

Me, My BPD, and God

by Christine McDonald

Until a few years ago the words spiritual and mental were in the same place in my mind as the occult – a scary place that I had no plans to explore. In some ways, they had bed mates – other hang ups that I had – long haired men, people in wheelchairs, and those with different coloured skin, for example.

I had lived a sheltered life in many ways and these people were different from me. In my eyes, I was normal, and they were not. Then life got in the way. Basically I grew up, married, and had a successful career in local government; first as a buyer, followed by marketing and sales. Then, my husband and I decided to start a family.

Whilst on maternity leave, I received notification that my applications for professional membership of two Chartered Institutes had been accepted, that of Purchase and Supply and of Marketing. I checked out the membership lists, and found I was the only person worldwide with both qualifications, giving me evidence of great achievement in two opposing disciplines – buying and selling. I was unique. At this point, it was as if an electrical circuit had been completed in my head. I remember feeling a physical difference as if pathways were opening up in my mind.

Then I met God

He was sitting on a cloud, and I asked him how he knew He was God, and I wasn't? He replied, "Because I am up here and you are down there. I asked if I could join Him, but His answer was "No! not yet".

I argued that I had reached my peak, cited my motherhood and newly received membership cards as proof, but He continued, "Get back down to earth - you haven't played all your cards yet. I have selected you to spread the word that I am available to anyone who needs me. You can use your own experiences to explain".

I wish now that He had said, "...spread the word... at appropriate times", because learning this forewarning would have saved me a whole lot of trouble, anxiety, and maybe even the diagnosis and stigma when I mentioned the conversation to others.

After a time, I forgot about my dialogue with God on the cloud. Somehow though my mood had lifted and I picked up a newspaper to read. An article jumped off the page as if written just for me, and I was soon on a tidal wave, driven to research everything about the subject, and to produce a dissertation. I had 100 copies of my report printed, and sent them to everyone on my Christmas card list, then posted them in all the letter boxes in the village, and started thinking about extended distribution.

Just then my baby cried, and I switched immediately from work mode to baby mode. After dealing with the immediate needs of nature, I looked around and saw the pile of presents we had received at my child's Christening. They included a photograph album - one of those with spaces for the first lock of hair, and for pictures of family members.

It made me think about my father, who had died when I was six years of age. I had an urge to find out more about him, which became more and more intense. I wanted to get closer to him and tell him he was a grandfather. I reached this closeness by discovering his spirit in a packet of scented talcum powder and sprinkled it everywhere, rather like incense in high church.

The following day, I was diagnosed with Manic Depression - Bi Polar Disorder - BPD - as it is now called. The text book cites various typical clinical signs of mania. For example, a belief at being the chosen one, delusions of grandeur and hallucinations. Were these the experiences I had when I met God on

His cloud? So I was mad, after all, and my pact with God must stay a secret, for to tell anyone was proof of maniamental illness. When I first received the diagnosis I was terrified – to me manic depressives went around with axes murdering people. People told me I was silly to think that, but it didn't help – the thought was in my head, and no-one listened to the message I was putting out - that I needed someone to listen to how I felt, and not judge what I was saying.

To me, their judgment was that I was trivial and puerile ...and it hurt. For the last 14 years I have had a fair share of 'character building experiences'. There were many times when I have forgotten about God. But when I remember, we have a little chat.

We have special ways of communicating. We have a laugh together in private, but at times He tells me off and advises me not to be too flippant. "Be careful not to upset the beliefs of others", He warns. So, I am careful whom I tell about God. I have learned my own caveat, my own self-management skills as to when to share thoughts and feelings and when not to. (Until now, that is!)

Along my journey I have met a cornucopia of personalities who have touched upon my life - many of whom I would not have met had I not seen the world from the 'other side'.

I feel privileged I have met God and been able to share my conversations with Him. I feel I have played many cards in my deck, and just when I have won a hand, someone comes along, collects up the cards, shuffles them and re deals. One time when I was an inpatient, I had the experience of a few days of long, sincere and searching conversations with two special new found friends, who were co-patients. We talked as a threesome exploring life, death and all things in between.

One was an Angel, the other relied on The Bible to attempt to quell my almost insatiable appetite for knowledge about such things that were a mystery to me.

It was an experience I shall treasure for the rest of my life.

NB This experience was over three years ago. It was the last time I needed acute care, after well over a decade as a revolving door patient.