

# *My Story*

***These things may seem ridiculous to others, even as ridiculous as they were in themselves, but to me they were the most tormenting cogitations***

***John Bunyon, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners.***

***Rule your mind or it will rule you.  
Horace.***

I have had OCD from very early on in childhood and it is now known of course that I most likely had a genetic predisposition to have been born with this very debilitating disorder. There are letters in my medical files from the age of only three years referring to unspecified psychological problems and later records from approximately eight years of age mentioning problems with moodiness, introversion and memory lapses. All of this I now cannot remember however I recall being medicated on what was referred to as a sedative due to my habit of screaming in the street as a consequence of not being able to cope with the noise and the confusion of traffic and crowds.

***The fear of death is more to be dreaded than death itself.  
Pubilius Syrus. Maxims***

I began to have obsessive thoughts right from preschool age that began as a morbid preoccupation with death, I would ruminate about death and its inevitability. I soon realised that there was no escape from death and this fact haunted me throughout childhood and it was this fear that would eventually be the driving force behind the myriad of obsessions and compulsions that would ruin my life. In particular I was anxious about an aunt, of whom I was fond, and that one day she would die. I could not bear this thought and worried that I would forget what she looked like. Anxious concerning this I would draw pictures of her in an attempt to retain something of her for when she eventually died.

From about the age of six or seven I was best by religious ruminations, anxious thoughts haunted me concerning my status as a Christian: would God consider me Christian. I would seek reassurance from my family. My family did not attend Church nonetheless I had a catholic type of upbringing and was encouraged to approach religion in the Catholic manner. I was always worried that if I was not good or if God did not consider me a Christian then I would go to hell. I was indeed very frightened of the prospect of going to hell and as consequence I was an unnaturally well-behaved

and scrupulous child.

About the same time I began to develop compulsive rituals, these rituals were performed mostly at bedtime and bath time. If I could not carry out these rituals I became anxious. The rituals involved washing my hands for a certain number of times before going to bed and whilst bathing I had to wash certain parts of my body in a special way for a set number of times. The compulsion to perform such rituals was not born from the fear of contamination, as would be the case in later years, rather such was carried out because of superstitious fears - I felt that some disaster would befall me if I did not.

As a child I was very depressed and moody. I was shy and from junior school onwards I found it difficult to make friends and take part in any social life with my peers. I felt odd, awkward, out of place never seeming to fit in never knowing what to say or how to behave. Overall school was a very stressful time of my life. Moreover despite having an above average IQ I did not do well academically at school. I was simply too anxious to learn being more concerned with coping with the unpleasantness and spitefulness of other children who seemed to know that somehow I was different from them in a way that perhaps they could not define, in a way that children of this type seem to instinctively know.

There are significant gaps in my memory with regard to OCD. Perhaps these were periods when the condition was less severe. I recall however that my fears of death and dying would become more apparent whenever something pleasant was imminent; I became anxious that I would die before the anticipated event. One of these events was Christmas. Christmas was marred by the thought that I would die before the arrival of the anticipated day. I would lie awake on Christmas Eve frightened that I would die before Father Christmas arrived and I could open my presents.

The next significant phase of my illness began in adolescence. It was at this time that I began to doubt the existence of an after life - even one as awful as hell. Instead of being haunted by the fear of hell and damnation my mind was troubled by the prospect of endless oblivion, which seemed infinitely more terrible even than hell, at least one existed in hell. I would have acute attacks of fear for periods lasting several hours during which my mind compulsively contemplated or ruminated upon the finality of death and the eternity of oblivion which now I believed stretch before me after death. In my ruminations it appeared to me that death was rather like the universe in as much that it like the universe persisted forever having no end. That was of course my understanding of the universe at that time therefore this analogy with death was appropriate. Because of this association any subject connected with space and the universe reminded me of death and as such filled me with cold apprehension. Such a feeling I now recognize as existential terror however at that time I had no name to put to such feelings I merely felt them and bore them until eventually such feelings would subside until the next time.

Eventually as time went on this association with death became less of a problem for awhile until leaving school, although thoughts about death existed somewhere in the background fuelling feelings of anxiety and depression. After I left school I started work in a large department store it was whilst working here that I developed a

compulsive ritual that was superstitious in its content. The ritual involved walking through the city centre, visiting the same shops in the same order and even to the extent of using the same public toilet at the same time of day regardless of necessity. I did not know why I felt the compulsion to perform this senseless ritual; I knew only that I became anxious if for some reason I was prevented from doing so. It never occurred to me that my behaviour was irrational or that I had a problem. Fortunately after leaving my place of employment this ritual stopped, although I continued to work in the same area the compulsion ceased without any effort on my behalf.

***It is not death that a man should fear, but he should fear never beginning to live.  
Marcus Aurelius.***

However my obsession with death became more of a problem and increasingly marred my life. The words of Samuel Johnson whom experts believed suffered with OCD, sum up my feelings quite adequately when he said that there was never a time when death was not terrible to him. Although I was still only fifteen I was always anxious that time was passing me by. I spent my teens uneventfully. I was shy, depressed and introverted and I had few friends. Those that I did have never stayed friends for very long and there was never any real closeness.

During my mid teens and early twenties I became involved with a couple of religious cults: The Mormons and the Scientologists. Concerning the first: during my time as a Mormon I felt as though I had some religious faith and for a time the fear of death subsided, although in retrospect I now believe that I was merely carried away with fascination rather than genuine religious fervour. With regard to Scientology, this was more of a rebound reaction as I joined this cult shortly after losing my faith in Mormonism looking most likely for a substitute as I could not revert to the lonely fearful life that I had had preoccupied with the fear of death. However Scientology did not fill this gap and I was with this sect for barely six months.

I met my husband in my early twenties and we were married within weeks of dating. My husband was aware that I suffered from depression but neither he nor I realised that I had a specific psychological disorder. I never sought treatment at this time. Although my thoughts were distressing and most certainly depressing I never considered that such morbid thoughts were abnormal. I realised of course that my outlook on life was somewhat different to most people's however I considered that I had a depressive type of personality. I realised that I contemplated philosophical issues, such as the meaning of life, how one should live and what happened upon death, perhaps rather more than most people did. Nonetheless I considered this a normal part of my personality if indeed I considered the whys and wherefores of my thinking processes in this regard. I realised that I was perhaps more sensitive concerning such issues and had possibly a greater level of awareness than most. Nonetheless I envied the peace of mind and the carefree life styles that others led whose minds seemed uncluttered by such considerations. Most people I realised did not think of death except when they were older, illness threatened or they had had a bereavement.

***Pain of mind is worse than pain of body.  
Publius Syrus.***

The following incident that occurred soon after my marriage may have been the precipitating factor in the full-blown emergence of my OCD. Shortly after a depressing conversation about death with a colleague at work I developed hypochondriasis. After this insensitive conversation I imagined that I had any and every illnesses that was mentioned by anyone or that I inadvertently read about. Any irregularity in my body became exaggerated until I was convinced that I was terminally ill. To complicate matters further the intrusive thoughts and compulsions of my childhood began to present themselves in a much greater intensity and frequency than they had hitherto. In particular the obsessional thoughts concerning death and disaster became more prominent, more intrusive and more distressing. Throughout most of my waking hours my mind was preoccupied with some aspect of death. Shortly afterwards the religious obsessions, ruminations and compulsions of childhood returned but in a far more distressing and bizarre manner.

I began to have what I will refer to as propitiatory obsessions. I would make bargains with God in a placatory manner. For instance I would deny myself all manner of normal pursuits and pleasures. I made vows to abstain from eating certain types of food usually anything that was particularly pleasurable, such as chocolate, eventually however there remained little of any interest that I could eat and this was restricted to certain times of the day. Furthermore I would prohibit myself from buying clothes, make up and so on. I would make such vows of abstinence hoping to placate God and in exchange for such self-denial he would not take my life or the lives of those I loved. I would be constantly adding to the list afraid that it was never enough. This behaviour lasted for months, I steadily deteriorated and my life resembled that of a devout ascetic but of course for all the wrong reasons and not from any sense of piety. Moreover I did not realise how strange my behaviour was and how unnatural and neurotic. I did not analyse my behaviour I simply conformed to the neurotic, and in deed at times psychotic, whisperings of my aberrant mind. I had no insight into my behaviour and for many many months I lived in this misery. Also bear in mind that since losing faith in Mormonism I was now at least an agnostic, possibly even atheist. Nevertheless at that time such considerations did not enter into the matter at all. Consequently my behaviour was indeed most bizarre. I still had an open mind concerning religion but that was about the extent of my conviction at that time.

Furthermore I was most distressed by intrusive thoughts of a profane and blasphemous nature. I had the notion that I had committed the unforgivable sin and consequently either someone that I loved or I would die. The first thought of this nature came one glorious hot day during summer as we were driving home. Throughout the day I had the words of a famous hymn repeating over and over in my mind rather like a loop tape, the way that such lyrics and music do to all of us from time to time. All of a sudden the words of the hymn suddenly changed to include words of a most vile nature and blasphemous obscenities forced themselves into my mind. I was appalled, mortified and more importantly utterly overwhelmed with a feeling of dread not hitherto experienced. I could not prevent these thoughts from entering my mind and time and time again these thoughts and other like them would return to haunt me; there appeared to be nothing that I could do to prevent their incursion. I tried to mitigate the terror or harm that I considered that such thoughts produced by constantly pleading with God to ignore my thoughts and not take

retribution upon my self or my family. Repetitive praying along with more vows of abstention followed in an attempt to allay the perceived consequence of my thoughts.

Paradoxically I still did not believe in an afterlife and was not sure if I believed in God in any rational sense. Yet I had to comply with these obsessive-compulsive behaviours. I was rendered powerless to resist. I was afraid to break my vows with God even though they were severely disrupting my life in case by doing so someone would die. I longed to go shopping for some of the lovely cloths that I would see as I passed by the shops, buy and wear make up and jewellery, purchase and read books and eat chocolate. I could do none of these things bound by the chains of a fearful dread that at the time I had no rational insight into its inappropriateness. I even lost a job that I actually liked because of the strange behaviours resulting from my OCD.

During this very difficult time my anxiety was further accentuated by an intrusive thought that presented to my mind the notion that I would soon die. This intrusive thought involved the idea that on a certain day at a specified time I would die and until that day arrived and passed by uneventfully I was in a state of hysteria often collapsing on the floor screaming and crying. So real were these imaginings that I thought that my doom was inevitable I did not question the validity of such notions that returned again and again to torment me.

The morbid fear of death was now so distressing that I could not walk past a cemetery without experiencing severe anxiety symptoms. It was during this time that I began to become concerned about germs and contamination but this obsession did not at this time present itself quite to the extent that it does now.

*Give sorrow words ...which swells with silence in the tortured soul.*

*William Shakespeare.*

After months of unremitting torment during which the boundaries of my existence decreased at an alarming rate I decided that I needed to confide in my husband. Finally I had now either some insight into my behaviour or else I was simply so miserable and so limited and restricted that I had no choice. He was very understanding and did not think I was insane as I thought that he might. It is very surprising you may think that he was totally unaware of what was happening to me. However sufferers of OCD become very adept at hiding symptoms especially in the early stages of the illness and particularly if the obsessions and compulsions are covert or good excuses are made to explain some of the unusual behaviours. Such as the food restrictions; these I insisted were dieting. And as for make up, cloths and so on: well we were saving for our own home and I was not interested in make up anymore. All such rationale was indeed very convincing, after all no one could possibly suspect the real motivations behind such behaviours as such is out of the field of perception for non sufferers.

With his help and encouragement I broke the vows that I had made with God. After breaking just one I felt free to break all the others and the sense of freedom was truly liberating. There than followed a period when I was relatively normal. However I continued to be tormented with unwanted thoughts of a morbid nature.

***If you want to get rid of your enemy, the true way is to realize that your enemy is delusion.***

***Kegon Sutra.***

It is now rather difficult to be precise concerning the chronological order of events but it was probably about this time that I began to have an intrusive and persistent thought that the food in the supermarkets may have been poisoned because of terrorist activity. I considered the possibility that someone could surreptitiously have injected poison through the packaging of dairy products such as butter, yoghurt cheeses and so on. I would examine the packaging for evidence of such tampering. Often I would imagine the food tasted odd, that it had an under taste. Such thoughts were distressing however this problem would get much worse as time went on.

After moving to a nearby village a few years later my obsession with contamination by germs became a significant problem. I became obsessed with the thought that I might contract rabies by any association with an animal either directly or indirectly. For instance if an animal was to touch me, even just to the extent of brushing past me, I became anxious that I would become contaminated by the rabies virus and die the horrible death that this disease caused. I felt contaminated even if the owner of an animal touched me or even if he or she came into any indirect contact with me: For instance if I touched a personal item belonging to anyone who owned an animal. I could not enter any place that had previously been contaminated by an animal. I could not join a supermarket queue if the person in front was buying pet food. Most bizarre of all I would feel compelled to wash my hands after reading a book that even mentioned the subject of rabies.

This was the beginning of a serious and severe obsession that after the birth of my son would reach nightmare proportions. Eventually this obsession and its consequent compulsions would involve me in endless hand washing and the washing and decontaminating of my cloths and my home. During my pregnancy my obsessions were not as severe. Now I use the word obsessions here however at that time I did not know what the problem was or indeed if I had a problem for I had not sought out medical advice.

Sometime after the birth of my son my fears about my own demise seemed less, overshadowed by concerns about my husband dying, and than the rituals that developed centred more on concern for his safety and eventually my son's rather than my own. I was always worried that he might die prematurely, I became anxious if he had to travel without me and I would accompany him everywhere whenever possible as I felt more secure if I was with him.

***The everyday life of people is like clouds and water, but clouds and water are free while people are not. If they would get to be as free as clouds and water, where would people's compulsive mundane routines arise?***

***Dogen, Rational Zen***

My son was born prematurely, this event ignited severe cleaning rituals: when he came home from hospital I was advised to be diligent concerning hygiene and this developed into overwhelming cleaning compulsions and sterilizing rituals far in excess of what was required. I still did not seek medical advice and did not have any insight into my behaviour.

We moved again and after a time the cleaning seemed to be less important and was replaced by the return of the religious obsessions and I soon deteriorated once again into an ascetic lifestyle ruled by fearful abstentions and yet again I was plunged into a miserable and anxious existence denying myself all manner of pleasures. I now felt that I could cope no longer and I approached my doctor and was referred to a psychiatrist who arranged for group therapy and prescribed Anafranil. It had been no easy matter to tell either the psychiatrist or the community psychiatric nurse CPN who was also present and I had to be encouraged to reveal the exact nature of my malady. I was told that although such thoughts and behaviours appeared bizarre they were caused by anxiety. No one told me that I had a specific disorder; no one mentioned OCD or obsessional neurosis as this illness was then called.

I made some progress with the group and once again overcame my religious obsessions which had reached new levels of absurdity: At one time I could not even cut my hair having made a vow not to do so as I thought that someone would die if I broke this vow. During the time with the group I had been obsessed by weight but never mentioned this to the group. I was not anorexic but there was a time when I overdosed on laxatives and tried to induce vomiting along with a very restricted diet and lost a good deal of weight. Moreover I failed to mention to the group my problems with contamination, maybe because these had faded into the background somewhat. Group therapy had been enormously difficult; most of the other members suffered with general anxiety and agoraphobia, compared to which my problems appeared most bizarre. And had I not been asked to explain my situation before hearing from any of the others I doubt that I would have been able to participate. I was in fact very upset as I was told the group would be comprised of sufferers with a similar problem. The only thing we had in common was fear for there is no similarity between agoraphobia and OCD particularly not religious OCD. I felt very embarrassed and inhibited.

Sometime after leaving the group these obsessions grew once again to incapacitating levels. I had made a friend during my time with the group, she had a son of similar age as mine and the two boys became close friends. I enjoyed this friendship, the first that I had had in years. In addition to OCD I suffered with social phobia therefore having such a close friend was for me most unusual. Unfortunately however my friend came into the possession of a pet dog. From that moment on my contamination obsessions escalated by an alarming degree and I was never again to be free from some degree of fear in this regard. Eventually I would lose this lady's friendship because of my OCD. She could not tolerate my behaviour as it became more difficult for me to associate with her because of my obsessions concerning contamination.

I was always anxious when she and the children visited and would boil any cutlery and disinfect any crockery they had used. I could not eat at her home and would change, shower and disinfect my cloths after visiting her. There now followed a

period of very severe OCD comprising an eternal round of washing my hands repeatedly until they were cracked, dry, and wrinkled like an old woman's. I would clean the house excessively paying particular attention to certain contaminated hot spots; for instance were a Christmas card of my mother's had stood I would wash again and again in disinfectant to quell the feelings of fear, as my mother now owned a dog. I always washed my cloths in disinfectant and even bleach them when I was severely anxious. I even washed the crockery in bleach after a dog owner came to tea with us. I washed the settee, shampooed and disinfected the carpets after any visitor called even if they did not own a pet.

I returned to the group however this time therapy was unsuccessful. I then saw a CPN for one to one therapy. Dogs were brought into the clinic for desensitisation therapy. I was encouraged to stroke them and then not to wash my hands, shower or change my cloths when I returned home. I was too anxious and could not comply. I was referred to a psychiatrist and was advised to go into hospital. Admission was however postponed as we due to go on holiday. However the holiday proved to be a nightmare of fear and anxiety. We had arranged for a two weeks stay in a self-catering flat in the North of Wales. It was a most pleasant and scenic area that I had frequented many times during childhood and I had spent many enjoyable holidays there. However this was not to be the case this time. The lady who owned the accommodation had a dog, we could hear it's frantic barking as we arrived. Consequently I felt that the entire flat was contaminated, I could not even unpack my case. I disinfected everything but it still felt contaminated. I endured it for the sake of my husband and son but it was a miserable holiday, I could not sit on the couch or use the bedcovers and I had to boil the cutlery.

I spent three months in hospital undergoing a course of behavioural therapy. I was assured that treatment was ninety nine percent successful. The main obsession concerned contamination by germs however I was beginning to be anxious concerning contamination by chemicals and this would eventually produce a conflict of fears as I needed to use chemicals such as bleach and disinfectant in my attempts to mitigate my contamination fears.

Also during this time I was again beset by religious obsessions, these strange intrusive thoughts were indeed very distressful; such thoughts involved a compulsive urge to make an oath on someone's life. I considered such oaths binding in a religious sense and that God would take retribution if I broke these oaths. The fear was that if I did not fulfil the commitment than that person would die. Such compulsions to swear oaths often came when I had to make any decision however small or insignificant. It is very difficult to explain. For a similar case refer to Sigmund Freud's case history The Rat Man. Let me try to explain by giving you an example: If I were in a shop trying to decide whether or not to make a purchase the thought would come into my mind entirely unbidden to make an oath that if I did not buy this or that, then a certain person whom I would name would die. Now these thoughts were both voluntary and involuntary. If when I felt the thought coming and I tried to ignore the thought it would come anyway to swear such an oath and often times I would be bound by the oath to make a decision that I did not want to make, this would mostly be the result of an involuntary oath and often this had disastrous consequences. To prevent this I therefore had to make a voluntary oath so that I could determine the outcome and not

be left bound to doing something I did not want to do, such as buy something I did not want. So as soon as I felt even the essence of this type of intrusive thought I had to quickly counteract it with a voluntary oath so that I would arrive at a satisfactory decision. I loathed myself for this behaviour but I was powerless to stop it. No one really knows how intolerable the stress produced by this type of intrusive thought is, I was afraid that some one would die if I ignored any of the oaths that I made. I dare not break the oath, I could not change my mind about any decision made by making one of these ridiculous oaths.

The treatment at the hospital included a programme of desensitisation to try and stop the washing compulsions, however nothing whatsoever was done to help me cope with the intrusive thoughts that I have just described. In fact one of the nurses thought that the matter was amusing and made no attempt to conceal the fact and actually laughed. This caused me considerable embarrassment and for a long time after made it difficult to discuss the matter with anyone. I never mentioned it again during my stay in hospital. Treatment for my contamination OCD was to some extent successful even though I had little more than half an hour of therapy each day. I was very disappointed by my time in hospital I thought that I would have a more intensive therapy schedule and that all my psychological problems would be dealt with. Personally I do not think that hospitalisation is a suitable treatment for OCD and my time there did nothing to resolve my problems, when once again I returned to my home environment I could not sustain the little progress that I had made. I now consider that the time spent in hospital was in fact detrimental to my mental well being: large portions of the day patients were left with nothing much with which to occupy their minds, such inactivity allowed plenty of time for ruminating and was not an ideal environment for someone such as myself. There was occupational therapy OT for a couple of hours each day but activities of that nature were not really of much benefit, as such occupied the hands rather than the mind and the activities of the OT department were in any case limited. After three months I returned home.

Shortly afterwards I became more depressed and the obsessions returned and I was admitted to hospital again for one week After which I was offered further treatment as an out patient. Although I was not free from contamination obsessions and the intrusive thoughts I was somewhat more able to cope with life and I was encouraged to occupy myself with a mentally stimulating means of distraction. I decided to take an O level course in English language. I enrolled for a correspondence course and studied with what could be described as obsessional enthusiasm. One important aspect of this illness is that I tend to be obsessional in all areas of my life and not just in an OCD way. Once I have decided to do something I will peruse it to fanatical lengths with great zeal and determination. I am a perfectionist and if this tendency is channelled into something positive it is not necessarily a detriment. Studying was an excellent distraction but of course it could not completely eradicate my intrusive thoughts.

However this respite from the intensity of my OCD symptoms did not last long and I was referred by my doctor to a student counsellor studying Gestalt therapy to try something a little different. I liked this lady straight the way we both had something in common - OCD. This lady had suffered from OCD but it was in control. She like me also had contamination OCD. And even more encouraging she had to cope with

religious obsessions similar to mine, until I met this lady I thought I was indeed the only one to suffer this way. Just finding some one with a similar problem was so liberating it was an enormous relief. In later years I have since read as already mentioned Sigmund Freud's case history of 'The Rat Man' and also the "Wolf man" both of these individuals suffered with OCD or obsessional neurosis as it was once called and both presented with religious obsessions similar to mine. And in more recent times there is the case history of the Jewish boy, in the "Boy who couldn't Stop Washing" by Judith Rappaport, who also suffered similar placatory obsessions to mine. With the advent of the Internet I am now very aware of many others who sufferer from this type of OCD and have read many similar case histories as my own, thanks to the internet much of the loneliness concerning OCD has been alleviated. And through the internet I have relatively recently been made aware of John Bunyon's autobiography "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners" which clearly describes his experiences with OCD religious thoughts and compulsions. Experts believe it is almost certain that John Bunyon the author of Pilgrim's progress suffered from religious/scrupulosity OCD. If only I had been aware of this book when my condition became apparent so much of my suffering would have been alleviated and my loneliness mitigated.

I was counselled at this ladies home one to one and as part of a very small group. The first meeting included another OCD sufferer, an agoraphobic and I, along with our partners. After the first meeting the person with OCD dropped out. The group was based upon Gestalt therapy. This therapy may be helpful for other mental health problems but for me personally I gained little from the actual therapy however I found the group helpful in a supportive way.

I continued to study with increasing intensity and to my utter astonishment passed with a grade A. I was elated I had never achieved anything remotely academic before. I enrolled for another course, this time I chose O level biology; I passed with another grade A. Shortly after wards for reasons I cannot now recall the counselling sessions were discontinued.

I was later referred to the local mental health centre for more therapy. It was suggested that I return to the hospital as a day patient, I declined as by this time I was just too afraid to travel with anyone other than my husband I had become afraid of the possibility of an accident and would trust no one other than him. In order to get to the hospital some forty miles distance I would need a hospital car, I could not cope with this. An alternative arrangement was made for a CPN to visit me at home.

By this time my obsession with contamination and consequent compulsions was indeed very severe. I was washing my hands over and over dozens of times each day, my periphery of existence was diminishing at an alarming rate limited by my ever increasing and incapacitating obsessional behaviours. In addition I was beset with intrusive thoughts of a particularly terrifying nature; these thoughts filled me with indescribable dread. I began to have the strange notion that I had asked God to hurt some one and cause them to die. I would spend long periods of time in near hysteria pleading with God not to hurt the person upon whom the thought had been directed, but instead to take my life. These thoughts, which were relentless, were also very real; I could not dismiss them from my mind. Neither could I ignore them. I was in an

almost continuous state of dread and anxiety. I really considered that someone might die as a result of my thoughts and even at the present time as I write this now this type of obsessive thinking still gives me feelings of apprehension and these and similar thoughts, although metamorphosed now into a slightly different context, continue to instil anxiety. Such thoughts occur at difficult times in my life when either someone I care about or I myself is more vulnerable than is usually the case. And this type of thought will become more aggressive, more severe at such times as it adds its own unique dimension of misery to an already stressful situation. Such as if someone I care for is about to undergo surgery or undergo some other dangerous pursuit - at least dangerous according to the whisperings of my deluded mind. Some times I was so consumed by fear that I would literally scream much to the consternation of my neighbour. She would call round to check that I was all right but of course I could not confide in her, as I was ashamed and embarrassed by my bizarre thoughts.

This was one of the worse times in my life concerning OCD. I had tried many forms of treatment in order to rid myself of this unremitting torment. The thoughts would come anywhere and at any time especially if I was alone. I had no peace of mind whatsoever, my mind, my life, my soul, whatever the part of the psyche that makes you you was constantly under attack. There was no sanctuary, no respite. I tried many different types of complimentary medicine including homeopathy, acupuncture, spiritual healing all to no avail. One spiritual healer suggested that I might be possessed of a demon, a thought that I had considered even though not strictly in the biblical sense, but I had certainly given consideration that I was being tormented by an incorporeal being. There are not words in my vocabulary that adequately express the torment that I was subjected to at this time. I was in a constant dilemma my personality felt as though it were split in two; part of me feared death because I reasoned that death meant oblivion yet another part of my personality feared that God (of whose existence I was not sure) would harm me or some one that I loved because of my thoughts. It was a strange paradox indeed, I had thoughts that were totally opposed to each other. I was unable to resolve this dilemma. There are further ramifications which are so complex in nature that I would find such difficult to express concisely or in terms that anyone would really understand. I now had little faith in the existence of God, yet here I was bound and tormented by these dreadful obsessions. I cannot explain the obvious contradiction between my obsessive behaviours and my completely opposing beliefs. Perhaps a psychologist would say that I still subconsciously retained some belief in a God, who knows, no one has ever offered any explanation, not even an hypothesis. Notwithstanding the contradictory nature of my malady the misery that this manifestation caused and continues to cause to this day is considerable.

Furthermore and in a somewhat similar vein I suffered from what is termed OCD scrupulosity, which is really an extension of the religious aspect of OCD. I was compulsively and excessively scrupulous; this scrupulousness had a superstitious component to it inasmuch as if I did not abide by certain extreme ethical or moral codes of conduct than some one I cared for might die. Any trifling misdemeanour would cause severe anxiety, even something as insignificant as dropping litter even if it was accidental I dare not even dwell upon a bad thought or read a swear word in a book consequently when the blasphemous thoughts began to intrude themselves into

my thinking processes I would be reduced to a severe state of extreme dread As I had no control over them.

Furthermore I was washing more and more, my contamination OCD was increasing at an alarming rate more so than at any previous time. I sat on the end of the settee, there was nowhere else to sit as all other seats were contaminated, this became the only area in my home that I felt was not contaminated by germs or toxins. No one else was allowed to sit on this seat. If a visitor called, an event that filled me with considerable consternation, I would have to shampoo the place that they had sat and the carpet. Eventually I had to cover the settee with clean sheets because I felt it was just too contaminated to sit on otherwise. Every time I touched anything I had to wash my hands; I could not even touch my husband or my son. As I love and care for both of them this situation, made me feel very guilty and very lonely. The sense of hopelessness that I felt at this time was indeed most profound. Yet I could not resist these thoughts and the compulsions that followed them. Fortunately this very extreme period of not touching my husband and son lasted for only a short time; with great effort I resumed contact with them but continued to be unable to resist all the other aspects of my OCD. I was of course concerned about the effect that my behaviour may have upon my son and I tried to explain to him my behaviour as best I could.

During this time I had no peace of mind, there was no escape from the onslaught either indoors or outside. No safe heaven into which to retreat either physically or mentally. My thoughts were my constant companions even intruding into my dreams. Both indoors and out side I was panicky about germs, Going out was an absolute nightmare; I would scan the pavement for signs off dog excrement. Nonetheless I was always anxious that I had accidentally trodden in some and would return home to disinfect my shoes even though for the most part there was no evidence to support my concern. Naturally I could not enter the house with shoes on at any time.

I continued to be visited by the CPN but no actual treatment was forthcoming; I merely talked about my problems while he listened. What I thought was needed at the time was constant supervision in my home environment not in hospital. I was convinced both then and now that I and others with OCD could overcome the behavioural aspects of this illnesses to a higher degree by becoming involved in an intensive desensitisation treatment in their own home under the constant supervision of a qualified person. However no such help was available then and I would imagine such is not available now.

During this time in my mid thirties I tried to find a solution to the problems with morbid rumination and religious obsessions by investigating religious belief hoping perhaps to learn to have some kind of more normal attitude to religion. I should stress however that because philosophical / religious ruminations were part of my OCD problem that this search for religious truth was most likely another manifestation of my religious obsessions and compulsions. In fact church attendance had at one time been included in the placatory obsessions mentioned earlier. In addition I hoped that church attendance would help my son acquire a belief in an after life so that his life would not be dominated by the fear of death as mine was and continues to be. Sadly however at this time I did not realise that this endeavour would make little difference, as maybe he would never manifest with such an obsession anyway; each individual

has his or her own unique set of obsessive behaviours that often present in an entirely different form than those of the parents. My husband had a firm faith and was happy to attend church.

Church however was to prove very traumatic for me. During the service I would be plagued by intrusive thoughts, which were blasphemous in nature, and the compulsion to make vows was sometimes overwhelming. I was reduced to tears on many occasions. I tried by every means possible to dispel these intrusive thoughts such as mentally reciting my multiplication tables or poetry, but nothing really helped.

Of course these thoughts were not confined to church, any moment alone and I was inundated by these dreadful intrusions. Sometimes the washing rituals and the intrusive thoughts would come in opposition to each other. For example I would feel the compulsion to wash my hands because of contamination but before I could do so the thought would enter my mind to make a vow that if I washed my hands then God would take someone's life. Now bear in mind that such a vow often presented as a mere essence of a thought as I tried to stop its incursion, nonetheless it was binding. Ridiculous! Yes to anyone else but to me in my distraught aberrant thinking it all seemed very real and far too real for me to ignore. A small part of my psyche recognised the irrationality of this situation however the larger part of my mind believed it to an almost psychotic degree. The fear was too overwhelming for me to attempt some rational analysis and my mind was in such turmoil impossible to describe. If I did not wash I thought that someone would die from a disease that I had transmitted by my contaminated hands, on the other hand if I broke my vow by washing my hands I was anxious that someone would die as a result of my having broken my vow. It was a case of damned if I did, damned if I did not. During such episodes I would be reduced to a state of near hysteria screaming and crying in fear and frustration.

I was desperate for some peace. I approached ministers of religion for help but such counselling proved of little benefit towards any solution to the religious aspect of my OCD. I would telephone my GP in floods of tears requesting tranquillisers hoping to quell my intense fear. I rang the Samaritans, they were sympathetic but there was little they could do or say.

My life at this juncture was intolerable. So intense was my dread that I would cling to my husband in a state of desperate anxiety for hours on end. I did not want him to go to work and cried when he left in the morning. I would beg him not to go and would ring him at work asking him to come home. It was a very difficult time for him nonetheless he was always very patient. I lived in a state of perpetual anxiety I was always worried that some disaster may befall him. All through Christmas of that year I was literally sick with anxiety and spent the duration of the holiday, about ten days, dreading the day when he would have to return to work. I resented his job, his employer and society for allowing me to live this way for not understanding that I needed my husband and for leaving me to suffer alone in this state of inner torment. Oh and how I resented the school that Christmas, for my son did not start his holidays until a couple of days before Christmas day or at least that is the way it seemed to me. I did not want my son to go to school and I dreaded him leaving in the morning, I would sit on the end of the settee clutching a cup of coffee trying to glean some

modicum of peace from its warm comfort. I knew my behaviour was not good for my son and I did my best to try and not let him see my fear and my depression but it was virtually impossible to conceal from him my unhappiness. Except for lunchtime after my son and husband left I would spend the entire day in our cold, damp and gloomy house utterly alone except for the company of these tormenting and unremitting thoughts. I had no friends and no relatives close by.

This very severe period of my OCD lasted a considerable time however the precise details of the duration and the chronological order of events have become vague, blurred by the passing of time. My CPN continued to visit and I received counselling from a private councillor. She was very sympathetic but she was not trained to council people with mental disorders such as OCD, her expertise was mainly concerned with emotional problems bought on by circumstances, such as divorce or job loss and so on rather than as a result of a psychological condition. She seemed to genuinely care though, which in my own experience, I had not always found to be the case even with those trained to help people suffering with mental health problems.

My CPN suggested that it might be of benefit for me to receive a visit from a 'Befriender' to help alleviate the social isolation. The Befrienders are a voluntary group who visit people who need someone to talk with, people like myself who are isolated from society by their circumstances and in need of some companionship. I was rather anxious at first I did not know what type of person to expect or how she would react to my unusual and bizarre problems. I had only agreed to see this lady if my situation in its entirety, including the religious aspect, was explained to her. I did not want the risk of any unexpected surprises later on if the person was not able to at least accept the nature of my problem even if she could not understand it. I was told that this lady was of a similar age and background and had one child of a similar age to mine. Now I find it very difficult to talk with most people: I have social phobia or, as used to be said before such terms came into common usage, I was shy. However we got on very well right from the first meeting and we became close friends for nearly tens years. I was totally relaxed with this lady and was able to share with her all my problems as well as listen to hers and to chat about other matters such as our children, world affairs, religion (in a normal context) and just about anything and everything that comprises normal conversations. She was very supportive and I looked forward to her visits over the years during which we were friends. Sadly we lost contact as I began to suffer with migraine and daily headaches, which made it difficult to talk with anyone during the initial years of experiencing this added dimension to my misery of which I will explain later.

***Do the thing you fear and the death of fear is certain.***  
***Ralph Waldo Emerson.***

In the spring of that year shortly after receiving visits from his lady, I must have been approaching my late thirties, I was deteriorating to such an extent that my life was seriously restricted in every aspect. I desperately sought a way out. I determined that some way or another I would fight this illnesses not only for my own sake but also for the sake of my husband and son. With independent support form my private councillor, my CPN and the lady mentioned above I devised my own desensitisation program. Had I not done so I would never have improved and may even have had a

complete breakdown. None of the professional people involved in my case ever suggested anything of this nature. The CPN came and talked, and the counsellor did like wise and that was about it. When I say talk I mean precisely that, it was not therapy such as cognitive therapy, Gestalt therapy or even the old fashioned psychotherapy it was simply advice and most of it although well meaning was not a lot better than the type of advice one would expect to receive from a friend. This approach was not doing any good and was in fact frustrating, just to have someone sit opposite to you and do nothing when it was obvious that merely talking in this manner was not helping. I could not understand why none of those involved in my case never suggested any kind of desensitisation therapy or indeed any other therapy. Finally and as a result of my proposed endeavour the CPN arranged for me to see a psychiatrist and I was prescribed Imiprimine. My husband also was supportive and took a few days from work to help me during the initial stages, which would of course be the most difficult with which to cope. I needed some company twenty-four hours each day; I would not be able to complete the program if I were left alone.

I would expose myself to situations that would cause anxiety, yet were considered by most people to be normal. After all the years of suffering with OCD it was very difficult to know what normal behaviour was I therefore had to rely upon the advice of my husband and the people already mentioned. The main part of the program consisted of prohibiting myself from washing my hands, except after I had been to the toilet, and before preparing a meal and to take only one shower each day. I would also not change my outer cloths for two days. Moreover I would actively expose myself to places that I considered contaminated such as other peoples seats in the home, public seats, animals..... well the list is quite extensive and I do not need to itemize everything but I am sure the idea is clear. I also determined to ignore all compulsions to abide by any intrusive vows and not to make any voluntary vows to counter act the effect of the involuntary intrusive vows.

Part of my problem not only included the fear that I would contaminate myself but that once having become contaminated than I would as a consequence contaminate others. Overcoming this manifestation of my OCD was far more difficult when it involved the obsessive thought that such exposure to contamination would harm others; it was easier when the contamination concerned only myself. The fear of harming others if I stopped washing compulsively involved two distinct aspects of neurotic thinking. Firstly I was afraid that someone would become ill as a result of coming into contact with things contaminated by my actions. Secondly I was fearful that if I ignored these cleaning compulsions merely for the sake of getting well than in some superstitious way either my family or I would be punished for my selfishness.

It therefore needed a considerable amount of determination to proceed with the program. The part of my program concerning the deliberate contamination of myself and my environment involved my going round the house deliberately touching items that I felt were contaminated and thereafter not washing my hands or my cloths as already described. With the co-operation of someone I knew quite well, who knew about my problems and who owned dog, I tried to desensitise my fears in this regard by allowing myself to come into contact with the dog by stroking it and allowing it to come close and contaminate my clothing. My husband would be with me during all these exposure to contamination sessions. I than had to take the contamination outside

the home into public places in order to desensitise myself concerning my fear of contaminating others. The church was one such place and this was the most difficult public place to confront. According to my irrational thinking to contaminate the church would exact some kind of divine retribution. I always had to be extra clean to go to church. Now let me reiterate for the reader who knows nothing at all about OCD that when I use the term contaminate I am of course not referring to any normal situation, all of my actions and the contamination that I took to the church was nothing more than the effects of normal daily living: For instance going to church immediately after touching a dog and not washing my hands or changing my cloths or disinfecting my shoes first. Accompanied by my husband I would go into the church each day with “dirty” clothing and hands.

I made a steady progress and improved considerably. However I continued to be more concerned with cleanliness more than the average person. Nonetheless I was much improved and was able to live for a while with some semblance of normality. I even enjoyed our holiday that year despite the fact that I of course continued to be anxious about travelling. This fear could not really be mitigated by desensitisation for no matter how often I travelled the fear would not lessen as the thought remained that perhaps this time would be the time when something would go wrong. It mattered not how many safe trips I had previously made, nothing could mitigate this thought, for indeed this thought was born from reality: as yes indeed something could go wrong and some how I simply had to go ahead and travel anyway in spite of the worrisome thought.

I applied for voluntary work at the local Oxfam Shop and enrolled for an adult education course. I had to be diligent and mindful of any digression into my previous behaviour, which could occur at any time especially in the Oxfam shop. Not any easy matter sorting through donated cloths for a person with OCD and there were set backs from time to time.

***What worries you masters you.  
Haddon W. Robinson.***

Although my situation had improved somewhat concerning my contamination and religious obsessions I continued to suffer with morbid preoccupation; the fear of death haunted my soul and I was continually beset with thoughts concerning my own mortality and that of those whom I loved. I continued to be aware of my tendency for involvement in pointless rumination concerning philosophical matters however these became more interspersed with more mundane considerations. I continued to suffer with depression and a general background anxiety. But I was more able to involve myself in more normal day-to-day living. I had to be more diligent during more stressful times in my life otherwise the obsession would become worse.

Unfortunately this more stable period in my life was relatively short-lived and probably lasted not more than two or three years. And it was by no means easy, set backs were common and it was a continual battle to maintain the progress I had made. My OCD became more of a problem when I became pregnant with my second child at the age of thirty-nine. It was rather a shock due mostly to my age and to the big gap that would exist between the new baby and my son who was now about twelve. In

spite of the fears surrounding my pregnancy we were quite happy at the prospect of extending our family. My fears however marred our happiness as indeed such fears have marred every aspect of my life. On an OCD level of perception I was anxious about the possibility of dying in childbirth. I was also worried about the fact that my husband would have to travel to the hospital to visit after the birth: I still did not like it if either he or my son had to travel without me. I had never got over this aspect of my OCD and in fact I had never tried as it was simply too anxiety provoking and like the travelling fears in general already mentioned it would never in any case be resolved by desensitisation. I constantly worried about the well being of my unborn child and was very careful concerning what I ate to the point that it became an obsession. I would regularly ring the midwife seeking reassurance about every ache or pain. I was admitted to hospital on two occasions having convinced myself that I was going into premature labour. I became concerned about germs infecting my baby and would shower each time I defecated in case I somehow infected my baby. I worried about the possibility of her dying in childbirth or afterwards because of cot death. I used to have awful thoughts about attending her funeral; such thoughts were accompanied by visual images, which were replayed time and time again.

In spite of my misgivings all seemed to be going well until I was thirty-six weeks into my pregnancy. I cannot describe all the details, as it is still too painful for me and besides it not helpful to me or anyone else. Just before Christmas I was rushed into hospital because I was losing blood. I had to have an emergency caesarean section. Tragically my baby died. I am not going to attempt to describe my feelings either now or then; I try to push from my mind the feelings of emptiness and loss. Such thoughts seem in many ways easier to dismiss than OCD type thoughts nonetheless every now and again it is as though a videotape automatically turns itself on and once again I live through this awful experience.

*That's the secret to life... replace one worry with another...*  
*M.Schulzl. Charlie Brown.*

Needless to say after this time my obsessions became much worse. In fact they started almost immediately as after waking from the anaesthetic I realised with a sense of horror that I had been given a blood transfusion. This resulted in the obsession that I had AIDS. No amount of assurance that donated blood had been tested for AIDS made the least difference to my anxiety. I had to cope with this fear for the time of the incubation period, which is six months before I could have a blood test. And it was not just living with the fear but the consequence of the fear which resulted in an increase in obsessive-compulsive behaviours mainly hand washing. As was mostly the case now I was not that concerned about whether or not I had AIDS but rather I was concerned that if I did have this disease than I would pass it on to others: I ruminated that I could contaminate others with the AIDS virus but not by sexual intercourse. No the OCD mind set need not adhere to medical fact or to statistics concerning the unlikely possibility of transmitting the disease in another way, such as by contact with blood from a sufferer by shaking hands with an infected person who has an open wound and so on. Any cut on my hand however tiny, cuts that would have previously gone unnoticed, provoked extreme anxiety. My fingers were covered with plasters to prevent the possibility of my blood leaking out and contaminating someone. I wore gloves if I needed to shake hands such as when attending church as

in the catholic church (I was now attending this church after visiting just about every church in the locality trying to find some meaning to my life and what was happening to me) during communion it is customary to turn to the people near by and shake hands as a sign of peace. I got to the stage when I would stare at the floor to ignore the outstretched hands of the congregation or disappear outside until this part of the service was over. I had gotten over the fear of shaking hands now it had once again returned

Packaged and unpacked food was another nightmare as I imagined that I had contaminated it with my blood if I had handled it in the shop, I avoided touching anything unless I intended to buy it. I worried that I would pass on the virus to whoever ate what I had prepared. Inadvertently on one occasion my son ate something that I was in the process of eating, a discarded sandwich, this filled me with dreadful apprehension. I became constantly anxious concerning all my bodily fluids even my tears, which I was once again shedding more often, were considered contaminated with the AIDS virus. I rang the national AIDS help line on many occasions and although they were understanding and explained the matter well enough I remained unconvinced.

The obsession that food in the supermarket had been poisoned had returned during my pregnancy and was now getting worse. Previously when I had first experienced this obsession it had had no real basis in reality. However this time there had been several reports in the news that certain food products were being deliberately contaminated in order to extort money from prominent food companies. My obsession was now based upon fact and was therefore more difficult to dismiss. I would examine everything that I bought for signs of tampering and would throw food away if not completely satisfied. I would often leave the shop without making a purchase considering that all the food was poisoned.

Yet again the quality of my life was rapidly deteriorating; not only was I washing and cleaning again excessively, but also I began to become rather hypochondrical once again but not to the extent previously mentioned in the beginning of this account.

Furthermore I was anxious about becoming pregnant once again and although I would have dearly liked another child I could not face going through the trauma again I could not contemplate another tragedy. Even though my baby had never lived outside of my womb I had come to love her and could not bear to have the same thing happen once again. I was also terrified at the thought of having another caesarean. The thought of becoming pregnant haunted me turning into a serious obsession. If my period were a little late I would find myself in an extreme state of dread.

After the six months incubation time had passed I had a blood test for AIDS, which was of course negative. Deep in my consciousness on a level of awareness quite separate from that which produces the OCD type of thinking I knew that I was okay yet I could never convince myself of this no matter whom I talked with or how I tried to persuade myself. The part of my psyche that is rational seems so small, so powerless and unable to assert itself with its rationality overwhelmed by this part of me that deludes my mind, distorts my thinking, and causes unrelenting misery that only another sufferer is able to understand.

There followed a couple of years when things remained on a plateau although since losing my baby I had a serious setback with my OCD as I have already explained. Nonetheless I continued to go about my daily life as best I could including my two mornings each week at the Oxfam shop. It was however enormously difficult and there were times when I couldn't cope and felt myself slipping back to the position I had been in before I had made an effort. However things were to get worse, much worse and I would never again be in the position that I had been in after the desensitisation program that I had embarked on prior to my pregnancy.

I had acquired a considerable amount of weight during my pregnancy and now I began to diet obsessively. It started as a normal diet and I lost quite a lot of weight and was proud of my new appearance, it gave me self-confidence and in general I felt better for it. My psychiatrist congratulated me that I had managed to lose weight all on my own with no outside help despite the fact that I was suffering now with very severe OCD. However things changed and I began to diet to extreme levels reaching a weight of only six and a half stone. I looked emaciated and about ten years older than my actual age - well at least that is what other people thought. However I thought that they were jealous. Someone even asked my husband if I had cancer. I however delighted in my new slim figure and used to look at myself in the mirror taking pleasure in seeing my shoulder bones protrude. Also I derived enormous satisfaction from seeing my rib cage stick out even though my husband could not look at me. And perversely I even found some sense of satisfaction in this. My sister was anorexic, and had been so for many years, and there developed a kind of competitiveness between us. She feeling the threat more than I although she was thinner than myself and in any case I would not have been diagnosed with anorexia as I still had my menstrual period. However if it were not for a serious and very unpleasant turn of events I may well have reached the stage when such a diagnosis would have been appropriate.

During my late twenties/early thirties I had become prone to suffering frequent headaches, diagnosed as tension headaches. Eventually I went on to suffer with migraine. Now the migraine and indeed some of the tension headaches were very severe and initially turned my life into a living hell of pain and fear. However these headaches did not originally occur every day and there were many days when I was headache free, and there was often a couple of weeks or more in-between migraine attacks. A couple of years after having lost my baby and during the time in which my dieting got rather out of hand I was prescribed a course of Prozac to help me cope with the increasing problems with my OCD. I was unsure about taking this medication, as I knew that one of the side effects of this medication was a headache. I expressed my concerns to the psychiatrist as I was very anxious should this medication be detrimental to my existing headache /migraine problem. I was assured that taking a simple over the counter painkiller would treat any headaches that I experienced. However this was most certainly not the case at all. Shortly after taking this medication my migraine increased with such severity that when I had barely recovered from one attack than within twenty-four hours or so I would get another. Initially for the first few years of suffering with migraine I had no medication that would alleviate the pain. Therefore I lived in a state of utter dread, any twinge of pain and my heart would pound with fear for the torment to come of hours and hours in bed with mounting pain that would not be alleviated no matter what I did.

Moreover after taking Prozac my tension headaches become overwhelmingly severe and occurred all the time. During the first three years I barely had any respite at all and spent most of my day lying on the settee with a hot water bottle on my head trying to find some relief from the pain. My migraine became much worse and more frequent; my life was one of unmitigated misery. The only respite I had was when I learnt that Larazepam would relieve my tension headaches for a good number of hours during the day, this however was only a temporary solution and my doctor prescribed them only to allow me to go on holiday and besides after ten days they ceased to work. They are in any case addictive if taken over anything other than a very short space of time. I tried every thing possible hoping to rid myself from this new hell. This included complimentary medicine such as acupuncture, herbal medicine, homeopathy, and hypnotism. I say complimentary for at no time did I replace orthodox medication prescribed by my doctor with complimentary medicine even though I was often pressured to do so by one practitioner or another. I did of course discontinue taking Prozac. At some point I took antipsychotics, which are major tranquillisers and therefore like Larazepam alleviated the pain but unlike Larazepam they are not addictive but they had a list of worrying side effects. Yes they did help but the side effects were dreadful and I had to stop taking them.

Nothing helped. I was desperate and thoroughly depressed. I saw a psychologist briefly during this difficult time. I recall what a hellish nightmare it was trying to get to hospital during one of those very few hot summers we have here, with my head pounding with pain and my heart tense with fear. The psychologist arranged for a course of relaxation therapy. I later became very proficient adding meditation techniques that I had learnt many years previously during the time when I was looking for a religious solution to my problems and I became involved in Buddhist meditation. I really experienced profound feelings of relaxation accompanied by a significant elevation in my mood. Relaxation and meditation however did nothing for the pain and eventually one day I had a severe attack during practice of these techniques. Since then I have realised after trying many times that relaxation and meditation seem to make my headaches worse.

This turn of events was most demoralizing as I had become interested in meditation as a spiritual practice and certainly felt from personal experience that such practice would unlock some inner sense of awareness to reveal a part of us all that can experience our innate happiness regardless of outer circumstances. I had experienced this or at least an elevation of mood despite the appalling pain of migraine and headache. I firmly believe that one can transcend the misery of many of life's adverse circumstances including pain through meditation. I was devastated by this new turn of events especially after feeling such positive affects from these practices. I continue to be greatly saddened as once again a chance for some inner peace was snatched away. Of course such unpleasant side effects do not occur for everyone and many people meditate for religious and health reasons with no problems. Furthermore the same can also be said concerning Prozac and any other medication; many derive significant improvement of symptoms and are liberated from the enslavement of OCD; sadly however others suffer terribly from side effects. Unfortunately one can only find out by trail and error.

I had to give up both my voluntary job at the Oxfam shop and my art course that I had started the previous year. Everything that kept me anything like sane was snatched away from me. I could not read, or paint or draw I could barely manage to cook a meal. I could not of course go out anywhere alone. Now my obsession with being thin changed, as I feared that by not eating properly I would induce more headaches or make an existing one worse. Therefore not only did I commence normal eating but also I began to eat every two hours even during the night following advice to do so in the many books and web sites I had consulted looking for ways to alleviate my pain. Despite the fact that such advice did not work and my pain continued I felt just too afraid to diet and over the ensuing two years I have put on considerable amounts of weight. Each day I dreaded waking up in the morning to another day of loneliness and pain.

***Most of the time I don't have much fun. The rest of the time I don't have any fun at all.***

***Woody Allen.***

All the progress I had managed to retain with enormous effort slipped away like water through sand. I lay for hours in agony the thought of those days feels me with cold apprehension now. After three years the symptoms became less severe but since that time I have not had one day entirely headache free. Every day I have some type of headache sometimes only upon waking for a short while or later in the day for a short duration. But many days I have a bad tension headache lasting a significant part of the day. And I have frequent migraine sometimes from two to five each week. Thankfully I take diclofenac and this at the time of writing will rid me of my migraine symptoms. However it is often difficult to tell one headache from another and this causes a lot of fear because if I take my medication for the wrong headache, and it will not relieve a tension headache, I will be in agony if the real thing turns up before I can safely take another dose. If it were not for diclofenac I do not think my life would be worth living. And I exist in a state of dread that this medication may cease to work. There is nothing to relieve a tension headache but they are somewhat less severe and somehow I have learned to cope with them.

Things progressed much the same for a few more years until 2001 when my husband was made redundant. Prior to this there had been four years during which our lives had been made a misery by insecurity caused by the new owners of my husband's place of employment, the previous owner having sold the business despite assurances that he never would. My husband had worked for this firm for twenty seven years and during this time he had only three months sick leave and that had included a couple of weeks on two occasions in order to help me with my OCD. John had been a good employee doing far more than was required in his job description. However during the four years leading up to his redundancy his life, and as a consequence mine, was reduced to one of misery and insecurity as the business declined and the new owners implemented new rules and regulations all of which were detrimental to the employees, most of whom had been there for many years. Furthermore he received no rise for three years. My husband went from being a laid back easy going person to a withdrawn and depressed individual His former employer barely gave him the time of day except for one phone call when he was made redundant and that lasted all of three minutes if that. John was extremely hurt. I was very angry and remain so today. I find

it very difficult to forgive such appalling behaviour, despite his former understanding towards my situation I thought his behaviour towards my husband was nothing short of insensitive. The firm went into liquidation and my husband received only £50 redundancy after the liquidation process and he had a few months earlier received a moderate top up to his pension of about £5000 and that was it for twenty seven years of working for the firm. We were devastated.

We decided to move from the South East to the North East. House prices here were far cheaper and we would be central to many places of outstanding natural beauty including the Lake District, Yorkshire Dales and Northumbria. We both enjoy the open spaces, the peace and quiet and the rugged natural beauty was uplifting.

***My conscience hath a thousand several tongues, and every tongue brings in a several tale, and every tale condemns me for a villain.***

***William Shakespeare.***

Moving such a distance was indeed most traumatic and life is now very difficult for me. My son who had a good job with the civil service can now find no suitable employment. Yes he could have stayed in the South East but his wage was so poor he would not have had much of a life living in one room which is all he would have been able to afford and that most likely would have taken a good third of his wages. He was not keen to move here and I am riddled with guilt as I see his emotional decline. He is now depressed and stressed all the time. He most probably has attention deficit disorder ADD, as it is indeed quite possible that both my husband and I have, and finds concentration difficult and he lacks any motivation. He has a marvellous talent for art but does not apply himself, he could make a living with his artwork but he just cannot become motivated hindered by depression and anxiety. My husband remains depressed and withdrawn preoccupied with worry. He is not the contented person he once was. His former employer has never even telephoned him once since moving and we have lived here now for nearly two years. He feels saddened by this turn of events in his life; it is not just the loss of income and financial security it is the appalling way that he has been treated that is in fact been the most distressing.

At the time of writing I continue to find living here very difficult and often regret moving. Although of course this is off set to a good extent by having my husband at home something that I have wanted for many years in fact since the day we were married. Sadly this is marred by my ill health. . As already mentioned my tension headaches and migraine continue to present themselves. In addition shortly after the onset of these headaches I began to experience neck pain and I have suffered with this along with joint and muscular aches. Oftentimes I wake up in the morning extremely stiff with a sore throat and have done so now for years but this condition has worsened since moving here. In addition I have irritable bowel syndrome and possibly irritable bladder both of which are very disabling in themselves adding a further dimension of misery whenever I go out. I believe that some of these symptoms are a result of fibromyalgia but it is difficult to get a diagnosis. Doctors here in the UK seem to be of the rather strange opinion that if one suffers with a mental health problem such as OCD or depression one cannot suffer from fibromyalgia or ME / CFS. This idea appears to me most strange but doctors here in the UK seem rather set in their ways and I have grown weary of even trying to get such a diagnosis.

Also to add to the perversity of life right now there is a factory in the village which from virtually the time we moved in have made my life a misery with a low frequency hum that whines on unabated for twenty four hours a day. I can get no help with this matter and my health has deteriorated consequently. I am awake now most mornings anytime sometimes as early as 3 or 4am and just lately even earlier and cannot go back to sleep as I either ache too much or I am simply too afraid to go back to sleep as doing so will most often precipitate a significant headache upon waking. Sleep in general has been very troublesome now for a number of years but has got alarming much worse since moving here. I often wake gasping for breath momentarily unable to breath or I wake suddenly from sleep choking trying to swallow something imaginary lodged in my throat. I also suffer with that dreadful lump in the throat feeling sometimes so bad I can hardly speak. Of course the noise from this factory has made my existing sleep problems much worse. Can you imagine what it is like to lie awake in the dead of night when it is so quiet, when all other noises have died down except for a low continuous whine like the sound of one note of music persistent, unrelenting, twenty four hours each day, seven days a week. The machine, which generates this noise, is never turned off. It is the type of noise less civilised countries would use to torture people and yes it is torture for me it's the type of noise that drives one mad and this is what it is doing to me now.

Also since moving here I have tragically lost my sister, my only sibling and indeed other than my son my only blood relative. Lynda died after having undergone a heart by pass operation, her story is also included on this web site. The shock of this loss is enormous. The loneliness is a bitter pill to swallow. Lynda like I feared death, she feared illness, aging and indeed life itself, filled as it was with fears and phobias. She was so afraid of the impending surgery thinking she would die. I regret having encouraged her to go for surgery. I have remained close to my brother-in-law who only six months later sustained a head injury after having a fall. He had to have a blood clot removed from his brain. This left him with some disability and he may need to spend the rest of his life in a care home. He hopes to move near to us as he like me has no blood relatives and considers, my husband, son and I as his family as we also consider him family, and blood ties mean nothing, and I will do my best to try and make his life as happy as possible despite the dire consequences that have blighted his life.

As for me well my OCD is much worse it has metamorphosed into a slightly different type but the contamination obsessions remain much the same. I know now that I will always suffer with OCD and will always have a difficult time with contamination obsessions particularly concerning rabies although now the fear of contamination has to some degree become more generalized. The fear however remains and that is: I fear that having become contaminated that I will contaminate others. The day that rabies arrives in Britain may be the day when I will no longer be able to cope but who knows ones fears change over the passing of time. What was once a dreadful and terrifying obsession may become more moderate as the years go by. However as one obsession becomes less troublesome it is replaced like the heads of the hydra in Greek mythology with a new and more terrifying manifestation. But whatever the nature of the obsession that drives the myriad compulsions, the fundamental fear remains as one embarks time and time again on futile attempts to moderate the fear by complying

to an endless round of compulsive behaviours. Due to fears of rabies I am unable to travel abroad and will never visit the places I dream about such as Japan, Tibet and other oriental destinations that have long held my fascination.

The obsession concerning the deliberate contamination of food remains; I either imagine the food has not been cooked properly or it has been tampered with.

I have acquired many checking obsessions and these too have changed over the years according to circumstances. Among this type of obsession consisted compulsions to check for gas leaks and checking that all appliances were turned off; bending to sniff to see if gas was leaking imaging the smell of gas. This is now not the problem it once was as we no longer have stand-alone gas appliances and this compulsion no longer arises with the central heating in our new home. Moreover the constant checking of locks for some reason seems not the problem it once was. However compulsive checking of plugs to see it all except the refrigerator are turned off and removed before leaving the house is quite a problem and I will check several times to quell the anxiety. Currently I also repeatedly check e-mail, snail mail and any other writing that another will read anxious should I have inadvertently written something harmful or I am simply anxious of making grammatical errors. Writing this account and my memoir and indeed this web site have been massive undertakings as I have been plagued time and time again with concerns of causing harm by writing something inappropriate or something that may bring about harm to a another in ways too numerous to mention or to clearly define.

An unusual compulsion included in my checking rituals was the periodic checking of windowsills for wood lice, which have become trapped between the glazing only to die never seeming to find an escape through the way they came. Such an obsession is born from my concern for the welfare of all living beings and may in a different context be accepted as quite normal and indeed concerning my present philosophical beliefs it could well be considered so. Nonetheless behind this normality there exists a superstitious fear of harming in a kind of Karmic style anxiety that if I neglect to do something resulting in the detriment of another living creature, than such neglect will rebound upon myself and those I care about. Because I have OCD it is sometimes very difficult to know which thought is which. When is such a thought born from a natural tendency to hold such beliefs and when is it a result of neurotic and fearful thinking of possible negative consequences.

Furthermore concerning my anxieties for the welfare of all creatures there presents a conflict of obsessive behaviours rather similar to those involved in the religious compulsions already mentioned. Over the years I have had to some degree or another the compulsion to rescue worms that come onto the street from gardens or grass verges or any other small creature likely to be stepped upon by passers by who are less aware of such things than I. This again may not appear to be considered a problem and is only so according to ones perspective, however eccentric it might appear to the western mind set regarding the right of life for all creatures. However self consciousness concerning such unusual behaviour can be unsettling but more problematic is the conflict of obsessive compulsive behaviours that arise from such actions: Having picked up the worm or other creature and removed it to a safe place I feel contaminated and need to wash my hands. This can be quite a dilemma if

nowhere to wash is available and stress arises because of such a conflict.

I continue to have intrusive obsessive thoughts concerning death along with morbid ruminations. I am now even more aware of the inexorable certainty of death, which continues to haunt my thoughts and daunts my ambitions and my hopes. Since losing my sister the reality of death seems undeniable and unlike the majority of people who from time to time experience similar existential terrors I am unable to set it aside. Often now suddenly I am enveloped with an overwhelming existential terror of existence or the lack thereof. Something most often indefinable will induce in me this sense of the awful dread of existence; seemingly unprovoked I descend into a morbid reverie of the horror that only those who sufferer in this way can fully understand. Although I expect from time to time even the most normal and well balanced person may experience similar feelings, it is however becoming a more frequent occurrence particularly upon waking.

***There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.  
William Shakespeare.***

Often philosophical rumination can become quite depressing and I get carried away in some pointless and distressing contemplation including such matters as: The passing of time, universal suffering, the meaning of life or the lack of meaning thereof and the origins of life, along with the bleak contemplation concerning the significance of a possible eternity of oblivion as endless as the universe was once thought to be. Such thoughts daunt my existence and the meaning of my life inducing feelings of hopelessness and futility. Obviously down through the ages such contemplations by deep thinking individuals have produced the world's great religions, and philosophers such as Buddha, Mohammed, Plato, and Christ etc. etc. have occupied their thoughts with such considerations. These notable luminaries have considered such matters arriving at satisfactory conclusions for them selves and for the millions of followers who have adhered to one or the other of these religious / philosophical ways of seeing the world throughout the ensuing centuries. In particular Buddha meditated upon the suffering that he became aware of after having been protected from it during his youth. According to Buddhist belief through such mediation and contemplation he became enlightened and found a way to overcome suffering. One of the many types of Buddhist mediation involves the practitioner meditating upon death and decay and in Buddhist countries this may involve going to cemeteries to contemplate death and impermanence. This would be considered by most westerners as morbid. Yet such contemplations are done to uplift, to enlighten and bring happiness and a sense of acceptance and consequently relief from fear and suffering. Therefore such considerations can be viewed from a more positive perspective but this is not the same for the OCD sufferer like me who may sink into depression by the presence of such thoughts. For ancient philosophers such considerations were thought of without the fear that accompanies the OCD sufferer driven to ponder such matters time and time again never arriving at a satisfying conclusion. Also many people view such thoughts with fascination or intellectual curiosity. It is not therefore the nature of the thought that is the problem but rather the perspective from which we view it. In fact Buddha stated that the mind was the architect of all our suffering. I and every OCDer and indeed anyone with a mental illnesses can most certainly agree with this insight, however recognising this and altering our perceptions and perspective is not an easy

matter. And I have not been able to achieve this.

I have several obsessive thinking patterns and compulsions not easily categorized. I often have the thought that I may harm another or myself without either my volition or awareness. For example I fear that I may take too many pills during my sleep without my knowledge or I may swallow a toxic substance. I also have the thought that I may harm another or myself with a sharp instrument such as knives or scissors. I will not have such items in the house. If however it is essential as it would be to have scissors my husband will hide them until I require them, if I do not know where they are I cannot of course do any harm with them. I have no sharp knives in the house or poisons not even in the kitchen. On holiday when we stay at self-catering accommodation my husband has to hide all the knives and anything sharp remembering to return them to their proper places when we leave. Now for the benefit of anyone reading this who has no knowledge of OCD this obsession may seem a little scary and one may conclude that OCD sufferers have the potential to be dangerous. However this is certainly never the case such obsessions concerning fear of harming others is never carried out, it like all the other fears is irrational and exists only as an obsessive fear resulting in avoidance compulsions such as hiding knives and so on. There is a type of OC spectrum disorder where the sufferer feels an overwhelming compulsion to harm his or herself and these are carried out but this is not quite the same thing and self harming occurs mainly as a result of anxiety and self harmers never hurt others

In recent years many different obsessive type thoughts have arisen often difficult to clarify and these have become interwoven producing a complex web of misery. A most recent one involves analysing conversations, ruminating on what I said and what others have said: perhaps I should have said this or I should have said that. I read all sorts of paranoid types of threats into conversations feeling everyone to be against me and perceiving all subjects, even quite trivial conversations, as negative issues thinking people do not like me and feeling relegated to second place. Such imaginings of course on occasion may be valid and there are those who believe that this type of paranoid thinking is produced simply by persons with a more keen sense of awareness. I am of course not speaking of the type of the paranoid delusions experienced by schizophrenics, it is rather the type of paranoid or negative interpretations of conversations and people's reactions which characterise this type of paranoid negative rumination. Such as if my friend cancels the arrangement to visit me I immediately think what I have done to offend her or has she found something better to do with her time. Or my friend told me I have an interesting home: This could translate into anything and of course I see it as a negative comment, which of course it may well be. But it most likely is not, this lady has a very bland home all the furnishing and decor is beige or white there are few ornaments; compared to which our home of hoarded clutter filled with the unusual is interesting. These examples may seem to be mild concerns of no consequence but they can and do have quite devastating effects warping our perspective. Especially if such thoughts occur with increasing frequency we begin to feel victimised. My mother used to say when I was tormented at school the following phrase, which I am sure we have all heard at sometime or another, "sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me. Nothing could be further from the truth, words can and do hurt along with the devastating imaginings which those of us with OCD and other mental disorders

have to contend with. It is a difficult one to explain but I seem to interpret any conversation or event in a negative light. Moreover I worry going over the conversation often convincing myself that I have inadvertently said something to harm or upset someone. I will become involved in ruminative thinking going over conversations repeatedly often involving my husband asking his opinion never satisfied with the answer

Most days there is a back ground feeling of anxiety and even more intensive feelings of free floating anxiety when the reason seems unaccompanied by either a thought or a deed. I have depression constantly in varying degrees and never face any day with any sense of excitement or anticipation mostly waking with the burden of a heavy heart. Throughout my illness I have increasingly found it more and more difficult to make even the simplest of decisions. My mind tells me that every decision that I finally make is wrong. Yes eventually everyone makes a decision, even if one procrastinates decisions are made nonetheless as even doing nothing becomes a decision. I mostly consider that I have never made a right decision not even upon trivial matters as the results turn sour and I wished I had acted differently.

Moreover because of years of torment and ceaseless anxiety I have become absent minded and easily distracted and concentration is difficult, my mind wanders and I feel restless and easily bored.

It is indeed most difficult to attempt to tell you my present situation concerning OCD. I will attempt to do so by giving you a glimpse into my life today .The French call OCD the doubting disease thus I doubt that I have got my point across, perhaps I have, perhaps I have not; the point is I cannot allay the nagging doubt that I have not despite all the lengthy writing you may have waded through to get to this point. This is one of the reasons I am a prolific writer and is a result of my OCD.

This morning I woke at 4.00am after having not being able to get to sleep until just before midnight than awakening again at 2.30 now at 4.00am I must get up my sleep having been disturbed by the continual hum of the wood burner from the factory in the village which in recent weeks has been joined by the rumble of machinery as they are now working during the night. I wake my entire body aches, my heart is heavy with depression, some mornings I have an attack of existential terror like panic, overwhelming feelings of regret and guilt for having come to live here and fears for the future of my husband, son and myself. I am indeed most miserable; waking is the worst time of day for me. In addition I have a mild headache, I feel worried, anxious as I have an appointment later. Will my headache get worse, will I cope when the time comes to go. Such worries occur whenever I have to go anywhere and the pressure for me to be well is enormous. I am also angry for having to suffer the consequence of the unremitting misery of noise abuse from across the road, I feel helpless unable to cope. No one here in the village seems to care less, few complain, none complain to the factory in question or the council responsible for resolving such matters but refuse to.

Its now 4.40. My saving grace used to be my computer and the Internet and it still is once I have overcome the first OCD obstacle of the day, at least concerning the use of the computer. Before doing anything I have to go to visit the “click to denote” web sites. These are web sites where for every click by a visitor a charity gets a very very

small donation from a sponsor. I have two computers. I am unable to get rid of the old one as I find it difficult to discard anything for reasons not easy to explain, doing so would give me emotional pain. So I have to do this click to donate twice before I can do anything else, it can take as many as sixty clicks or more and sometimes if I have to leave it to do something else I doubt I have done it and have to start all over again.. It is now the only thing I do for others yet I resent it. Why? Because it has turned into an obsession, if I do not do this I become anxious and I have done this on the morning of an operation when I was so afraid and wanted nothing more than to sit quietly and prepare myself for what was to come. Yet I could not neglect this compulsion I would have worried all day fearing negative consequences of my inaction. The real me may well wish to continue with this whenever possible but only when it is appropriate to do so and for reasons of compassion rather than fear.

Now I frantically write letters to the factory and the council, the second of two page lengthy letters this week complaining but trying to be reasonable, trying to get the situation changed but not wishing to cause harm or hurt others, yet angry for my inability to get this injustice rectified allowing people to walk all over me because of my scrupulosity. I have taken hours to write them and again this morning they are altered yet again. I am anxious, will I be able to post them. I fear the consequences, I doubt, I am filled with indecision. Amidst all this I am ill with IBS and irritable balder, I am frustrated by these interruptions to my compulsive letter writing I want to get the letters in the post before I become anxious and read them once again and alter them yet again. Up and down stairs to the toilet inundated by contaminations fears and compulsions I am angry by these delays.

This morning I am so stressed I have not got round to my Tai chi. I have been learning Tai Chi now for a couple of years, it is not an easy matter, social phobia and my inability to concentrate make it difficult. But it is something positive, but today I simply cannot cope with doing this. I try to do this every morning but sometimes like meditation it gives me the headache and anyway this morning I am too tense to do it. I have to get my son up also. He has some pointless course at the college for the job centre new deal scheme; it is making him even more depressed than usual. It is pointless, humiliating and degrading. Again I feel the guilt I am overwhelmed with what I have done to him. He cannot turn his incredible talent for art into a means of earning a living. As I have already mentioned he had a good job with the HSE back in Sussex now he cannot find work and as become depressed and anxious unable to cope.

I am tired and exhausted, I want to cry, I would love to cry but I dare not as even one tear can bring on a headache. But I am angry, frustrated, I lose my temper throwing cutlery round the kitchen screaming. I want some relief I cannot cope. I want to smash everything.

I wake Kevin, he is depressed and keeps saying he cannot cope over and over, most days he repeats this like a negative mantra again and again. He loses his temper with the computer, the printer has ran out of ink.

I might rise early but I dread getting washed and dressed, cannot face the lengthy OCD washing rituals to come as I attempt to shower and clean the sink and bath yet

again fearing I have contaminated them. Again washing my hair, everyday it is washed sometimes more than once. Perhaps I have dried it and then felt the towel was not clean. Yesterday I coloured it, its long, thin and grey, if I do not colour it it will look as though I have no hair on top at all. This will affect the little confidence that I have and make it more difficult to cope with my social phobia because of embarrassment concerning my appearance. Yet this procedure is terrifying, anxiety provoking as I fear the toxic substance may harm another and I wash my hair again and again hoping no trace remains even scrubbing my head with a brillo pad to remove small areas of black dye tenaciously clinging to my scalp. I scrub the remains of the sensitivity patch test with scouring powder and the drops of dye that have fallen on my arms until my skin is red still not satisfied all traces have been removed. Several towels and a good deal of shampoo and scouring powder later I leave the bathroom. Still unhappy that I am not a danger to others I swear one of those compulsive vows mentioned earlier so I will not have to go back to the bathroom for another round of washing to quell the anxieties. This perverse method fails as it sometimes does when one fear vies with another for supremacy during which I am tortured with indecision and I wash my hair yet again but make another vow not to change my cloths. This time the vows works and I put on the same cloths and I feel that it's reasonably okay but I am afraid to go to the supermarket in case a particle of hair colour kills someone and if it were not for my husband being with me I would not have gone. As I write this it seems truly bizarre and I wonder if I will ever dare put this on the net. But I want people to know what it is like for us, the lives we live and the misery we contended with as the mind wages this perpetual war upon itself.

Finally I get dressed feeling relieved now that the washing is over for the time being but it will not be long before I feel dirty again IBS is a difficult ailment for an OCD sufferer and I soon feel contaminated. But if it is not this than its something else so many things in the house feel contaminated and I try mostly to avoid rather than decontaminate. The bed is a difficult problem and I have clean cloths every night and when I rise in the morning I cannot sit down with the cloths I wore the night before so I have to put a clean dressing gown over the top so as not to contaminate the seats until I am washed and dressed. I have to be very mindful not to allow my night cloths to come into contact with anything that others may touch, especially my clean cloths for the day. The letters that I wrote early in the morning will not be printed out until I have washed and dressed for fear of spreading contamination to others. When I go out later today I will need a complete change of cloths, if it was a medical appointment I would need to have another wash, perhaps two, even three including my hair. Today however a change of cloths will be okay. But when I do finally go to my appointment I cannot sit down in the car without first covering the seat with a towel.

I think the above gives the reader a glimpse of what it is like for me and others who are indeed worse than I. It is only a fragment of the torment that I endured during the time mentioned, to cover it all would be too overwhelming for me to write as such is exhausting but nevertheless is somehow liberating - at least it has distracted me from my letters. However if I do not post them to day, well than tomorrow yet again I will sit at my computer in the early hours of the morning tormented by my doubting mind reading repeatedly what I have written, adding more and more becoming increasingly anxious with self doubt. Yet as I sit here now my mind fills with doubts and a strong compulsion to write more. And now the intrusive thought to swear a vow to complete

this section without adding further to it has popped into my mind and I am not even sure if it is an involuntary vow or not. I am scared all of this frantic writing will bring on a headache I feel the tension now round my head and this if nothing else will be the deciding factor.

All of this section was written in great haste driven by tensions difficult to explain. Everything has to be done quickly and my mind races faster than I can type and of course it will need to be checked so enough is enough. Such is my life at this juncture. If you wish to know more explicit details of all the obsessions and compulsions read my memoir also on this web site. Perhaps you can see why it took me ten years to write.

Overall OCD has had quite a devastating effect upon my life. I often look back upon the wasted years with profound regret I am in my declining years and the battle with OCD is by no means over and now I doubt it will ever be. In retrospect I consider that if I had been better informed right from the beginning concerning the exact nature of my illness and its prognosis I may have been more aware of its gradual and insidious progression and aware of the way it morphs into new and more terrifying obsessions and compulsions just when I have learnt to cope with an existing one. I did not know from what I was suffering. I had no idea that the strange and bizarre religious obsessions could suddenly be joined and even opposed by washing compulsions and than by checking compulsions, each rising to a peak of intensity before become more subdued only to be replaced by a new and more terrifying obsession. And than to become interwoven one with another leaving me in an horrifying quandary not knowing what to do as one obsession contradicts another as I have already explained.

Moreover it should have been made clear to me that if I did not stand and oppose this illness than it would devour my life and as the years went by it would become more difficult to overcome. To be told that one suffers from anxiety does not clarify for the sufferer the intensity of the illness and the depth of misery he or she will eventually suffer. It is not merely anxiety, OCD goes deeper than that. Yes most certainly OCD produces anxiety but the anxiety is bought on as the mind is taken over by thoughts resulting in compulsions that are totally abhorrent or opposed to the person's normal thinking patterns. And ones mind is taken over to such a degree that when one is in the throes of obsessive thoughts they appear all too real and the thoughts too powerful to ignore. I cannot describe how it feels to the non sufferer, it is as though one is possessed, as though ones mind is taken over and you are enslaved by the thoughts that pour into it unbidden and unwanted and although a minute part of you may see this you are nonetheless powerless to ignore it. At least this is now one feels especially in the beginning and during times when alone or one is left without treatment in ignorance concerning the nature of this strange affliction. This insight may not occur immediately as in the case of my religious obsessions which initially exhibited an almost psychotic component as I had no insight whatsoever into the absurdity of my thoughts and behaviours. However for most sufferers eventually the very small light of reason shines through, we may not be able to follow this light but it is there nonetheless, it may be a dim glimmer in the distance as I am crying and washing my hands in an hysteria of panic but that tiny light of reason exists and that is what prevents us from becoming insane even though many times without help and considerable determination we cannot act upon it to increase its intensity.

Sometimes life can be so overwhelmingly sad and one lives in fear of the next unhappy circumstance. Whenever the phone rings I am filled with dread. What now? What next? Who knows the uncertainty is terrifying. My heart is saddened by life I am filled with anger for the wasted years and perhaps consider that I made little effort and perhaps things could have been better. But it is pointless to blame myself as OCD is a terrible illness and the fight is a hard one and one needs so much help and support. Thankfully today there is more hope for OCD and many make a recovery inasmuch as they learn how to cope with whatever it is that invades the mind torments the soul and brings about havoc to the individual concerned and his or her family.

*It is never too late to be what you might have been.  
George Eliot.*