

## Reasons to be cheerful

I took the Lithium because my G.P said I needed to, I took it because my family said I needed to, I took it because I felt life was so shit I couldn't think of an alternative. The people in my head thought I was stupid to take it and they took the piss out of me, but eventually they stopped nagging me and I took it. The drug turned me into a perfect Stepford wife, except I was really, really fat, I could do the shopping and I could feed the kids and I never got angry or sad or happy, or anything at all, I just got fatter and fatter wrapped up in my cloud of grey, surrounded by a huge wall I knew I was the other side of, I just couldn't get to me anymore. So after a year in this chemical prison I started to reduce the dosage, I don't know or care if I spoke to the Doctor, it was my body and my choice. With the reduction I found myself again, it was heavenly. I started to lose weight, I had more energy and I cared about everything again. And I started to argue with my husband, I felt the restrictions of family life tightening around me and I couldn't bear it.

So on May 1st I left. I lived in a van and I hung out with the homeless and the alcoholics and the recreational drug users, but I only ever drank, because I fucking hate drugs. And my mate said, "a little bit of this will help", as she passed me the vodka at 9 in the morning, and I trusted her. And it did help for a while.

But then I realised I was not like these people and I retreated to my van, parking in lay-by's, and missing my children, but glad of the freedom to be me, as I sank lower and lower into suicidal visions and compulsions. By now I had stopped the medication and the alcohol, I was clean and alive, and dreadfully depressed.

I became a Goddess, the Universe was a gift and I wanted to share this beauty so I went to Cornwall, to see the sea, to see my family. And there, amongst the fairies and demons and love and terror, I was sectioned.

I spat out their drugs, even when they gave me dissolving anti-psychotics and kept me talking, I still rushed to the loo and spit out as much of the fizzy yellow poison as I could. I recited mantra's to survive, like 'we are all one', and 'that which does not destroy me makes me stronger', and 'if they can't destroy me in the bin then I will be strong'.

Less than a month later I was back to my home town and a homeless hostel, and a handful of anti-psychotics and threats of Lithium and I told the Psychiatrist I was taking them, even though I wasn't. He asked what the Community Mental Health team could do for me and I told him I wanted a community art centre and a space full of love and light and optimism, and someone to cook for me. He said "we cannot provide that" and I said "but it's what I need to recover", and he said, "you are doing my head in" and he discharged me.

I was non-compliant, I was homeless and I was off the planet, but I was free.

The visions and voices still invaded my life, I couldn't sleep or eat and eventually in November I took a homeopathic remedy. The harassment in my head ceased over the next couple of days and I started to rebuild my life. I spent my time in the hostel eating well; first I ate in cafes because I couldn't cook, then I began to make salads, full of healthy ingredients. I walked miles for exercise. I believed I was important, I wrote and I sewed and I joined an art course at the college and my G.P listened to me talk and occasionally prescribed me homeopathic remedies which worked like magic. And I stayed away from my old acquaintances. And I always believed the Universe provided whatever we need to learn and grow, and I learned how to be good and I learned how to be well. And I went to the MDF (Manic Depression Fellowship) support group and I was supported and I supported others. I saw my children and I got a flat, I got a divorce, it was all very amicable, and two years later I got a heavenly house and I share the children with their father and we are all happy and free.

It is now almost four years since I started to reduce the medication and not for one day do I regret my choice, the journey here was hard at times, but good things don't come easy. The only way I can keep the monsters away from me, and the paranoia and the terrors is to live a good life. So now I am a very reluctant Buddhist kind of a person, and as long as I never do anything wrong I only have the funny and good people living in my head. And that's my journey of coming off the medication.

I still see a shaman, who is brilliant and I still use homeopathy. And I still believe in the Universal energy, because it is bigger than everything and it is me, and you, and all of us and we are all one. And that is all I wanted to tell people and that is delusions of grandeur and needs forcibly medicating out of you.

Non-compliance is the first step to recovery.

Clare