



Scottish Recovery Network

Title: Emerging From a Cocoon

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This recovery story from Catherine Eadie charts her journey through childhood to the present day, exploring what supported her personal journey of recovery from mental health problems and hospitalisation, to her current role as a support worker. Catherine also lists the factors that help support her daily wellbeing now and why she feels sharing her story could inspire hope of recovery in others.

I am no longer the same person who started this journey at sixteen. At the time I didn't know or feel I was on a journey, but looking back over twenty-two years I can see it was a very long journey that actually, if I had anything to do with it, would have ended very abruptly. I almost feel I had to go through this whole journey to emerge a better and more capable person, and most of all grab back and attain my own identity.

For anyone who knows Erik Eriksson's eight developmental stages from infancy to late adulthood, the very beginning called "Infancy" is definitely something myself and family had problems with. The main factor being separation from the maternal mother at an age of around six months. This was not, I may add, through death, but a breakdown of the family unit. A very unusual court case resulted in my father obtaining custody. Bearing in mind in the seventies this was almost unheard of. My father had met someone who had two children already and it was felt he could provide a more supportive family environment for me with his new wife.

Without anyone realising it at the time, this decision was the foundation of my problems. Naturally many more events occurred along the way that made things more difficult. Including, in my early teens, my father's divorce and marriage for the fourth time which came at a point where I was already struggling.

Difficulties at school only confused the many battles I had yet to deal with and as a result at seventeen, and again at nineteen, I was admitted to the Young People's Unit (YPU) for a period of six to seven months. There were, with hindsight, positive and negative aspects to being there. The negatives were, without doubt, being drawn into "the system", and a very stigmatised one at

that. I was also very confused at exactly what “I” was meant to do to get better and help myself. Looking back I can see this was purely because I was a teenager, still learning the skills of life and all that went with it. Unfortunately being unwell added to this and made the comprehension of my mind and my actions very difficult.

I settled a little with medication, therapies, group-work, and hospital friendships. I then went on to do Supported Employment Training, but deep down I was still struggling. By pure chance, and without thought, I met someone who was to ultimately change my life, even if it did take him a while and a lot of dedication to achieve this!

I left supported accommodation at nineteen and we moved into a flat together where we remain today. I continued to attend the YPU Day Unit and psychotherapy once a week with a very nice lady. Unusually I stayed on their books until I was around twenty-two. Transition to the adult services at the Royal Edinburgh was not as cut and dry then as it is now. In some ways this was a blessing, because I continued to suffer very distressing symptoms and thoughts and to be passed over at a vulnerable time would not have been good. Suicide at that point was often on my mind, sometimes in the background and sometimes to the point of making serious attempts that ultimately didn't work but required a journey to A&E.

Medication changes continued and between the ages of twenty-three and twenty-six I had a very settled period. I wasn't at the stage of employment, but I did attend some groups, courses and voluntary work, trying to keep myself as occupied as possible.

In 1997 at the age of twenty-six I had a minor setback, which resulted in being seen at the Inverleith Day Unit. An antipsychotic I had been on for several years was not re-instated, but instead I was given a new one. This had a devastating effect on my mental health and I went onto to suffer paradoxical side-effects. This was not accepted by the medical team looking after me and in a few short weeks I had a massive breakdown which resulted in me ending up on a train to Glasgow. I took an overdose at a B&B there and after two days phoned the police who took me to a police station in Glasgow. My husband, having almost had a breakdown himself while I had disappeared, came to collect me and was instructed to take me to A&E in Edinburgh, and subsequently I was admitted to the Royal Edinburgh.

It was no laughing matter being back at the Royal Edinburgh, and over the next three years and several more admissions I knew things had to change. Caring psychiatric staff do exist, from consultants all the way down, BUT.....I'm afraid there are a fair number who think they know what is going on in your head, who don't listen or care, who show no compassion or understanding. Psychiatry is like no other medical profession out there, it's invisible, internal and destructive. There are no tests, examinations and even assessments are never 100% absolute. My admission in 2000 was to be my last and I vowed never to return there again.

Having come away dejected by lack of care, support and sensitivity, I laid out a path to follow. Half the time not knowing what my own head was doing, this path would be a wavy one, but over time I have been totally 100% responsible for my own recovery. The people I would thank who have helped me through this journey have no association with psychiatry or the medical model. All the way has been trial and error – thankfully the errors have not had any major impact!

Before I started my journey in the outside world, I decided, from home, to set up a mental health support website. This is still running successfully, but with the help of volunteers as my time is now limited.

The start of my outside path was having a Support Worker, instilling in me my abilities and focusing on what I could do, getting out and about etc. This led me to having the confidence to try out an Open University course and to attend the gym - firstly just once a week, then built up to three times. Between 2003 and 2006 I achieved four OU courses resulting in two certificates. I became a volunteer mental health advocate, became fit and healthy and started Permitted Work. By 2007 I finally got a contract of employment at the grand old age of thirty-six, my first 'real' job ever! And yes, it's as a mental health Support Worker! During 2007 I also achieved four runs for charity, two 5k's and two 10'ks.

Here and now in 2008, I feel a normal part of society. I have gained confidence, self-esteem, I look after myself very carefully and after so many years of my husband worrying and caring for me, I can now give him something in return and we can be an equal couple.

What did my 'journey' teach me? Firstly it taught me that each and every person who does manage to gain any element of recovery goes through it very very differently. I won't pass on my journey as a piece of advice, as that to me would be ignorant. I will tell it, in the hope that it gives hope – however small.

Secondly, it taught me a vital lesson in taking care of myself and that I am, and could be, vulnerable to further relapses but that these can be lessened by some very important tools for self-preservation and stable mental health.

- Regular and consistent sleep pattern of at least 8 hours
- Routine and organisation, (vital for management of anxiety)
- Healthy eating + exercise, no consumption of alcohol, caffeine etc.
- Stay positive and recognise/challenge negative thinking
- Recognise positive achievements
- Don't get caught up in negative family dynamics
- Have fun and take up new challenges to keep up motivation
- Use medication as an assistance at the lowest dose possible
- Get a pet, they are great therapy
- A problem shared is a problem halved – talk about it !

What do I want in 2008/2009? Well, my next goal is to do a course in Personal Training, become a Jogscotland Leader and train for a half-marathon.

This story is obviously a very shortened version of my journey through the mental health system. And, it is just a story. Now being on the other side as a Support Worker, I see patients I used to be with in hospital still stuck in the system. A name pops up here and there, sometimes followed by sad news of their demise by their own hand. Not really that surprising, as I also witnessed this while I was in the system. I have lost friends and I have come across fellow patients who are shadows of their former selves. This makes me sad, but also realistic that we are far from succeeding in making an impact and improving people's mental health. Some would say this is a negative view – I say its real life. You just need to look around you to see that.

If you'd like to share your thoughts on recovery then email [info@scottishrecovery.net](mailto:info@scottishrecovery.net) attaching your story. You may also want to attach a picture though this is optional. If you'd like to discuss this further then phone 0141 240 7790.