is impotent and passive the role of victim allows one to be exposed to visions of extreme violence and be hounded by ruthless tormentors. The seeds of my madness were germinating in my self-imposed exile. You do not necessarily choose the role of victim consciously it can be imposed in a variety of ways, it just becomes easier to live that way; you choose it because it can define who you have become, it is a position of justifiable penance

I began to withdraw from the world, I spent more time in my own company the threads that bound me to this ordinary world became tenuous and frayed with the consist fear of falling into an abyss of eternal darkness. I tried to erect impenetrable walls hoping to keep the ugliness of everyday life at bay. They were insufficient and I was relentlessly pursued by unsubstantiated claims of future horrors which would grow into a virtual forest of wild imaginings and give further proof of my most deep seated and hidden fears. I would be rejected by those who professed to care for me I would be ignored if I didn't present myself in the appropriate manner or conform to the social constructs of how a female should be. No longer able to maintain any semblance of normality the doors behind which my childhood anxieties lurked sprung open there was no place to run my exits had been blocked, there was nowhere to hide, no place of safety I was exposed, I'd been caught out. I had been discovered when I had for so long tried to be invisible, I had remained silent, I kept my oath of secrecy, I had kept my promise. I thought that would be enough. My decline spiralled and my retreat did not go unobserved, those close to me baffled and bewildered by my bizarre behaviour called in the professionals and I was sent off to a hospital to be 'hidden away and cured'.

In hospital I was placed in an elaborate structure, supported by clinical language the building blocks consisted of names like chronic- delusional- psychotic- each added to my confinement, the overarching roof named schizophrenia strengthened the clinical proclamations and gave it a quality of permanence. My new abode gave me a view constructed by others there was for me no view from behind, no view to the sides just a tiny slit of allowed light from the front and that slit of light became my whole lens to the outside world. Narrow and rigid it became my only way to observe the world so I sat deprived of sensual and social pleasure, limited and dulled. I sat in my carefully designed and manufactured 'Mad House' and I furnished it with desolation, hopelessness and worthlessness. It soon became cluttered with the musings and imaginings of a desperate mind, one seeking solace and more importantly escape, constantly searching for an exit, taunted by this inflicted view this minuscule view of my pre supposed and predetermined future, I foolishly sensed that beyond there was an elusive paradise

I was plagued by a weary and troubled mind that none the less still held to the ideal of the existence of a Utopia. A place that offers asylum to all its inhabitants a place that replenishes and offers renewal, a place that rejoices in diversity, a place with no need of locks for what is most precious is already possessed freedom. Freedom to be who you: who you were always meant to be.

I had previously been a possessor of a vibrant and energising life force but now my life was forced. Forced by those members of staff who informed me they knew how I should live my life, what I should be thinking about, instructed to comply, I was forced to yield to the will of others, forced into silence and forced to actively partake of my own destruction. The madness (define mad) crept up on me it devoured the last of my identity I was to become a manualised classification stripped of my own name know from now on as "S". Declared a sub species annulled as a human being.

They say the raw ingredients were there. I came from a poor family and a resource poor environment, but one rich in its cultural diversity one with an abundance of acceptance and spiritual generosity. I had a brother several years older than I, both my parents worked and were away from home for long periods of time leaving the responsibility of my care to my older brother subsequently I spent a lot of time on my own. I was an anxious child easy to frighten with a vivid and active imagination. I spent most of my time reading, writing and creating stories. I was later to attend an out of area school separated from those trusted and familiar friends and neighbours. The children were very different in their attitudes and behaviour quite incongruent to my own upbringing and it was very apparent that I didn't fit in. This experience of being intentionally excluded from my peers was both hurtful and dehumanising and would continue to resonate throughout my life. Another move to another school in which the exclusion was even more intense and frequently marred with physical and verbal abuse was to further destabilise my *sense of worth* and increase my anxiety to almost unbearable levels. I had for a number of years been hearing voices. Within my own local community one enriched with an ancient cultural understanding of such 'phenomena', my voice hearing was not seen as a form of madness but rather an acceptable and explicable occurrence. My abilities were accepted where I lived but schooling requirements did not allow me to stay cocooned in this environment of the culturally enlightened, it was when this protected world became extended beyond the parameters of my pre-existing safety zone that my voices and consequently I, became a source of contempt, ridicule and ultimately rejection.

But we were not to be separated my voices and I that was incomprehensible so we hid, we secreted ourselves away and continued our clandestine relationship making us immune from the comments and judgement of those who would see us parted. To share such a hiding place one develops an intimacy that grows into a grotesque form of love. The kind a hostage develops to their kidnapper, becoming reliant on them for all necessities of life both physical and emotional, loving and hating them in equal measures but entirely dependent on them. Never considering they would not be part of your life forever. Exposed to such external adversity and abhorrence serves to strengthen such a relationship and ours was to grow and flourish, they became my primary source of information and dictated and determined my existence in the world. My antagonists were now my Salvationist. They told me of my specialness, my advanced intellect, my ability to shape the world. I was a messenger from God I would bring peace to mankind. I would be the purveyor of the long awaited harmony so desired by the world. I would free mankind from tyranny and bring an abundance of tranquillity and

serenity to all those who craved it. I just had to endure these trails, the voices of demons presented me with tasks to perform and should I be successful it would be an indicator that I was a worthy recipient of this divine message. Constantly I failed, and then I would endure agonising prolonged emotional battering's the sense of disappointment not only for myself but for the cause was devastating. I had to endure hours of tortuous, hideous libel, only to then be given another chance and in doing so they identified themselves as benevolent masters. They wished me to succeed if only I could show myself to be other than this snivelling, insignificant excuse for a human being I would be able to master these trivial events and realise my gallant quest. The burden was crushing the cost immeasurable. I tried, I tried to be everything they wanted, I tried to conform to their will, I tried to save you all. I was prepared to give everything to obliterate the world of terror to bring about serenity. My heart and mind contorted in its quest to satisfy others requirement as it is so eminently capable of doing. My mind became overly alert and vulnerable to the constant intersecting of terror and exaltation, while I tirelessly endeavoured to reconstruct a world, which crumbled every day.

The mind is capable of the most improbable contortions to help us to survive these rare instances which are so readily labelled delusions and what I maintain are "righteous madness moments", or we could think of them as the result of a crippling of the human spirit the implosion of our internal surrendering's, the mind at last conceding to the pressure of the denying our very nature. When we experience the sudden strangeness of all that was so familiar it alarms and confuses. When you become bewildered by the rudimentary and overwhelmed by the ordinary. When you have been stripped of all understanding of the world and your place in it, the anchors that secured you to your essence no longer exist and you are surrounded by chaos, marooned from your full set of salvage implements, it can appear all is lost it can be difficult to accept that this is only a momentary lapse, that this is indeed another opportunity to hone your skills to learn how to subdue your traitorous mind.

I came to believe everything my voices said because it made perfect sense I believed what they said because it gave clarity and logic to my existence I believed what they said because I chose to. My survival and the entire human race depended on my acceptance of this scared calling. I was being called to usher in a period of great celebration a time of joyous daybreaks and contented safe nights. The madness did not occur because of the content of the voices, or the frequency, or even the divine sources, the madness occurred when I no longer had a choice about what I believed it was then the conversion was absolute.

It was not one disembodied voice I heard but I experienced a collection of informants a virtual village of voices telling me I was the chosen one, I was of superior intelligence, possessor of a higher moral code. I engaged in lengthy unconvincing arguments with lofty sources, I debated amateurishly; whilst they spoke with great eloquence with great authority and deep conviction they spoke as one. They told me things that made absolute sense, things that fitted so neatly with my experiences of the world. They were my only source of intelligence there was no alternative view of the situation, for we spoke openly of the unutterable we spoke of all the things that others couldn't *or refused to hear*. We gave voice to all the spiritual poverty the destitution of human hearts; we talked until we had a consensual script of which I was the key player, for it was I who was responsible for all this carnage of purity therefore it was I who had to reinstate all that had I had dispatched from the world this enormous task rested heavily on my shoulders. Creating an even greater burden was the constant dialogue from voices informing me of my powerlessness to do anything; you can change

nothing they said. I was faced with the dilemma of wanting to save the world and yet knowing in the deep recesses of my mind that I could not possibly do so. All I could hope for is that I would not be exposed as a fraud; for the world was looking for me to rescue when it didn't even know they needed to be saved.

I struggled with the duality of voices which created quite a dilemma for me while I was subjected to malicious assaults by negative voices I was buoyed and comforted by positive voices they were to sustain me during some of my more challenging periods. They spoke of their love for me of my value my entitlement to be here. They reminded me of all I had to offer and the contribution I would make. They spoke of a future unlimited and obtainable. They rescued me and resuscitated the hope, extracted me not only from negative voices but from the environment I inhabited the *prison of self-depreciation*. They earned my appreciation they soothed and bolstered me when nothing or no one else could. I am beholden to them for preserving my inner *kernel* and they have more than proved their worth to me I am grateful to them for allowing me to blossom. They are welcome and I do not limit their contact for I have not developed the skills of *cheerleading* for myself.

Those positive voices knew I was made of sterner resolve but it seemed that everyone else underestimated me. The voices knew I could endure I could survive I could be free. I had endured so much, no one noticed how strong I was everyone saw the madness as weakness not as a sanctuary from desires eternally denied. Worst of all I always knew I, yet relinquished it. I was coerced into trusting you and I tried to trust you. I was encouraged to follow your pathway to see through your eyes and assess through your invented entitlements but they were not my experiences not my words and not my entitlements I was to become a projection of your unconscious beliefs that I was a lesser being. To transition from my world into your world of low expectations I denounced my inner warrior. I was offered a benevolent but ultimately invalidating world. A world as manufactured and steeped in fallacies as my own had been except mine was created to survive and yours was developed to subdue and control the *wonder of seekers*. I had to defiantly reclaim all I had cherished about myself I had to learn trust myself.

I recall seeing on documents that I wasn't of sound mind. It was the source of great amusement to me. How wrong could you be my mind was full of sound, words, languages, music, sharp piercing scrapes of sound. A never ending profusion of delectable, delicious and consuming sounds. My world comprises entirely of language it is in this domain that I am most comfortable whether the voices indulge in the language of brutalism or in the language of grace, it is my very own personal auditory terrain where I am a spectator of all my potential triumphs all my tragic depravations and all my enchantments. It is where my aspirations are contrived where the rhythm of my life plays out via these renegade voices. I am attuned to the frequency of beauty and brutality I hear the primal, the complex, I hear all that is beyond reach. I hear the faltering and fading souls who wish to be recalled. I hear the cries radiated from a deranged universe. Not of sound mind indeed!

When you are ordained with the lofty quest of the hero. When you are 'the chosen one' immediately you are placed in a position of total isolation for it is the trail of the hero to bear the burden of the ignorance and arrogance that blinds the world to its own destruction. You cannot be "of this world" your divine purpose is to shoulder the responsibility for all that is not known to them because you know you have access to all the gross injustices and travesties that permeate throughout the world you have access to this knowledge. It is a solitary and unimaginably exasperating pursuit one that will see you reviled and humiliated at times until the time is right when their eyes will be opened when they will see my noble quest for what it is. It is for them, not for myself I do it for them, and yet they dismiss my pleas and declarations of what is so obvious. But that is the destiny of all hero's is it not; to be rejected, that explains why I am rejected so often, it is because I am a hero that very notion allows me to continue existing for if I was not on this heroic mission I would have no function and no rationale to excuse my survival. It is my shield and I will defend my beliefs with great vivacity for they are my affixes to any pride I still maintain. When the burden becomes too great it takes all your energy to carry it, there are no reserves to speak, for the weight crushes and depletes you of the necessary accretions. When you are not listened to nor heard the silence becomes a nauseating pounding; it is swallowed and endured for it is impossible to do anything else. Things had to change and it was not reality that flooded in it was resignation. I was too tired to fight, too tired to face yet another battle, too tired to wait for all that I had so dedicatedly waited. It was absolute fatigue that made me question and enquire. It took me time to realise that I was as captured by my own beliefs as much as those who were wedded to their own notions of what it was to be a hero. True heroism is demonstrated every day in innocuous acts of kindness small subtle acts not grand gestures but in the deliberate acts of warmth, unnoticed deeds borne from an unselfish nature. Pleasure gained from the pleasure of strangers. Doing the expected and unexpected with pride not for acknowledgment nor financial gain just for the enrichment of others.

Madness percolates from years of self-loathing mine so engrained that I could smell the stench that permeated from my every pore. I recall food tasting of excrement simply because it had touched my hands. I recall the revulsion at the very thought of who I was. In my own deliberations even I did not think I deserved the level of contempt I directed at myself. But again and again it rose within me to engulf me with its proclamations of my demonic villainy. I would have to face the undeniable truth of what I had come to believe. I could not exonerate myself from its powerful condemnation I just had to sit with the knowledge of my own foulness, and then there were the voices to reinforce the litany of misdemeanours and felonies, they possessed a lengthy record of crimes committed. I was the perpetrator of crimes of selfishness of greed of arrogance, of being different, of being unlovable unforgivable crimes. These are crimes that exclude you from decent society. Transgressions that were demonstrated in my every action, every decision, and every motive. My thoughts rather than my deeds entertained ideas of unparalleled wickedness but to have the thought was enough only an immorally bankrupt person could manufacture such atrocities. I was that person. There was not a snippet a nano-second of my existence that couldn't be reproduced to affirm and remind me of how depraved I was. Each memory infused with the details of my potential to preform acts of great cruelty, and with every crime there comes a punishment. My sentence was to have immediate access to a lifetime of offending a flood of distorted memories of all my misconduct in the most explicit detail, my sentence was to know exactly what I was capable of.

A jury comprised of disembodied voices observed my every move they narrated with scorn every attempt to atone for my sins. They tarnished each compulsion to act according to the conventions of decency. They ridiculed my feeble acts of redemption until it became impossible to do anything remotely worthy for it was forever tainted with the hue of a mercenary heart. How can the impure ever wash themselves of the stains of disdain? How can those crippling internal beasts be subdued? I had to think this through if it was possible for think my way into madness then reasonably it was possible to think myself out of it. I had to stop listening to others I had to find my own voice I had to find the language that would help me to reconnect to myself. I had to find the language that I could recognise I had to learn the language of acceptance and love.

I began to explore my beliefs and I was to discover many of them were incorrect and one of the main ideas was this notion that I had been locked up by others that I was at the mercy of those who sought to destroy me. I had not been locked into my world by others it was not others that dictated my narrow view of the world. For it was I who held the key to my own liberty it was I who spent all their time looking outside to a world that distorted and challenged my reality .I was observing when I should have been seeking. I should have been searching for a door, the door to get myself out. I needed to have a total experience of the world, to experience all its charms and manifestations, to have the chance to inhale all its essences. The lure of the view robbed me of the capacity to seek out the route for my real escape. It was I who held the key. Around my own neck close to my heart was the key to my exodus. And the key was to firstly wail and lament my lost aspirations and acknowledge my damaged soul, to recognise my grief and then to restore this fragmented self so I could commune with a sublime whole an inelegant, painful and at times demeaning process.

It meant I had to match words with action, I was the only one who could do it because it was I who held all that was necessary to heal myself, no-one knew my history nor my present, every nuance, every tread of triviality that combined created a stairway for my ascent into madness each a purposeful and effective technique to spare me from excruciating pain. It falls to me to extricate myself from the quagmire of the dark, disillusioned staging of my own punishment.

Recovery happens when you rise you head up above the parapet when you denounce the place imposed by others and create a dominion of your own choosing. No longer had a passive recipient of the abuse hurled at you but an activist, proactive in your own recovery. When you decide to reclaim your life and purge yourself of the past and determine that your life begins today. When you no longer allow the past to dictate the future and you question all pre conceived notions of who and what you are and begin to assert yourself. When you defy the rules of institutional constructs and embrace the delights of humanity. When you stop being a voyeur to your own life.

If you have created a truth that both condemns and denies you then you can create a truth that entitles and benefits you. Past events have shaped you but they do not define you. Even when you are captured by the madness, lost to its rapture you still manage to breath in an out, that is the world's message to you that no matter what, you must survive that your life is as precious and prized as anyone else's that is a colossal endorsement with the simple act of drawing breath. You have much to offer you are an indispensable asset in this world. You are the mirror to the world when it forgets to be gentle when it overrides the moral imperatives towards our fellow human being. That is why they try to shut you away for we are the irrefutable thorns of impoverished spirits. It is imperative we are visible that we bear witness to the plight and consequence of an intolerant world.

It appears that service users are more like the social collateral of our communities, for we are the canary in the coalmine the instruments of awareness. From times past when the canary was sent down to determine if it was safe for the miners to enter the mine, service users bear witness to the rot in our society they are the gauge of the decline in our society . Service users are sensitive to all that excludes and denies. We have the capacity to express a single sorrow a thousand ways and yet our expressions of emotions are relegated to the banal and trite, viewed as an individual symptom rather than symptom of a disengaged society.

It is naïve to think that there is any political will to acknowledge or even address the issues which may be raised from the proliferation of mental distress in our community. For it insinuates that all is not right within our realm and if there is the possibility that something is wrong then it means that it needs to be addressed, that there is an agency that should take responsibility it implies that all is not well within our kingdom. Far better to make it about “The mentally ill” better to “other” to make “them” fundamentally different A discreet group so totally alien to our society as to be ignored for their plight is a consequences of chemical imbalances and neuron -terrorism. That way designated authorities can abdicate themselves of their responsibilities and construct a system to compartmentalise and identify those who dare to expose the failings of those who are mandated to protect us all, unfortunately it is these same agencies that decide who are worthy of protection and those who are not.

With each healing that occurs the profit is multiplied tenfold with each healing that occurs we have made the world a better place here in this tightly wound professional with our obsessive arguments of the value of science over the influence of nature versus nurture. Whilst they are worthy of debates they must not be a distraction we must be careful not to use such debates as a vehicle to spread our own elitist views nor fashion our own dogma for we must remain open to a variety of different viewpoints, especially those generated from service users for it is only services who can endorse approaches this is where strength truly lies when we demonstrate the power that is generated when we combine our expertise.

When I come to your office I notice the diploma’s that credential you in your chosen profession material that denotes your competence and aptitude your abilities to pass exams at certain modalities and approaches to mental distress. It appears sometimes that what you seek is the validation and obtainment of that which will extoll your superiority to your peers. These accolades are displayed with much reverence It has made me consider that there is always one missing the one that declares that I would identify you are as a therapist, for you are not a therapist until I say you are and all that that truly involves. When you sit down with m, you are not the personification of all those authorisation of merit that sits before me rather a imperfect human being besieged with the same insecurities and ambiguities that I hold. For if we are to embark on this partnership at all we must we genuine with each other. I for one would wish to speak to someone who has the ability to empathise and have a basic understanding of what it is to experience confusion, sadness, disappointment and periods of feeling things are out of control. If you have not experienced such events then how will you be able to assist me someone who has experienced them in such extreme forms. My connection will be of the human kind I will look firstly for all we have in common I will need to ascertain if you are someone who has the capacity to listen to the perversion that sits inside me all the wickedness that I possess. I need to know that you can tolerate all that I contain at such great cost, for I need to protect you. I cannot entertain the possibility that you will betray me or lose

interest in me or deny me. I could not bear that again like the last person I say and the one before that and the one before that. I want you to be the one but I don't need you to be.

Never underestimate your ability to impact on other people's lives you do not have to take over their lives whilst you may disguise your own anxiety you do nothing to compensate for the loss of my own ability to resolve my own difficulties. The gift is to believe in and help me to access my own riches. It is hard to imagine that anyone can go through life unscathed without a few scars from the excesses of a turbulent world. But they are also the symbols of a life lived, of triumph over adversity of the promise of another chance. We must learn to embrace life with both hands clamped together. A life embroidered with the designs of the raw and unknown parts of one self, golden thread sown for an enduring heart, and then embossed with the rainbow of colours of hope supreme

In the past I found my escape through madness: no batteries required but when I look at people caught up in their pursuits of happiness I see they frequently resort to videogames and various forms of computerised generated fantasy, I reside in a society that appears to be constantly seeking external stimulus a society versed in the ways of detachment from the realities of the world rather than appreciation of it. Is this relentless craving for 'more' the same weaponry of my own madness. I relinquished my propensity to madness in my effort to be a reformist and in doing so I encountered those who held the same mission as my own. I found kindred spirits, the kind of people not interested in a tepid distanced lives but rather a collection of excessively curious people bound to a fundamental belief that there was a likelihood that people acted in extraordinary ways when extraordinary things happened to ordinary people. These were the listeners they listened without drawing conclusions they listened with genuine interest they helped me to come to terms with what had happened in my life and how I had interpreted it. I found you!

I recall how I walked up to the artist and placed my palm tenderly on his and said "I'm here, I haven't left you". Startled he sprung up and with an embarrassed grin scuttled away, he stopped momentarily and turned to look at me he opened his mouth as if to say something but not even my tears nor encouraging smile could allow him to breach the 'code of the mime' for a fraction of a second I saw it in his face he contemplated reaching out to me but then he changed his mind and walked away.

How many times have I seen this once again a lost opportunity exemplified so many of my exchanges with clinicians. I could see them wanting to break their own imposed code but they could not for they lacked the courage. Courage is the greatest of all the virtues for without courage you cannot practice any of the others. I feel that what was lacking was the ability to believe in themselves all the attributes they asked so nonchalantly of me as if entitled they proved themselves to be deficient in. They were as trapped in their own imaging's as I was in mine. The subconscious belief in their own healing incompetence was just as entrenched as of my own beliefs of my specialness. Enslaved to the machinations of organisational decrees, seduced by the desire for peer esteem, the lure of prestige, fearful of professional exclusivity, for daring to be different, to deliberately stand out, could imply there was something wrong could be seen as an indictment on their chosen discipline. We are not that different you and I, I just do not possess the privileged voice of the dominant culture.

I have not spoken of those truly difficult times in my life when the voice falls silent. I am a voice hearer it is as natural to me as it is for those who are left handed, so when they fall silent I feel quite uncomfortable when they are not there for long periods of time. But I must say there is one particular silent voice that truly concerns me and that is the voice of professionals who do not speak out to advocate or defend nor expose the plights of service users. Where are those who profess to serve us when a story appears in the media that sensationalises or falsifies the information and possible motivation of adverse events. It seems that when an incident occurs the explanation that the person is mentally ill is sufficient in itself for that makes it 'those people' it reinforces the most negative stereotypes that as a group we are unpredictable, violent, uncontrollable when nothing could be further from the truth. Service user groups endeavour to speak within the public domain but it is the professionals that could allay the fears of the public by speaking of the reality of a situation rather than the biased hyped up media announcements. Why are we not standing side by side when asked to speak on such topics? I don't think I ever feel more alone as when I am asked to give my opinion on matters pertaining to those extraordinary times when negative events in which service users can be involved occur. No one it seems is interested in all the achievements and successes both within or outside the system it appears mental health only comes under public scrutiny when something negative happens. We do not celebrate nor publicise our triumphs our accomplishments, nor inform the public of the current approaches within service delivery.

We give awards, we give impressive titles, and people gain notoriety within the field but outside of our capsule who knows what we do. People seem more aware of what we don't do then what we do. We should be rejoicing in the multiple minor miracles that occur for people of which we can with all humility take a role in assisting. This cone of silence tells me more about your genuine views of me than anything else. Perhaps you secretly subscribe to those same negative views those same negative stereotypes, perhaps you even hold the view that this is how my life will be always that I can never get past this point. If you hold that inside you and you hold it to be true then what chance can I have for as brilliant as you might be in your chosen profession and modalities ultimately it is your belief in me that would give me the valour to try new things, to accept new ideas, to give me the strength to be who I want to be. I can sense insincerity and lack of genuineness you know I have to be able to it is a survival technique I cannot afford to forfeit. Consider this also that silence is the tool of abusers that is why we must renounce in the strongest terms those who insist on vilifying and producing abhorrent propaganda which impedes those with lived experience to have a life in our communities and ultimately a life worth living. We must reach out to our allies and our foes we must endeavour to have lively but respectful debates on the merits of the differing views and always, always service users must be at the centre: if what we do does not increase a person's autonomy we must explore and offer a rationale as to why.

We must administer to those who are still trapped within the confines of an arbitrary system we must all of us each commit to procuring a kinder world a place worthy of inheriting. We must raise our voices; speak out loud of the social injustices the savagery of bigotry the denial of dignity. We must speak to guide the global communities to a place of sanctuary. We must speak out like the activist of old we must have faith that our voices will be heard. Our legacy will be one of equal and dignified relationships, of respectful conduct, of pure loving exchanges. The richness obtained from reaching out to our fellow humans is incomparable and as a consequence we will be an enriched community. I look forward to when I am finally able to declare I am a citizen of the world; I am no longer a reflection of the trappings of inconsolable hearts.

This could be a journey of liberation for us both. My liberation tied up with your own. If we could dispense with the masks, the repackaging of evidence that trivialise and dismisses the lived experience. If we could unfurl those intuitive and humane approaches which have been confined to the legends of social reformist. If we would give permission to ourselves to explore together all that could be possible. If we decide to disseminate power it will multiply rather than be diminished in anyway then I am no longer a voyeur to my own life, but an active participant in my own reclamation of a life interrupted.

I have no wish to be an observable measurable paradox. It is my desire to be a contributing member of society, finding refuge in quality relationships, interesting vocations, enjoyable leisure time no longer discovering my respite in madness. I who have spent hours serenaded by the sounds of an injurious internal choir now awakened to the sounds of the natural world, the boisterousness of lively debate, conversations injected with laughter and good humour, the sounds that come with good company and real friendships, intriguing travel opportunities to destinations never before contemplated, able to access uncorrupted information, finally able to delight in the sonic absurdities of a world so long denied.

Madness for me has always seemed like the most natural abet extreme response to distress, and like those chronically normal people out there who wish to be held seek the reassurance of good full body hug. We clutch as only the desperately hurt can do hoping by some form of osmosis the other persons sense of being in control will merge with our own and their compassion will leech into my body.

I think of therapy as a holding. When I am held closely you will see all that is behind me all that has brought me here to this embrace. With arms, eyes and ears wide open you become aware of what has preceded my journey to you. You will see 180 degrees of my world and when the therapeutic process works well you will experience the infusion of experiential wisdom of how I engaged in this thing we call madness as a way to survive. Our time together has been spent taking small steps towards each other so that we can finally face one another face denuded of our insecurities not entirely sure of how this will end or how to get there just knowing that it is going to be together. For our paths have led us ultimately to a place of inter- dependence. We will need to rely on each other to trust each other we have cultivated all we can to bring us to this junction.

I believe that effective therapy comes from a place of love 'agape love' and if you truly want to be contentious especially around language just use the 'L' word. I am speaking of the Greek definition which is the pure, selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love, the highest of the four types of love". This for it seems that that one singular word more than any other raises the anxiety level of clinicians off the scale and yet I declare that it is the case deny as you will I am convinced of it. It saddens me that we should feel so unnerved about mentioning it. I would hope that the word should be a contagion if only we could put that into a blister pack and offer it 3 times a day?

It is my hope that when we stand together marvelling at the view which has revealed itself from the cloud of despair that the scales will fall from our eyes and with eyes, ears and mind and heart sincerely opened will witness a new and revised view of both our worlds' one which bestows an almost scared gift. Together we have ushered in a better world.

I wish to give you a souvenir it is an infinite range of colours put at your disposal that represents all those who will go after me and I invite you together with those fortunate enough to come into your company to colour in the world to make it what you so desire. Can I ask you one more favour before I leave you please, please in memory of me try to colour outside the lines!!