

## **Life can be anything you want it to be.**

Diagnosed Schizophrenic!!! That meant my life should be over. I would have to have people looking after me, never able to have a job and subjected to stigma for the rest of my life. Wrong, I did not let that be my life.

It all started in the summer of 2000. I remember the day as if it was yesterday. England played Portugal and lost. That was just the start of the day that would change me forever. I was a chef working in Leeds. At this time in life I was a drifter, never really achieving much. I liked to drink, smoke and also took drugs. I moved to Leeds from Nottingham to be away from my family. I just did not care about much.

Anyway, on this particular day to drown my sorrow about England, a few friends and myself had a lot to drink, smoked (cannabis) and took drugs (ecstasy). We then went back to the house we were sharing in a cheap area of Leeds, and carried on. I was having a great time, we all were, and then I passed out. Life was never the same after that.

I woke up. Everything was wrong. I had flashes of what had happened. My mind started to race, it wanted to re-live it, but I was too scared to let it. Each night I would go to bed and relive the same night. My mind could not take it so it fragmented and reality for me changed forever. As a man I would not for a long time acknowledge that I was sexually assaulted.

Over the next 2 years the reliving got stronger. I started hearing voices; I had strange ideas to try to explain things. My eyes would play tricks and I started to hallucinate. After suffering with this I thought my life could not get any worse. So it all had to come to an end. Alone, I could not, would not, live like this. So one day in February 2003, with four bottles of paracetamol, I tried to end it all. That was the start of the end of the control the illness had over my mind.

I came home from Leeds back to Nottingham after telling my parents that my suicide attempt had not worked. After going into hospital a doctor asked me a few questions and, because I was living in a strange world that my mind had created, I was labeled with schizophrenia. I was never much of one for making promises but I decided to make two that would also change my life, for the better. One, I would never go through any problem in life alone again. Two, that my life will get better.

Since leaving hospital I have met so many great people, with a mental health problem or work within the field. One of the main people that I will never forget was a student nurse. It was she who helped me to fulfill my promises. She got me going to two different groups. One was the young persons group - this helped me to be around people again; to start socializing and just got me talking to people about every day things. The second was the hearing voices group at Breakthru in Long Eaton. Here I was able to say what was happening to me, not only in the past but also what was happening to me within my mind. I cannot state just how much I owe these groups.

Breakthru is excellent place to go to if you have any form of mental health issue. As I have mentioned it is based in Long Eaton, and is open most weekdays. Here they offer exciting activities ranging from sign language to massage, plus food and drink. Over time the staff have helped me to not only talk about my problems, but just like the young persons and hearing voices groups, to be more positive. If you do unfortunately become ill then I really recommend Breakthru as some where to go. For information on any of these groups please contact them on 0115 9461213. If you do not live near Long Eaton then they do have a centre in Ilkeston (please use same number).

Over time I have achieved becoming vice-chairman of the whole of Derbyshire hearing voices network. I now work as a volunteer at Breakthru, helping other people with their mental health problems, but the thing I am most proud of at the moment is my 2:1 degree level in Social Sciences.

After getting my degree at Nottingham Trent University, I had to sit down and think about what I wanted to do with my life. Like I have said, since leaving hospital I have met so many unique people who have suffered terrible thing in their lives, but the one person that really stands out after trying to write this short story about me is that student nurse. I want to have the same impact on people's lives as she had on me. So a month ago I applied to Queens Medical Centre, which is part of Nottingham University, to start training to be a Community Mental Health Nurse. I am happy to say that I start in a few weeks.

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