

3 STRIKES – NOT OUT

By Ian Brown

I have had three breakdowns in my life. The first time was in 1970, at the age of twenty-four in London. The second occasion in 1986, some sixteen years later, was precipitated by a traumatic experience in an aircraft. And the third occasion involved a descent into a deep and drawn out depression, starting around 2002 (again after an interval of sixteen years).

I would like to describe my experiences, suggest possible explanations, and mention ways in which I was able to recover.

My family had a history of mental illness. My father, an Army officer, had been denied a promotion to Colonel in 1942 due to ill health. He had served for many years in Nigeria and had contracted malaria, dysentery and black-water fever. When he was ordered back to Britain, he was extremely upset and argued with the authorities. According to my mother, he had a breakdown and was referred to a psychiatrist. My mother had been brought up in a family in which she had an epileptic brother and a sister who was classified as schizophrenic in her early twenties and who spent the rest of her days in a psychiatric institution. The atmosphere in my home was fraught with tension. My father was disrespectful and overbearing towards my mother. She, by her own admission, did not know how to stand up to him. She would try to accommodate his moods while internalizing her own feelings – constant anxiety and depression were the result. My brother, Robin, had been born with a deformity, a club foot. From an early age he was ‘disobedient’ and my father would often resort to physical punishment. I was meant to be the ‘good one’ and yet there were occasions where my father would vent his anger on both of us. My sister, Joy, was the oldest child and was scarred by witnessing both physical and mental cruelty towards our brother. On one occasion, my mother even called the SPCC (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) with respect to my father’s behaviour towards Robin.

At the age of 13, I was sent away to a boarding school in Yorkshire. I felt abandoned at first but grew to accept Sedbergh as my new home. Due to ability in sports and music, I was able to fit in and eventually thrive in the tough but fair conditions of the school. By the age of 15, I dreaded the holidays and having to stay at my parents’ house. When I joined the CCF (combined cadet force), I took the opportunity of going to Army Camp for three successive summers. My father took this for enthusiasm to actually enter the Army when in fact it was more about finding ways to avoid spending the summer at ‘home’. Against my will, my father insisted that I take A levels in Physics and Chemistry, as he believed I needed these to enter Sandhurst, the Officer’s Military Training College. I hated these subjects and had no ability in them.

As it seemed unlikely that I would ever make it to University, the Army option loomed large. My father tried to persuade me that he had had a great time in the Army and that I would too. Privately, my mother would tell me that my father had been

miserable in the Army and would make the stark point that the purpose of the Army was to kill people and why would I want to do that.

In the end, I took the Entrance exam to Sandhurst and passed. There only remained the interview process. Under great pressure, I came to the conclusion that I did not want to go into the Army. When I told my father, he was devastated. A year later, at the age of 18, with the prospects of University still very dim, I convinced myself that even though I didn't want to follow my father's footsteps in the Army, maybe I should apply to the R.A.F. The result of that was that I had 4 days of interviews and testing and was accepted by Cranwall, the Officer's Training College for the R.A.F. However, I was told that I would not be able to be a pilot due to sub-standard eyesight. I loved adventure and challenge and the idea of being a pilot had been exciting. I had even rationalized the schism between my mother and father by focusing on the possibility of becoming an Air Sea Rescue Helicopter Pilot, i.e. saving people rather than killing them. But when this vision was crushed, I rejected the idea of service in Her Majesty's Armed Forces once and for all.

I wanted to get away from it all. My school had become my home and soon I would have to leave. I spent all my time studying and in the end managed to pass my Physics and Chemistry A Levels. I had three connections to Canada. Firstly, my sister had just married to a Canadian and they were planning to move from London to Montreal. In addition, I had been writing to a girl in Edmonton who had once been a neighbour in Edinburgh before immigrating to Canada with her family. We had a puppy love relationship and had both said we would do anything to be together. Lastly, I had a friend from Sedbergh who had been awarded a scholarship to study at Canadian University. He had told me that the scholarship was awarded by the Drapers' Company and wasn't necessarily based on academic merit, but rather having a 'good character' and being successful in other fields of endeavour at school.

I applied and was awarded a scholarship. Meanwhile I had been accepted by Queens University in Kingston, Ontario. In August of 1966, I waved goodbye to my parents and boarded the Empress of Canada at Clydeside.

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Mental Health and mental illness can be viewed as a continuum with stress and distress as its two main components. We all encounter stress every day. The question is what kind of stress, how much stress, and how we cope with it.

There is good stress (eustress) and bad stress. Good stress is one in which a stressful situation is viewed as a challenge and one which can be overcome and is worth

the effort to accomplish this goal. Bad stress does not help us achieve goals but instead inhibits our ability to function on a daily basis. Too much bad stress causes distress which is a result of persistent stress that is not resolved through coping or adaptation.

Eustress (good)	severe stress	severe distress	
	Stress (bad)	distress	breakdown

Most people view moving as stressful. Immigration is usually seen as more stressful than migration in that it involves coping with and/or adaptation to a new culture. In my experience there are two kinds of immigrant – student immigrant and landed immigrant. There are also two types of landed immigrant – the ‘ex-pat’ and the immigrant who has been able to accept the new motherland, and in so doing has gone through significant transformation in a kind of rebirth.

In 1969, after three years in Canada, I was a student immigrant who had begun that process of transformation. I had increasingly come to question and challenge my upbringing. The cultural experience of living in Canada had let me experience living in a society in which there was more opportunity and equality. My eyes had been further opened by immersion in the field of Sociology, an academic discipline whose purpose was to demystify social reality and reveal the underlying strata of class, corporatism, inherited wealth and capital return. Lastly, I was a baby boomer and at the centre of the huge social upheaval of the times. All these factors had made me disavow the inequities of Britain’s hierarchical social order. By my third year at Queens, the process of disidentification from my roots had deepened and quickened. I no longer felt like I was ‘British’.

Then, ironically, in the Summer of 1969, I received news that I had been accepted to do a Masters in Sociology at The London School of Economics. It was ironic because I had been seen as a bit dim-witted at school and hadn’t been expected to get a B.A. let alone a Masters. Also, I really didn’t want to go back to Britain at all, but felt I couldn’t turn down this unexpected offer. The three years at Queens had been years of finding myself intellectually. Released from the mental torture chamber of physics and chemistry, I had the freedom to discover and pursue my interests. This had led to majoring in Sociology. As a field, Sociology did not, and still does not command great respect. Basically, people really don’t know what it is. It took me quite a while to sort out the fact that Sociology was not the same as Social Work. Whereas the former was a field of formal enquiry professing scientific methodology, the latter was about working with and for the betterment of people’s social conditions.

It was really the latter that I was interested in, but I accepted the understanding and insights that sociological literature brought. Ever since reading

George Orwell at school, I had wanted to know more about different aspects of social reality. Orwell had a great influence on my thought and values. In Animal Farm and 1984, he exposed the inequalities and inequities of class society so graphically. But the writings that hit me most powerfully were the autobiographical Down and Out in Paris and London and some of his essays, most notable 'Shooting of an Elephant'.

'Down and Out' exposed the underbelly of the society that I had been brought up in. Along with a comparison of Churchill and Gandhi that I had read in a biography of Gandhi, it persuaded me that if one *really* wanted to help effect social change, you had to understand society, and in order to do that, academic sociology was not enough; you had to experience the reality of being a 'have-not'. That meant doing shit jobs, being poor, and living in sub-standard housing.

In 'Shooting of an Elephant', Orwell describes how as a colonial policeman in Burma, he was asked to shoot an elephant that had run amok in the local bazaar. Orwell takes a rifle and sets off to find the elephant. Followed by a huge crowd of local people who are frightened because the elephant has already killed one man, and excited at the prospect of a shooting and a bonanza of meat supply, Orwell locates the elephant in a nearby field:

"As soon as I saw the elephant, I knew with perfect certainty that I ought not to shoot him ... at that distance, peacefully eating, the elephant looked no more dangerous than a cow ... but at that moment I glanced around at the crowd ... watching me as they would watch a conjurer about to perform a trick ... and suddenly I realized that I should have to shoot the elephant after all. The people expected it of me and I had got to do it; I could feel their two thousand wills pressing me forward, irresistibly. and it was at this moment, as I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man's dominance in the East ... I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom he destroys ... he becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib ... he wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it."

Orwell concludes the essay, with the line "I often wonder if any of the others (fellow Europeans) grasped that I had done it solely to avoid looking like a fool."

I read this essay in 1965. In that same year, I read the biography of Gandhi. In one chapter, Gandhi is compared to Churchill. In the concluding paragraph, the author writes the following:

"Churchill loved social traditions. Gandhi smashed social barriers. Churchill mixed with every social class, but lived in his own. Gandhi lived with everybody. To Gandhi, the lowliest Indian was a child of God. To Churchill, all Indians were a pedestal for a throne. He would have died to keep England free, but tried to destroy those who wanted India free."

(The Life of Mahatma Gandhi, Louis Fischer, Harper, 1950)

1965 was also the year Churchill died. There were only two times at Sedbergh that we were allowed to watch TV; one was John Kennedy's funeral in 1963, and the other was Winston Churchill's funeral in 1965. On the one hand, feelings of patriotism were stirred up by the passing of this great war hero. On the other hand, Churchill was the very symbol of everything that both Orwell and Gandhi hated. 'Shooting of an Elephant' resonated deeply and powerfully for me on many levels.

My father (and his father) had spent most of their lives serving the British Empire. My father despised Gandhi and referred to him as "that half-naked Indian fakir." My father wanted me to go into the Army and said that he had had a wonderful life serving in Nigeria and India. My mother flatly contradicted this by saying that much of the time my father had been miserable and begged me not to follow in his footsteps. 1965 was the year that I opposed my father's will and decided not to enter the Army.

Meanwhile, my uncle Brigadier Arthur Cumming, had been awarded a Victoria Cross in Burma for extreme bravery in the line of fire. I had never thought of him as anything other than a hero who had killed Japanese troops (clearly 'the bad guys') and rescued wounded men. His courage was undeniable and I knew him to be a modest and kind man.

1965 was also the year that I had my own moment of profound awakening. As a senior prefect, appointed to uphold the traditions and values of the school, I had beaten a boy for what I saw as a serious infringement – namely skipping a compulsory cross-country run and then lying about it. Orwell had a screaming crowd and his conscience. I had a moral code to uphold which dictated that the truth was of the utmost importance. But as I carried out the punishment, I knew something was wrong. The awakening for me was that there was a mask and I did not want my face to fit this mask anymore.

The key theme in all of this was loyalty. Equal to Truth, Loyalty was a sacred value and one of the most important aspects of virtue as I knew it. But loyalty to who? Loyalty to what?

In the case of the Army as a career, I had been loyal to my mother's wishes but had betrayed my fathers'. In the case of the beating punishment, I had been loyal to institutional values but had betrayed humanistic moral values. The student that had lied was the elephant. It had not been necessary to strike him.

How important was it to be loyal to British culture? According to legend, the Duke of Wellington is reported to have said, 'the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton'. Certainly the political and military elites of the British Empire were largely from English Boarding Schools. On the one hand, Sedbergh preached self-sufficiency and independence. On the other, the social system was an intricate and intermeshing network of hierarchical groups each of which demanded loyalty. You were expected to be loyal to your equals (from new boys up to prefects); and on the 'playing fields' you had to be loyal to your House and to your School if you were selected to the 1st. XV (rugby) or 1st. XI (cricket). For hundreds of years, this was seen as suitable

training to then accept loyalty to Platoon, Company, Battalion, and ultimately your country in times of war.

I was deeply imbued with the boarding school values of telling the truth, playing fair, showing courage and endurance, and group loyalty. In other words, my conditioning was thorough.

The opposite of loyalty was betrayal – the ultimate sin. Orwell betrayed his roots when he declared he was “all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors.” And he betrayed the ruling class from which he came when he worked in the kitchens of Paris and London and fought in the Spanish Civil War. But he loved England, the country, the land, and ordinary people.

At Queens, I had embraced the humanistic socialism of people like Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, Frantz Fanon and Tom Bottomore. I had lapped up the anarchist spirit and hatred of capitalist consumer society personified by D. H. Lawrence and Henry Miller. And I had embraced the progressive ideas on education of A S. Neill, Paul Goodman and Jonathon Kozol. Meanwhile, I had played rugby for the University. I had sought out Canadians who were proud to be Canadian and not fawning to all things English. I was electrified when I came across Milton Acorn’s poem. ‘England’, which included such lines as:

*‘England’s a cretin’s grunt dressed up in a crumbling gothic
England’s not the source of all our woes, just the source of
the most annoying ones;
Where the aspiring-to-be-bright aspire to be gentlemen
Only to discover this is the contemporary age –
there are no gentlemen.
Trained to be administer colonies, they discover with surprise
There’s so few colonies left the competition
Is so fierce it’s like a river full of crocodiles –
no other edible beast in sight:
So they come to Canada and other naïve places
To administer the colonies of the American Empire.’*

And yet I was homesick for the beaches of East Lothian and the fells of Cumbria, the warmth of the pub, the honesty of the British satirical lineage, from Oscar Wilde to Peter Cook and Dudley Moore, and thereon to John Cleese and Rowan Atkinson.

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At the age of 24, I was experiencing an identity crisis of which there were class, cultural and occupational components. The term 'cultural schizophrenia' has arisen to denote the kind of confusion and conflicted loyalties that can result. Those inner conflicts were certainly not conducive to mental health.

In 1969, when I arrived in London, I didn't know where I fit. My previously BBC voice had been replaced by Canadian inflections such that people thought I was from either the U.S. or Canada (although Australia and South Africa figured in there as well.) I felt extremely uncomfortable in the company of old Sedbergh friends. They just seemed so upper crust with such an air of confident entitlement. Neither did I feel like an 'academic' or an 'intellectual'. I saw myself as a creative thinker that had become like Colin Wilson's 'Outsider' – marginal in terms of cultural, class or occupational identity.

As far as my family went, I felt estranged. My sister had just moved to Montreal, my brother was in South Africa, my mother was very anxious about my financial status (I had no scholarship or bursary at LSE), and my father was still aggrieved that I hadn't gone into the Army, and now angry and bewildered at my choice of Sociology as a course of study and LSE ('hotbed of socialists and anarchists') in particular. I felt alone and gripped by a foreboding that I was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

There were a couple of Canadians I'd known at Queens who were also in London at that time, and I sought out their company. They, in turn, introduced me to a few more. One of these was Ellie, a graduate of Queens who was studying movie making at the Slade School of Fine Arts. From October on, we became intimate.

Ellie was only my second serious relationship with a woman. The first had been with someone called Lesley at Queens. I was infatuated with Lesley, enchanted by her. We were inseparable during my second year in Kingston. In the summer, I went to Kenya with a group called operation Crossroads Africa. Lesley went to Montreal. I had worked there the previous summer as a guide in the British Pavilion at Expo '67. I had introduced Lesley to several of my friends. As she also had a backup plan to visit Britain. I gave her the number and address of another guide who had spent the year at Sussex University. Lesley had started a correspondence with him and unbeknownst to me, he had returned to Montreal that summer. While I wrote letter after letter from Kenya and received no replies, Lesley and the former guide were having an affair.

The first I knew about it was back in Kingston. First, Lesley told me that 'we' were finished but didn't offer any explanation. It was only a month later that she told me unapologetically about what had happened. When I met my former friend, his contribution was "well, she dumped me too."

I felt like a chameleon changing colour to fit the London environment. And I was surrounded by other chameleons doing the same thing to a greater or lesser extent. There was Jerry, Canadian but with British parents, working as a stage manager; Mark, ex-Etonian, fellow Drapers Scholar, still firmly British in his identity except for the counter-cultural transition as a hippy with rich parents; then there was Stewart, a born and bred lower middle-class Brit. set on making it to North America and finding fame

and fortune. (Stewart eventually did finish up in the USA with a rich Jewish American woman he had met on the trekkers trail; Stewart shrewdly milked his Britishness for it all it was worth, had several jobs as a reporter, and then joined CNN shortly after it had been launched by Ted Turner. He finished up several decades later at a strident right-wing anchor on Fox Network).

By January 1970, I knew I was in trouble. Increasingly, I felt things were spinning out of control. At LSE, the course work was stressful and dissatisfying. I found it hard getting a thesis supervisor who could relate to my interests. In addition, I had no student's bursary or loan and was scraping by teaching special education in a tough area. While having all kinds of innovative ideas, I had little experience of how to handle intransigent seven year olds. As things became more stressful, I began leaning on Ellie for emotional support, and the more I did this, the more she seemed to distance herself.

Diary: January 1970

'Adrift. Adrift in a sea of ideas. Adrift in a sea of turbulent feelings. Adrift in a gaping hole of vulnerability, a black hole hidden somewhere in inner space. Familiar landmarks disappearing. The cognitive map of knowing becoming blurred and confusing. Needing something to hold on to, something to secure me from being swept away.'

The foreboding I had felt on my return seemed now irretrievably deepening into a pervasive anxiety. More and more, I felt that I should never have returned to Britain and that I needed a way to escape back to Canada.

At the end of March, the lease was up at the flat where I was staying. Ellie suggested that I move in with her. With no money and things at LSE becoming overwhelming to the point where I was considering dropping out, I agreed.

Then one day, Ellie announced that she was *not* pregnant. I had no idea what she was talking about. She explained that she had stopped taking the pill for a while. I was shocked and asked her why she hadn't told me. She replied that I didn't need to know, that it was her decision as (a) she was choosing to be a single mother, (b) it was her body and she had a right to do what she wanted.

Now I felt anger mingling in with the anxiety. Did I not have a right to choose whether or not to have a child? I began to experience a state of benumbed inertia. There was a time bomb ticking away in my gut. It was just a question of when it would explode.

One day, while I was teaching, one of the seven year olds pushed me too far. I grabbed him and hoisted him out of his seat, telling him not to talk to me *'like that.'* I felt I was losing control and didn't know who to turn to for help.

Grad school felt like a cerebral labyrinth – one in which I was lost, unnoticed, and decidedly out of place. Going there seemed a mistake. Returning to Britain also felt like a mistake. On the plane from Toronto, I had kept thinking ‘you’re going east, you’re going in the wrong direction’. I had an overpowering feeling that I had cut the umbilical cord to my roots, that I had become politicized to the extent of becoming increasingly informed and radical in my perspective, one that had renounced the class structure in Britain. Increasingly, I felt that I should be an activist ‘out there’ engaging in social reform rather than engaging in conceptual analysis in the ivory tower of university.

Back at the house, I felt like I was being enmeshed in a web of intrigue and deceit. Ellie seemed to be in a game of seduction with the other member of the flat, a man called Roy. I asked her if something was going on. She answered ‘no’ and that I was ‘her man’. I didn’t believe her. I didn’t trust her. I needed her honesty and I wasn’t getting it.

My suspicions about Ellie and Roy increased and one evening, I confronted them both and demanded (pleaded would be a better word) to be told the truth. They both denied that anything was going on. Clearly there was. I broke down in tears. I had cut myself off from everything familiar and now I was teetering on the cliff edge. I spent that night at an old schoolfriend’s house. He kept remarking on how much I’d changed and was clearly embarrassed by the way I looked and the fact that I’d put him on the spot.

The next day, on returning to the flat, I discovered that Ellie and Roy had taken off somewhere on his motor-bike. I felt like smashing everything around me. I quit LSE that same day.

This was the point that I knew I had mental health problems. On the continuum of stress-distress-breakdown, my mental state could be described as extreme distress and disorientation. However, given my stoical upbringing, I did not seek help. I assumed my strength of will power would carry me through this challenge, as it always had in the past.

I left everything and with little money in my pocket, I somehow made my way to Morocco. As I travelled, I wrote in my Diary:

‘What is ‘a breakdown’? Is it panic? Hysteria? Withdrawal? Tears? Screams? Is it exploding anger? Depression? Collapsing identity? Annihilation of the ego? Raw vulnerability? Or is it, a disintegration of the thinking process? A breaking loose of the feeling process? An emergency of the spiritual process, rich with potential? Does it involve delusions, voices in the head? Are they necessary conditions? Is a ‘breakdown’ ‘breakthrough’? Breakthrough to the light? Breaking through encrusted patterns and petrified routines? Breaking through layers of maya?’

I stand like a motionless bird poised for a long flight through the dark night. This much I know – the real flight is not to Morocco, but through a nightmare of uncharted states of consciousness. I have become a passive receptor, as opposed to an actor. The barriers and defences, both emotional and cognitive, that normally filter out unwanted stimuli, have collapsed. I am flooded with a heightened awareness of sound and light and feeling. The merging of intense sensory input and the usual unrestrained flow of ideas is too much. Like a white star collapsing into a black hole. I know not who I am. Everything is splintering, fracturing, disintegrating – in me and around me. I don't know what I'm doing. Maybe I should be getting back to London. Retrieve the situation before it's too late. Get Ellie back. Get back to LSE. I experience a kind of inner shrinking. Like a jellyfish that has been poked, I contract. I need help. I need somebody. I need to be alone. I feel shame. I have failed. I have cut my ties. I feel alone.'

Morocco was a disaster. The hippy paradise of Essauara looked and felt like a scene out of Bosch's Hell. 'Free love' and rampant venereal disease. Scrawled on a wall in Marrakesh was the Rimbaud quote, 'the prerequisite for artistic perception and creation is a complete dissociation of the senses.' I got a grim satisfaction out of reading that.

I don't remember much of that time. I know I found a place to stay with a mad Scotsman who disappeared at night. Someone told me that he thought he was the Devil. I remember the light seemed almost too bright for my eyes. I remember walking the beaches of Essouara towards Diabet where I had been told there was a 'free love' commune. As I had also been told that the place was rampant with venereal disease, my interest was merely curiosity. Caucasian Americans, Brits, Canadians and Aussies seemed to be everywhere as was the aroma of weed. My main memory of Marrakesh was seeing a line up of similar Caucasians outside the American Express Office. Middle-class hippies with sound financial connections.

I was lost. In a daze. I had little money. I didn't know where I was or what I was doing. I didn't know who 'I' was. There were several personalities floating in and out of the same space. The Sedbergh boy disapproving of the lethargy and self-indulgence of the hippies; the post-grad student who had fallen out of the ivory tower; the rebel radical who didn't know which group he belonged to, if any; the spurned young man, emotionally still a boy, shattered by two betrayals – one in Canada and one in Britain; the person who was no longer clear about his national or cultural identity; the 'golden boy' who, with one decision had become a failure; the son who cut ties with his father.

I had to escape again. Get out of there. Get back to London, or Canada, or anywhere other than here. I was a rebel and had become committed to changing the status quo. But first I needed to put the pieces back together again. I wanted to live life on the other side, see life from the bottom looking up. The hell with the ivory tower.

The second time I had a breakdown was in 1986. After spending two more years in London, I emigrated to Montreal. After six years, and by then a certified teacher, I moved to B.C. in 1978 with my partner of 3 years, Jennifer and her daughter Krista. Jennifer and I split up a year later. I had a brief affair with a woman called Chloe which ended when I became involved with a woman who went on to become my partner and the mother of two of my children. A month after Joan and I started living together, Chloe announced that she was pregnant. Nine months later she gave birth to Jasmine. My daughter Annie was born a month after Jasmine in the Fall of 1980 and four years later, my son Ben was born.

In 1986, I was about to turn 40. I had been teaching ESL to adults in a Community College for about five years. Joan was also a teacher and between teaching and parenting, we were both stressed out most of the time. There never seemed to be time for each other. Stress turned to friction, which manifested in what felt like an ongoing power struggle. We shared many of the same values: for instance I supported Joan in her quest to be empowered as a woman, and she supported my involvement in men's groups. But despite this, when pressure became too great, more often than not, the other became a target for expressions of frustration or blame.

Then there were our respective mothers. My father had died in 1977. My mother was alone in Edinburgh. I felt responsible for arranging visits and for finding a solution to my mother's repeated cries for help. This included investigating the possibilities of my mother moving to Canada and this meant consultation with Joan, my brother Robin, and my sister Joy.

In May, I received a letter from Joy:

4/5/86

"Dear Ian,

I am writing this after having spoken to you on the phone. I am struck by the fact that the emotional impact of our family experience generates such intense feeling and continues to open up old wounds, I think the hardest thing for both of us to accept is that our individual perceptions and emotional experiences may not be congruent. For my part, I have no positive recollections or positive feelings about growing up that are related to family. My mother was unable to give or nurture, or reinforce good feelings towards me – for very understandable reasons – her stresses, at the time, her lack of positive reinforcement, and her preoccupation with her own needs.

Sadly on both sides of the family, there is so much self destruct, and guilt, and anger. You can see that with both our parents and with the three of us. I would like to see a solution for our mother – both you and Robin have really tried to both protect her and offer solutions, but she has also played into the negation of a solution.

I don't have an answer, which is of no help to you. And I don't share a sense of emotional commitment to family - my own experience tells me, that our family has done more harm, and been more self-destructive than offered creative solutions.

Both you, Robin and I share dubious, insecure futures. You and Robin have serious health problems, and difficult family and economic situations. You are enormously creative and talented, and have two beautiful children, but you are consumed with personal pain – which you manage to channel creatively in your writing, music, and commitment to parenting your children.

I am willing to continue to dialogue, and work towards solutions, if we can at least accept our differences, our different understanding, and our different needs. Our family is self destructive historically, and for me that is a raw experience. I don't want to see you or Robin or myself sink further into a morass of either 'in-fighting', hate or despair – we will all be losers."

In my twenties, I had seen my father as a tyrant and my mother as a victim. But after he died, I got to see my mother in another light. There was no question that she had serious mental issues. I knew about her depressions and anxiety states from my childhood, but I hadn't known about the fact that she had paranoid delusions. At times, when she saw someone who resembled me, she either thought it was me (working as an undercover RCMP agent) or my 'twin'. She also believed that Government 'boffins' were beaming rays at her, and these were responsible for various aches and pains.

At the age of 12, a teacher had written in my report that he was concerned that I was 'overconscientious'. How right he was. I easily succumbed to feelings of guilt if the voice of conscience dictated that I was not being responsible enough. The fact was that I felt responsible for my mother's welfare, the education of my students, the raising of my children and for being a better partner than my father had been. I was driven by a deep urge to be the opposite of my father. I was beginning to discover that my 'thoroughness' was masking a perfectionism which in turn, was an attempt to overcome deep feelings of inadequacy.

If my twenties were about realizing that I couldn't change the world, my thirties were about coming to terms with the uncomfortable fact that in certain fundamental ways, I couldn't even change myself. For example, I had been having sleep problems for quite some time. Eventually, I knew I had to give up my stoical attitude regarding medication and take some kind of sleeping pills. Some years earlier, I had gone through the same process with respect to seeing counsellors or therapists.

I had chosen teaching as my career path, but always in the background, were my two creative pursuits – music and writing. In 1975, I played piano in the Steven Barry Blues Band in Montreal, and in 1984, I wrote a one-act play entitled 'White Rock' that was produced at The Waterfront Theatre on Granville Island. Writing in my diary and playing the piano were necessary ongoing activities for my mental health.

In 1986, I started performing solo piano and vocals in public. On the one hand, it felt good to get recognition for my abilities. On the other, it was more pressure and stress. Whereas I was totally confident as a teacher, playing in a club in front of people I did not know set off considerable performance anxiety.

On Thanksgiving Day 1986, an event happened that had profound consequences. I had been given an introductory ticket for an Ultralight aircraft flight. In the course of the short flight, the pilot asked me over the intercom if I would like to “do some acrobatics”. Before I had a chance to reply, the plane went into a steep climb and then flipped over. I was completely unprepared for the disorientating shock of suddenly being swept upside down. In that moment, I felt a powerful surge of energy (it seemed like electricity) rapidly sweep up and down my body. I remember the pilot saying, “Don’t tell anyone down there that I did that. That’s a move we use to get out of box canyons.” As we climbed out of the plane, I was sure I smelled alcohol.

That evening, I experienced an unsettling numbness in my right hand, foot and leg. I was also short of breath and started hyperventilating. I had experienced a panic attack once before but it had been short-lived and from it I had learned that the sense of losing control of breathing plus heart palpitations didn’t mean that it was a heart attack or stroke.

I had expected that the shock would wear off, the breathing would normalize and the numbness would disappear. In my dazed condition, it seemed important that I go up in an Ultralight again (with a different pilot – one who was sober!). I braced myself, went back to the airfield, and was taken for a short and uneventful flight. However, in the days that followed, the panic attacks continued and the numbness didn’t disappear.

Earlier that year, I had been told that my right trapezius muscle was wasted. I was referred to a neurologist who gave me electrical conductivity tests, following which he informed me that the nerve that enervated the trapezius, the I Ith cranial nerve, was either not there or not working (I forget which). As to why the I Ith cranial nerve had ‘burned out’, that was never explained. Maybe it was related to the same genetic muscular dystrophy (F.S.H. – fascio scapula humeral) which had afflicted both my father and brother. I was given a muscle biopsy and told that I did not have F.S.H. There seemed to be no explanation. In the same way, when I sought explanation for the hand and leg numbness, none was forthcoming. I was told that my motor functioning was normal, and when asked if I could feel a feather on the sole of my right foot, I replied ‘yes’ to which I was assured that both motor and sensory nerves were fine.

I couldn’t sleep. I dreaded the next panic attack. For the first time in my life, I felt I could not trust the workings of either my mind or my body. As in the breakdown in London, I felt as if I was living a nightmare, one in which I was ‘out of my mind’, ‘beside myself’, one in which I had ‘lost my nerve’. I was gripped by fear, afraid to go out and be seen, afraid to have my children see me in tears, yet again. Within my

psyche, there was a deepening sense of a mammoth inner struggle between good and evil.

A month after the incident, things seemed to be getting worse. Eventually, Joan drove me to the doctor who immediately prescribed Xanax and Ativan.

Time dragged. Getting through the night was a terrible ordeal. One of my biggest fears was that I wouldn't be able to fall asleep with the result that I became so hypervigilant that I remained awake despite my exhaustion. Instead of a cycle of sleep and awakesness, there was an ongoing zombie existence. Another growing fear was being abandoned or rejected by my family. I began to despair and dwell on the thought that I was a burden and that Joan and the kids would be better off without me. The psychological pain was unremitting. Passive suicidal thoughts gradually led to a plan. I began to formulate what I would do.

I kept hoping the symptoms would disappear, or at least decrease in intensity or frequency. There were so many strange and unfamiliar sensations. It was as if my body was out of control. I kept feeling the urge to pee. I went to see a urologist. After sticking a metal probe up my penis, he announced that there was nothing wrong, only 'anxious bladder'. Driving home through the pouring rain, I thought of my father and suddenly started crying as I thought of the suffering in his life – not the suffering he had caused but that he himself had experienced. He had gone completely blind by the age of 72 due to glaucoma. In 1985, I had gone for a check up with an ophthalmologist and had been told that my intra-ocular pressures were too high and that I had glaucoma in its early stages. This sudden identification with my father marked the first indication of being able to let go of my anger towards him, the first sign of forgiveness – both giving it and asking for it.

During the months of October to December, I discovered that it didn't help to tell people of my problems. They all had different malaises, and they all told me *their* problems. One person suggested a hypnotherapist for my insomnia. The hypnotherapist was a wrinkled old guy who smelled of cigarette smoke. He gave me a cassette tape of hypnotic suggestions. It didn't help. Another suggested a naturopath who gave me a long list of foods that I should give up immediately, in addition to recommending a colon cleanse. And then there was the chiropractor who was shocked at my story and told me to go and see a lawyer so that I could sue the ultralight company. Nothing seemed to help except a massage therapist who loosened tight muscles and relaxed my nervous system.

The most unsettling symptoms were shortness of breath – a sense of my chest being compressed – and bewilderment at the experience of loss of automatic breathing. It was as if I had to will myself to breathe which in turn made me distrust the wisdom of my body. This distrust was exacerbated by the experience of heart palpitations and an uneven heart beat. The first time my heart 'jumped into my throat', I thought I must be having a heart attack. Again I was told that the cause was anxiety. It was hard to

believe. In addition, I experienced giddiness, an ever-present lump in my throat, headaches, trembling hands and a constant churning in my stomach. These ongoing experiences led to a distrust of both my internal and external worlds, which in turn took me to the edge of paranoia. I began to understand how my mother thought that someone 'out there' was the cause of her aches and pains.

One day I heard of a book called 'Why Bad Things Happen To Good People' by Harold Kushner, which was an extended analysis of the Book of Job. The central question for Job was 'why am I, an honest and conscientious man, being punished Lord?' I understood and empathized.

The hellish business of getting through the night now included the ordeal of getting through the day. In September, for the first time in four years, I did not have a teaching contract at Kwantlen. It was for this reason that I had decided to prioritize my music and perform in public. Before the ultralight incident, my day was structured around music practice and child minding. Now, I was unable to do my music and at times panicked that I could not cope with the kids. The result was *anomie* - a state of structurelessness that the sociologist, Emile Durkheim, identified as the principal cause of suicide. In this void, the passage of time became just another thing to fear. I fell into a habit of obsessive clock-watching which just served to increase a sense of agitation.

I was aware that the underlying causes of stress and distress were:

- (1) a sense of concern, responsibility interlaced with guilt about my mother's situation in Edinburgh,
- (2) unresolved issues with Joan
- (3) a job situation at KUC, where despite excellent evaluations from peers and students, I had no job security or benefits
- (4) deep unresolved anger due to painful experiences with women and my witnessing of many broken and desperate men during my involvement with a group in Burnaby called The Father's Rights Association.

In Montreal I had lived with a single mother named Jennifer. During this relationship with Jennifer, I had taken on the role and responsibilities of father to her daughter Krista. Jennifer had disowned the real father and was only too glad to have me help out. In 1979, we had moved out to B.C. together. However, in 1980, when we broke up, Jennifer denied me access to Krista despite the fact that we had a close relationship. I was hurt and angry. I had continued to support the women's movement but increasingly felt the need to seek out men who were on the receiving end of gender discrimination.

I decided to start a Father's group in White Rock. The name was The Father's Exchange Network. The idea was that other single father's would contact me and I would set up meetings with a view to exchanging information and providing emotional and moral support. The following article was printed in the *Peace Arch News*:

Single fathers speak out

Editor, PA News:
We, the Fathers Exchange Network, are in complete agreement with, and give our wholehearted support to what Bill Price and the Fathers Rights Action Group stand for.

It is encouraging to see the growing signs of fathers refusing to be treated as 'Disposable Parents'.

In another but related vein, there are also signs that there are now men who refuse to subscribe to the 'Myth of Male Privilege' (the subtitle of 'The Hazards Of Being Male' by Herb Goldberg: Signet, 1976.).

The Fathers Exchange Network seeks to provide a service for both single fathers and fathers still in a relationship who wish to share or exchange baby-

sitting or childminding duties.

We believe that fathers, and their children benefit by contact with other fathers, and by having access to provide for their children.

Unfortunately not everyone accepts that fathers have a right to equal access to their children, and that fathers and their children have the right to show their caring for each other whether before or after a relationship ends.

I urge fathers who are having custody or access problems to contact the Father's Rights Action Group, just as I urge those fathers who are fortunate enough to still have access to their children and who wish to join a network of

other fathers to contact me.

IAN BROWN
Fathers Exchange
Network
15311 Marine Drive,
White Rock, B.C.



The response was poor and while I was wondering how to promote the project better, I heard about a group called 'The Western Father's Rights Association'. The group met once a week in a rented unit on Kingsway opposite Metrotown. My first impressions were of a crowded room full of distressed, angry, working class men. They were not the kind of liberal, middle-class men who were beginning to explore their 'maleness' via Robert Bly and 'embrace your wild man' drumming workshops. They were men who were desperate for information, advice and any kind of support due, in most cases, to losing their children in custody battles. They were men who said they were good, caring fathers who had been financially drained, humiliated, and ordered to pay child custody and alimony. They had similar stories: how even the weekend access they were entitled to often got blocked in one way or another by their ex partners; how their health was suffering; how they were being driven to drink or other forms of escape.

I was probably the only man there with a degree. When my ability to be articulate was recognized, I was asked to write proposals for grant money. Several months later, in another sign of the times, when I called the Secretary of State's office to inquire about the response to a proposal I had submitted, I was told that the proposal had been turned down and when I began to protest that I personally know women's groups who continued to receive sizable grants on a regular basis, and how this was the first proposal of its kind from men, and moreover simply for money to cover the rent, I was told in a very condescending tone, "But Mr. Brown, men don't have a problem." I will never forget those words or the way in which they were delivered.

I was also probably the only man there who was still with his family and hadn't lost his children. For me, I was trying to prepare for that possibility and had strong feelings about the previous loss of rights with respect to Jennifer and Krista.

The stresses with Joan were gradually building up to an intolerable level. She insisted that she breast feed both children until almost the age of 3. She had been sleeping in the kids room for at least a year and a half prior to the ultralight incident. Despite what was supposed to be an equal sharing of rights and responsibilities, I felt like she had all the power. Her denial of this, extreme defensiveness and adamant refusal to take responsibility for any part in creating our problems, fuelled my resentment and anger.

So mixed in with rampant fear was a lot of suppressed frustration and anger, and considerable emotional pain. Ironically, it was mostly women who were my role-models (Helen Keller, Anais Nin, Germaine Greer, Margaret Atwood, Claire Weekes amongst others). My world up until the age of 20 has been almost exclusively male. In my twenties, my partners and best friends were women. In my thirties, I entered the world of ESL. At Kwantlen College, I was one of two men in a department of around twenty. When I did yoga or meditation groups, it was the same thing. The Housing Coop was dominated by single mothers and widows.

The zeitgeist of the times and of my sub culture was under the sway of second wave feminists. Gradually the proactive thrust of women's rights evolved into reverse sexism in which men (especially white men) became the enemy. Perceptions and interpretations became skewed into a strident and often hysterical misandry. If there was oppression, it was suffered by women and caused by men. If there were rights that needed to be fought for, they were women's rights (men, by definition had all the rights and none of the problems). Wars past and present were caused by men. Domestic violence always ended up with women as the victims. Pornography was an extension of men's sick minds.

There were a few men who spoke out - Herb Goldberg ([The Hazards of Being Male – Surviving the Myth of Masculine Privilege](#) -1976), Sam Keen ([Fire In The Belly: On Being A Man](#) – 1991) and Warren Farrell ([The Myth of Male Power: Why Men Are The Disposable Sex](#) – 1993). But when changes began to occur, it wasn't men who were responsible for the gradual shift to third wave feminism. Rather it was women of colour, immigrant women, third world women who pointed out to their white sisters the ways in which they had developed tunnel vision.

Fortunately, I had one friend who I could speak to. Veronica had had her own experiences of depression and 'going crazy'. When I told her of my thoughts of ending it all, she looked at me and said calmly, "Ian, think of the pain you would cause your children." It took a minute or two but then suddenly I was jerked out of my own self-preoccupation and could see clearly that this was not just about me and that suicide would create lasting shame and pain for my family.

I was terrified of completely losing control, of losing my mind, of 'going mad'. I didn't want to see a psychiatrist. My view of psychiatry had been heavily influenced by the subversive portrayals of both the movie 'One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest' and by the writings of R.D. Laing.

However, the psychiatrist was a friendly older man who assured me that I was not going mad, but instead had experienced a nervous breakdown, or 'anxiety state' as he preferred to call it. He recommended that I buy a book entitled 'Hope and Help For Your Nerves' by an Australian physician named Claire Weeks.

To this day, I am amazed that more people, especially mental health care workers, do not know about this book. In remarkably simple and direct language, Dr. Weeks explained the causes of a nervous breakdown, its usual symptoms, and ways in which to recover. Her key information is summarized as follows:

- (1) *Everyone has a nervous system (nerves + brain)*
- (2) *Nervous system =* $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{sympathetic nervous system} \\ \text{parasympathetic " " " "} \end{array} \right.$
- (3) *Nerves under stress release certain chemicals which always act on the same organs & always produce the same results. When emotional (afraid, angry, excited, agitated, etc.), the sympathetic system dominates the parasympathetic system.*
- (4) *Specifically, the sympathetic nerves release **adrenaline***
- (5) *The 3 pitfalls that produce nervous illness are:*
 - (a) *sensitization, (b) bewilderment (c) fear*
- (6) *There is 1st. fear and 2nd fear. The first is natural, the second is 'fear of fear' and sets off an adrenaline cycle that can fuel chronic anxiety, panic attacks, etc.*
- (7) *The way to deal with nervous feelings (of whatever kind) is:*
 - (a) **FACE**, (b) **ACCEPT**, (c) **FLOAT**, (d) **LET TIME PASS**

Her words were hugely reassuring. It gave me a basis to understand what was going on and how to set about recovering.

Fear can become a many-headed hydra. As soon as you cut off one head, new ones appear. I had developed many fears, the biggest of which was fear of Fear. Amongst other things, this had resulted in both claustrophobia, agoraphobia, cardiophobia, fear of the numbness spreading, fear of doing or saying the 'wrong' thing, fear of being misunderstood, fear of being mistrusted, fear of being unable to work, fear of rejection, fear of abandonment, fear of the stigma of being seen as a 'mental patient', etc.

I knew that there was a difference between 'fear' and 'being afraid'. to face my fears. I did not lack courage. I had gone up in an ultralight again. I continued to drive when necessary, making sure I always took a brown paper bag with me in case I started

hyperventilating. It was the accepting, floating and letting time pass that was harder to do. Why had this man done his stunt in the first place? I asked myself this question again and again. I had smelled liquor on his breath so maybe the ex bush pilot was half drunk and had an impulse to shake things up a bit for this greenhorn. Maybe, The point was that he hadn't prepared me for what was about to happen. He hadn't given me a choice. He had abused his power and had raped my will.

I couldn't find words to explain to others what had happened, or a way of expressing my shock and confusion. Mostly, I wanted to disguise my inner state from my children. I felt ashamed. I was the guy who had always taken risks, who had been accepted by Sandhurst, who had then stood up to his father and decided to go to University rather than the Army. I had always felt that I wasn't afraid of anything.

This said, it was hard to reconcile this self-image with the furtive creature who would wait until it was dark before slipping out of the house and heading over to the truck where he would hide out in the overhead camper. I started to see myself like Charles Laughton in the Hunchback of Notre Dame – ugly, deformed, unwilling to be seen in public.

One day, as I was experiencing a sizeable heart palpitation, I lay down and tried to put Claire Weekes's advice into practice. I breathed slowly, assured myself that the palpitation was 'only' nerves, and that I should face, accept, float and let time pass. As I was doing the latter, I began talking to my heart as if it was an old friend, and as I did so, I gently stroked that area of my body. I expressed gratitude to my heart for having the courage to bring me through so my trials and tribulations, *despite* the 'trickster' in my mind. Within minutes, the palpitations had ceased and my pulse had slowed down considerably. Many years later, I saw the correspondence between Weekes's words of wisdom and Buddhist philosophy, in particular the practice of tonglen. But there were other times that I felt I could not cope. A couple of times when I decided I couldn't handle the kids, I took them to Veronica's or Leah's house.

Leah was an older lady in her sixties who lived in a tiny apartment in a senior's complex. Like Veronica, Leah seemed both understanding and compassionate. Sometimes, she invited me over for a meal and one day she suggested that I accompany her to a 'Science of Mind' Group. The group was run by an elderly Englishman called Tim.

Tim had terminal cancer, as did another member of the group. Tim's daughter, Jane, sat beside a man, about my age, named Gordon. Jane's late husband had had Multiple Sclerosis, and now Jane was committed to caring for Gordon who was stricken with the same devastating disease. The philosophy of Science of Mind believed that God is not one thing, but rather an Energy Source of Infinite Intelligence present in everything in the Universe. This Source could be tapped into by affirmative prayer, a process in which one stated the desired outcome as if it had already happened. Personal responsibility was key and entailed human partnership with Infinite Intelligence to achieve success.

I found the people in this group to be open and honest. There was a sense that here was an atmosphere of humility and healing. One day, Jane gave me a book. It was called 'Letters Of A Scattered Brotherhood' and was a collection of inspirational writings by various anonymous authors. As I started reading it, I discovered that again and again the theme of Faith vs. Fear comes up. The writings were spiritual, not religious.

I needed to have faith that light would enter the darkness, or more importantly that I could choose to fill the darkness with light – the light of information, the light of knowing and trusting my essential inner goodness or Buddha nature.

I carried this book around with me and read it from cover to cover, again and again.

There were passages that I found incisive, beautiful, and uplifting. For example:

“Once there was a white bird with a blue bill and orange feet; it was neatly plumed and took joy in flying over waves. This bird was of the sea and lived in the far north certain seasons, and in flight took long journeys across continents to the cold again. When buffeted by winds, it followed its unerring instinct, rose high, straightened its wings and held to its course in safety, clear of all danger. It flew above contrary air currents, high and over great violences, held and protected by the instinct inherent in it.

So it is with the soul that is controlled by the self-conscious realization of its relation to the power of the Spirit in which it abides. The symbol of the bird suspended in horizontal flight, high above the tumults, the challenging fears and unreasonable panics, applies to times like these. Dark thoughts try to reach up and drag the bird from the sky, for it is the constant conflict between the outer and inner you. Spread your wings to the upcurrent and rise high above, serene and confident in that power which holds you in that high altitude.

You have the choice of this clear high impersonal yet loving peace, or the storms of human existence. Spread your wings straight and catch the first morning breeze of divine promise and hope, and be lifted into that high place where freed from the clutching of circumstance you can with a great heart give strength and surcease to those you love, to the world ... take your spirit and spread it forth like the wings of the bird and let it rise high and clear into the shining sun of faith.

Normally, my critical mind would have said 'but this is too simple, too mystical'. But now, it did seem just that simple. Whether or not there was a schism between 'good' and 'evil', there was no question that there were forces of creation and destruction. And there was choice, at least to the extent that your options had not been removed by someone or something. No matter what my state, internally or externally, I

could choose the darkness of fear or the light of faith. I began to see that faith was not just a fusty old religious concept. It was a human attribute, an internal resource that was there for a reason, a means to survival.

I had tried to understand my condition by delving through the Physician's bible, the Merck manual. I had searched for an explanation for the numbness in my right hand and leg and the experience of becoming icy cold so that sometimes it felt like I was sitting on a block of ice. Why did this coldness manifest in the lower half of my body up to around the belly button, almost as if there was a clear and consistent dividing line between cold and warm? The nearest I got to any self-diagnosis was a condition called 'conversion disorder'. Sometimes, I would ask Joan to feel my right leg to verify that it was 'objectively' cold and not just subjective imagination. But ruminating over what I read in Merck just served to stir up more doubt and fear.

'Letters of a Scattered Brotherhood' gave me a template that was simple and worked.

Again and again different passages would repeat the same message. We have an outer self and an inner self. Fear resides in the former, faith resides in the latter:

There is an outer ring of yourself surrounded by turbulence, chaos and anxiety; great moments swirling about, cosmic in potentiality. Within this ring is another circle outside of which are your responses to all these alarms and insistent shocks, excitements and dismays.

Inside this ring is another ring. This is a place where you sense your ignorances, your unawarenesses, your inadequacies. Here is where you are sorely tried, for this is your human self. And so these rings get smaller as you near the center where you find a place in you that longs for peace, calmness and spiritual understanding.

Finally there is the center which seems to the imagination within a very small circumference. Here is where you are, here is a place where you decide; here is where you are yourself. Most people seldom find it except in great moments; and yet when found and realized it encircles the universe. This is the quietness, this is the peace promised to those who seek.

Slowly, the confusion in my mind began to dissolve. Rather than a world of schism, paradox and contradiction, I began to see that there were options available to me. I was not helpless or powerless. I *could* choose faith over fear. I could trust that things would get better. I could believe that my mental and physical state would be healed.

Gradually, in my inner and outer world, meaning and purpose returned. I began to feel as if I had been reborn. I began to realize that I was going through a profound transformative experience, that the breakdown had, in some ways, been a breakthrough. I began to identify with the story of Icarus who had flown too near the sun in his arrogant pride and ambition, and who had burned and fallen as a result. But

this parable was counter-balanced by the story of the Phoenix where the ordeal by fire/fear can then become a process of regeneration.

I became increasingly aware that there were three areas in my life that I needed to work on, these being gratitude, humility and forgiveness. I recognized that the incident in the car after the urologist was the moment when the dam of anger against my father broke and I was able to feel some feelings of compassion and love for him in my heart and finally, ten years after he died, I was able to experience the first wave of genuine forgiveness.

I knew I had to learn more about forgiveness, how and when to engage it. I had a grudge list that was not helping anyone, least of all me. I needed to hold on to what I believed and let go of what had proved to be false in one way or another. I railed against material greed and inequality but had discovered in London that there were other kinds of greed, such as the greed for knowledge. Curiosity was good unless it became an obsessive addiction for more and more knowledge. Curiosity had led Icarus to fly too high and a quest for knowledge had persuaded Faust to sell his soul to the Devil. God had said to leave the tree of knowledge alone but Eve couldn't resist the temptation. I needed to acknowledge powers greater than mine, whether human or divine, and I needed to develop an attitude of humility and beware the arrogance of the ego. And rather than dwell on what I didn't have (whether money, friends, security, perfect health, etc), I needed to experience gratitude for what I did have, and to somehow ritualize that experience.

By Spring 1987, the blackness and swirling confusion began to be replaced by light and clarity. 'This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine' took on a much deeper significance, as did 'I once was blind and now I see'. I kept saying to myself, I am not The Source, Joan is not The Source. My mother gave birth to me but she is not the source of who I really am. There is something bigger than her or me or any other human being. It ceased to matter whether that 'something bigger' was Nature, or the Cosmos, God, Jesus, Allah or Buddha. They were all just different representations of the same thing, the Great Spirit.

Although I had not undergone a conversion to the religion of Christianity per se, I had gained fresh insights. In particular the Lord's Prayer came alive and resonant with wisdom. Every line had something to say. Rather than being mindlessly recited, like I'd always done in the past, I slowed everything down and really listened to the message.

'Our Father ...'

Who cared if it was 'Our Father' or 'Our Mother' – the point was we all had a Source that was larger than ourselves individually and collectively.

'Who art in Heaven'.

Heaven, as far as I was concerned, was what Letters of The Scattered Brotherhood referred to as the inner self. Heaven was intrinsic goodness. Heaven was our Buddha nature. We didn't have to go half way round the world to find it. We didn't have to take drugs or die to enter its gates. We didn't have to go to church and we didn't have to wait until we died to enter through its gates. It was there within, to be accessed at any time if we could only go beyond identification with roles, identities – the faces of the ego.

*Our Father/Mother who art in heaven
Hallowed be Thy name ...*

'Hallowed be Thy name' ...

I understood. Pay respect to all life forms around you, and feel humility in the face of that which is beyond Life and Death. Place your trust in that creative energy which is bigger than you, that Great Spirit which is our source and which unites us. I began to understand the meaning of the word 'worship' – when the highest respect becomes reverence. Pay respect, *revere* that which gave us birth, that which enabled us to experience Life. Worship the goodness/godness within as a way of letting the light shine and resisting the ego/serpent/devil/tempter-temptress. Worship as a means of keeping things in perspective, in balance, in the realm of humility. Worship didn't have to entail a deity whether in abstract or human form. For me, the reverence was directed towards the creative force behind life, nature and the cosmos.

Thy Kingdom come

Meaning, may the Spirit of goodness and light that we are born with in our inner self manifest, may it shine within us.

*Thy Will, be done**

As this passage from 'Letters of a Scattered Brotherhood puts it:

*"In quiet listen to the Spirit within you speak:
My will in thee is joy not sorrow
My will in thee is faith not fear
My will in thee is awareness of My love for thee
Let My will within thee be done."*

(* I had always heard this line recited as, 'Thy-will-be- done', intoned as if will was the future tense of 'be'. Then I realized that this didn't make sense. Rather, it should be, 'thy Will (pause), be done in heaven as it is in heaven')

In earth as it is in heaven

Meaning, may the Spirit manifest or 'come' to our life on the material level, the outer self.

Give us this day our daily bread

Meaning, may the Spirit ensure that we all have something to eat.

And forgive us our trespasses

Meaning, may the Spirit heal us from ways that we have wounded ourselves and others.

As we forgive them that trespass against us

And heal others from the ways in which they have wounded themselves and others.

For Thine is the Kingdom

The Spirit is where we come from and where we return to.

The power and the glory forever and ever, Amen

The ultimate power and wonder that knows no beginning or end.

Over the years, I came to believe in the cyclical view of the Cosmos, i.e. yes – there was a Big Bang (beginning apparently 13.82 billion years ago) but that followed a Big Crunch, which is what will happen again when our universe stops expanding.* (see footnotes on 'brane cosmology')

The garden of Eden was within. That particular tree and that serpent could and should be left alone because they were temptations appealing to acquisitive desire to have and to stray away from acceptance of the Spirit.

The choice of taking leave of the material level, of the outer self, and entering this garden, this inner temple was described again and again in 'Letters of a Scattered Brotherhood'.

It is really as if you were in a place which is overcrowded, like a tenement street, and dark, and you knew a secret door that opened into a garden where there was quiet and everything had a friendly feeling; even the flowers and leaves turned toward you and the sky was aglow with infinite refreshment, that feeling of complete renewal of your tired mind, your weary flesh, and your clogged spirit. Walk as you were enjoying a rose garden, hear the fountains of goodness and the birds of joy singing.

What an irony in the name 'ultra-light', given the two meanings of 'light'! I had needed a lot of light to show just how far I had strayed into a dark underworld.

The doors of perception (as Huxley called it) had been opened and suddenly, the garden was both within and without. I became aware, as I never had before, of the

exquisite beauty and extraordinary design and functioning of flowers, trees, patterns of light and colour, animals, insects – and people. I was in awe, and the gratitude I had been seeking came to me, I didn't need to search. The key was to surrender to the Spirit, and by doing so, become open to receiving impressions, ideas, feelings – whatever one wished to see, or hear, or feel, or be conscious of. The daylight was no longer harsh and over-bright but soft and embracing.

Piano improvisations came through me. I didn't need to 'will' them, or think about what I was going to play, or worry about whether it was going to be, or had been, 'good enough'.

Castaneda talked about seeing and '*seeing*'. I knew that what was happening was the latter – conceptual *seeing*, perceptual *seeing*, through and underneath the veil of illusion, of maya, being aware of intrinsic meaning.

As the Spring of 1987 blossomed, I knew I needed to have a place I could go to, away from the stress and painful memories, a place that I could continue this healing. In the Fall I started the Music Therapy program at Capilano College. I had just turned 40 and was returning as a student to a College at which I had been an Instructor 8 years earlier in my first year in B.C. I had broken through to a new life in London, and this seemed to be another important breakthrough.

* * *

The third time was different. It involved a return to the underworld and a long voyage that lasted six long years.

In 1994, Joan and I separated. The issue that finally drove us apart was one that concerned her mother. A few years earlier, Joan and I heard from Joan's sister that their mother had conveyed her concern that I might be molesting my daughter, Annie. I was shocked and let Joan and her mother know. Instead of an apology, Joan's mother denied that she had made such allegations (although Joan's sister insisted she had). Joan, for her part, while knowing that the allegation was a lie, didn't want to push her mother to make an apology.

I moved out and into a house on First Nations Land outside White Rock. The roller coaster ride continued. Despite equal responsibility for raising our kids and equal job opportunity, Joan took me to court for child maintenance. At the same time, the mother of Jasmine - my second daughter who had been born shortly before Annie – also took me to court.

My mother, who had a history of mental illness, was frail and suffering from paranoid delusions. My attempts to bring her to Canada had failed and instead I had committed myself to a yearly visit to Edinburgh. For many years, she had been dealing

with her loneliness and isolation by immersing herself in drawing and sketching scenes from her childhood, as well as vignettes of outdoor life.

In the beginning, my mother was reluctant to sketch because of feelings of inadequacy. Then, over the years, she gathered confidence as her opus continued to expand. In the end, her self-image had evolved from inferiority to grandiosity. "I want my art to be appraised by Southebys," she announced. I took her at her word and after she had selected her favourites, I took her portfolio to the Southebys office in Edinburgh. While saying it wasn't quite their thing, they pointed out that her work was 'folk art' and like a 'visual diary of daily street life in the city'. They suggested taking the portfolio to Edinburgh's Central Library where there was a gallery dedicated to local artists. I followed up and to my delight, they agreed to show a selection of my mother's sketches and coloured drawings. Secretly I think my mother was pleased although she continued to believe they had financial worth and should have been taken on by Southebys. Meanwhile my relations with my sister and brother deteriorated over issues concerning my mother, in particular the fact that they had got my mother to change her Will without consulting me.

The year before my mother died, at the age of 90, I took her in her wheel chair to Edinburgh Central Library to see an exhibition of her art work. It may not have been Southebys but at least all her creativity and productivity could finally get some recognition and appreciation.

In 1996, I married a Polish woman, only to get divorced a year later. The main issue had to do with my children. I was determined to give them a home but in the process, my new partner felt I was paying too much attention to them, and one or both of them felt I was too preoccupied with her.

Two years later, I was accused of 'personal harassment' by a colleague at Kwantlen College (I had become a qualified Music Therapist in 1989, but that same year had been offered a full-time position at Kwantlen, an offer that I felt I could not refuse). As in the case of Joan's mother, the accusation had no substance whatsoever and was a projection of a disturbed mind and indeed, a reflection of the gender war's hysteria about sexual and personal harassment. I countered with a 'personal harassment' grievance of my own.

After a lengthy and humiliating procedure, both grievances were dismissed. Ironically, I had been awarded a year's Educational Leave to develop ESL curricula and materials. I was happy to take the paid leave and have the opportunity to consolidate and simplify my approach to teaching beginner level ESL. I had always received excellent feedback from students and colleagues and I was excited to formalize the new materials, all of which had already been tested and proved successful in the classroom.

However, throughout the sabbatical, my anger about what had happened the previous year burned on inside me. There was a new grievance officer and I had met with him several times to pursue the possibility of action against the Administration. He confirmed that everyone thought the matter had been completely mishandled and that

my Director had been removed from her position. I told him that I wanted to write to the Board demanding an apology. He supported the idea although he pointed out that the Board would be concerned about my taking legal action. On return to the College in September of 2002, I sent off the letter to the Board and eventually received a carefully worded response that said the matter had been resolved. Sure enough – no apology. I felt disgusted and decided I'd had enough.

I took early retirement in December 2002.

Despite the spiritual insights and growth of the period following the ultralight incident, my life at this time felt like a never-ending series of battles, most of which I was fighting on the defensive.

In 2002, I was asked by Margaret, a Native Indian friend to do a series of paid articles on 'Mental Health and Wellness in Aboriginal Communities'. I welcomed the opportunity. I had given therapy to mental health consumers (the correct term). I had received therapy. Based on my experiences, I believed deeply that there needed to be much improved public education in order to promote understanding and remove stigmas.

I had worked for Margaret at the Native Indian Center in Montreal. I had lived on the Rez for twelve years. I knew how the First Nations had been abused, how they had suffered, and how there were desperate mental health problems in communities across Canada. The most prominent of these problems was the high rate of suicide. After many months of research and writing, the articles appeared in the Spring 2003 (vol. 26) edition of 'In Touch', the quarterly periodical of NIICHO (National Indian & Inuit Community Health Representatives Organization).

The next three years marked a gradual descent into depression and despair. My pension from Kwantlen was \$1100/month of which \$500 went on land lease rent. In 2003, I tried to live off this amount. I had received an inheritance from my mother's estate, which had initially enabled me to buy my house. It had cost \$30,000 – this amount being for the house but not the land.

I spent a further \$12,000 in payment to a company called the Invention Submission Corporation. While at Kwantlen, I had devised an aid to learning English. I called it 'The Grammar Wheel'. It was completely original and consisted of 3 revolving wheels which could be manipulated in such a way as to produce positive and negative statements (subject-verb-object), and 'WH' questions (what, when, where, why, who etc.). However, ultimately it was not granted a U.S. patent because, according to a Patent Clerk in New York (who spoke very poor English), "wheels had already been invented."

I spent at least \$20,000 upgrading my mouldy and run-down house. This involved a new roof, insulation and a music studio for my son Ben who was developing into a fine musician. He and his friends needed a space where they could practice and record. The rest of the inheritance went into savings.

On the one hand, I *did* have money in the bank, on the other I knew this money would disappear fast if I didn't live off my income. There were no public utilities on the Reserve. Water came from a well and we each had to pay to get the septic tank cleaned out once in a while.

Meanwhile, in 2001, Joan's mother had died in Toronto. Her husband had been a doctor and Joan's inheritance was considerable. The following year, Joan purchased 19 acres of land upon which she built a house. My level of resentment grew and grew. I was resentful about what had happened with her mother. I was resentful about being forced to pay child maintenance even though I had joint custody and had always looked after the children 50% of the time. I had been a popular and highly respected Instructor at Kwantlen for 12 years and I was hurt and angry about the way in which my character and actions had been called into question. I was told that the College had made a mistake in allowing the Grievance to be heard in the first place and that such a thing could never happen again as 'thanks' to my case, changes had been made such a grievance procedure could not be set in motion without first being screened for some kind of evidence. Cold comfort.

In April of 2003, Revenue Canada informed me that I owed them \$1500. They explained that I had claimed Ben as a dependent and shouldn't have done. Given that I had joint custody and had been looking after Ben well over half of the time, I was outraged. I didn't understand the reasoning and, as a matter of fact, still don't. When Annie and Ben told me of their trip with Joan to New York and their visits to Joan's land on Galiano, my resentment grew to the point where I started to become increasingly concerned about how it might spill over into my relations with my kids.

Throughout 2003, I worked on editing videos that I had recorded over the years of family events. In September, I presented a 2 DVD 'Family Album' to Joan, Annie and Ben. In November, I met up with a Music Therapy friend. He said he was concerned about me. He told me I looked "desperate". However, he said he could probably offer me work once in a while as an Entertainer at the Purdy Pavilion of the UBC Hospital. Meanwhile, I had approached another Music Therapist that I knew well, and she also said that she could probably find some work for me. I was grateful. I had to get out of the house. I had to augment my income. And I needed something to boost my self-esteem.

At the end of the year, Roy Slakov announced that he was retiring. I had been seeing him once a month for almost fifteen years. The essence of his feedback to me over the years was as follows:

*You are obsessive-compulsive in that you have to feel you're right
You have an open mind but a rigid character
You are a perfectionist
You should ease up on yourself
You should be less self-important*

*You shouldn't be so driven
You should give up pleasing others
You should give up the expectation that people understand all of you
You should speak from your child more, less from your intellect
Don't let other people's denials effect your sense of reality
(e.g. if someone else says, "it's all your fault", it doesn't mean that it was all
your fault)
Understand that family pattern of denials can be crazy-making
You should trust your own perceptions
You can't change others. It is crazy-making for you to expect or demand that
of yourself. Surrender to failure.
You have a hard time of letting anything go*

*It's OK to be depressed. Recognize it for what it is, i.e. it is not you,
it is the state / voice of depression.
You lose yourself when you become over-involved
You have fragile self-esteem (fear of not 'measuring up')
Key script from parents: things never good enough
It's OK to protect your vulnerability*

There was a lot of truth in what he said. What he didn't mention was that I was driven to seek out the facts, to expose the truth. I was beginning to get more deeply into Buddhist philosophy and practice, and had started attending a Sri Lankan temple in South Surrey.

I started seeing a new psychiatrist. Her name was Dr. Lyn MacBeath. I had liked Roy Slakov and I liked Lyn MacBeath. She had been recommended by Slakov and share with him an eclectic and unorthodox approach. One day she asked me for my astrological sign. I told her I had seven signs in Scorpio, including Sun, Moon and Ascendant. A month later she showed me my chart. She said that it was interesting that my Houses showed that I was strong and clear in my values, but confused in my identity. It sounded pretty accurate to me.

Another time, I told her how I had had some remarkable experiences with marijuana, all of which had felt therapeutic in one way or another. She told me that she also believed in the potential of 'weed' and she referred me to the Compassion Club, a medical marijuana dispensary. I rejoiced once again that I had been led to the garden of Eden, otherwise known as British Columbia.

I also liked the fact that unlike many therapists, she looked at the social context. She countered pathologizing and labelling by considering the larger picture. As my states of depression became more frequent, I asked her if she thought I was unipolar or bipolar. Her reply was that my depressions were "family related". When I told her that I always seemed to get insecure in 'triangle' situations, she said, "Ian, the issue is

not triangles. The issue is that you don't trust women and that's OK. You have reason not to."

That was a powerful statement and something I needed to hear, especially from a woman. What she said was true but I had never been able to admit it to myself, let alone to others. The experiences with Lesley and Ellie, and then more recently, Joan's mother and my female colleague at Kwantlen, had led to much soul searching, none of which had left me with an attitude of acknowledging and validating that my distrust was deep. All my life, it had been the opposite. How many times had I heard the phrase "I don't trust men" from a woman and how few (if any) had I heard "I don't trust women" from a man. From my parents' generation – maybe.

In my youth I had certainly heard the phrase "never trust a woman", but not subsequently from a baby boomer. I had lived and worked predominantly with women, many of who echoed the cultural norm that 'men could not be trusted.' That some of these same women would be attracted to macho, untrustworthy 'bad boys' I could understand. I had been a huge fan of Janis Joplin who seemed sassy but real, unlike Madonna later on who seemed neither to me. Maybe the 'realness' had to do with the willingness and courage of showing the heart's vulnerability. In any event, it bothered me that some women would talk the talk but not walk the walk. As to why I let myself get involved with women who had a distinct dark side, or why I would project my dark side onto them, or why I would continue to do either or both of these things even after painful experience those were issues I was working on, and still am.

Probably my biggest source of resentment concerned our 'landlords', the Federal Government's Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (INAC). At the beginning of 2004, the land-lease residents of the Semiahmoo Reserve were presented with a new lease, one which re-iterated that at any time, a decision could be made to develop the land, in which case, we would have to remove our houses at our own expense. There would not be any compensation. In addition, they informed us that the Government were going to instigate thorough house inspections, and anything that was sub-standard would have to be repaired. The word on the Rez was that the Band wanted to develop the land and that it was only a matter of time before we would be kicked out.

At first I couldn't believe that such a scenario was possible. Surely, as Canadian citizens, we had some rights – under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms if nothing else – apparently not. Apparently, the non-native residents had no rights whatsoever. It was just another thing to fuel an already burning sense of outrage. I became determined that I would do whatever it took to fight this policy, and that if push came to shove, I was prepared to chain myself to the big oak tree at the foot of my garden. I started attending meetings of concerned residents. These were meetings of non-natives *and* natives. Needless to say, the aboriginal occupants had their own on-going grievances with the Government.

And then there was Ben and his friends. Needless to say, he was delighted with the finished Studio. It had been built by my friend and master handyman, Garry – with my assistance. I had wanted Ben and Co's active involvement but it never happened. They were at that age, 18-19, finishing high school, awash with the praise they were getting for their band, immersed in sexual exploration with eager girl friends. They expected to get but hadn't yet understood the connection between 'get' and 'give'.

It was really my fault. I could and should have set clearer limits about where their space ended and mine started, as well as volume levels, etc. It was just another thing that was triggering victim feelings. I had gone from helping victims to feeling like one myself. Too many shocks, too little stability.

One day, Ben called me and told me that his girl friend had cheated on him. He was completely distraught and I drove into Vancouver to pick him up. As he sobbed on the way back, I wished that I could have taken his pain. I knew what he was feeling – I had been there myself too many times. I had a sudden insight into the meaning of the Crucifixion. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Forget about faith, belief, and earning a ticket into heaven; what I understood at that moment in my heart was the fact that love can be so strong that you can want to sacrifice your own well-being so that another won't have to suffer. Sounds so 'obvious' when heard through the mind, but in the same way that I hadn't previously Heard or understood the 'Lord's Prayer', or later Buddha's Noble Truths, it took an experience such as this to spark the insight.

* * *

Another ongoing drama at this time was the fact that my dearly beloved dog Rusty, who had been my constant companion for over 12 years, was coming to the end of his days. He had been incontinent for a while but was now pooping inside the house as well. His back legs barely had the strength and flexibility to get him off the ground. Rusty was suffering and me along with him. I knew I had to deal with the inevitable. I was going to have to put him down. But I kept delaying the decision. I ordered a special rear legs-and-butt harness from California. It was only when I tried it on and discovered that in order to get it to work, I had to hoist Rusty up in a forceful way, that I knew the time had come. I summoned the vet, went out and bought a case of beer and a pack of cigarettes, and with Annie and Ben present, held Rusty in my arms for the last time. I had experienced grief before but nothing like this.

* * *

Dr. MacBeath had suggested marihuana but had also prescribed Prozac. It had helped, but the bouts of depression were getting more regular and more intense. Rusty had been far more therapeutic than any drug could be. He had helped give shape and meaning to my day. He got me out of the house. He allowed me to inhabit my caring self. Above all, for over twelve years, I had enjoyed the absolute loyalty that only a beloved dog can give. Now that he was gone, I felt lonely. Occasionally, my friend Lynne came over, and we would share 'empty nest' feelings. The role of parent and animal care-taker had all but been stripped away.

Roy Slakov had said, "remember Ian, it's OK to be depressed. Recognize it for what it is. It is the voice of depression. It is not you." Easier said than done. What was 'me'? The everlasting question. Outside of my roles, what was this 'I'? There was Ian the young cellist and sportsman from Edinburgh. There was the youth who achieved much at boarding-school. There was the rebel who defied his father and refused to enter the Army. There was the 'not so bright' student who blossomed. There was the anarcho-syndicalist proletarian who worked in factories, warehouses, loading bays and restaurant kitchens. There was the committed teacher, the musician who had been classically trained on the 'cello, who became a blues pianist, who aspired to be a jazz pianist, and the writer who had written three plays, one of which had been produced.

Then there was the man who had supported feminism in many different ways, but who had grown angry at the reverse sexism and entitlements that were an increasingly visible feature of western society. There was the music therapist who had been working as an entertainer. There was the political being who valued public resources like parks and libraries and mass transit, and was disgusted at so many offensive aspects of corporate, capitalist society and whose heroes had been and still were people like Gandhi, Orwell, Emma Goldman, Anais Nin, Jonathon Kozol, Paulo Freire, Michael Moore and Naomi Klein – and anyone who understood how private ownership perpetuated a class system, inequality and inequity.

Was 'I' all of these, or none of these. It was only as I started reading Pema Chodron, Ezra Bayda and Eckhart Tolle, that I began to understand the ways in which we create identities from roles, and how we then make the mistake of thinking that this is who we really are. These 'me's' were composites of my personality but the essential person was simpler and deeper than my personality/personalities.

What did my voice of depression tell me? That 'I' was a failure. That I was going blind like my father. That I was going deaf and what used to sound mellow now sounded harsh. That there seemed to be a bottomless well of pain and anger deep inside. That I was going to lose my house after spending so much time, money and energy making it into the home I'd always wanted. That I had lost my beloved companion, Rusty. That I hadn't realized my potential as a writer or musician. That I had nothing to offer. That I didn't know how to return to the blessed state I had been in after the ultralight breakdown.

It felt as if everything was crumbling, within and without. I felt extremely vulnerable and very afraid of offending people. One day in November 2004, those feelings were so overpowering that I told Annie and Ben, who were visiting, that I had to leave. I felt 'unfit' to be in their company and very anxious that I would do or say something 'wrong'.

Fortunately, I could still work. I had occasional music therapy and entertainment engagements and I had been asked to give workshops in my area of speciality, 'Using Music to Teach ESL', at Vancouver Community College (VCC). But my anxiety levels were becoming so high that I would insulate my nervous system with tranquilizers, weed or alcohol in preparation for the abrupt transition between lonely obscurity and being the centre of attention and the person in charge of a group of students.

Ever since my two previous breakdowns, I had become aware of how, under certain circumstances, I could undergo a rapid loss of confidence to the point where I felt I was a nobody, a vegetable, a primitive invertebrate in a state of paralysis. In my ongoing self-education about how the mind worked, I had read about the function of the amygdala. It is the amygdala (or 'amygdalae' as there is a right and left part) that functions to control fear responses (e.g. freezing or escape responses), autonomic nervous system responses (e.g. changes in blood pressure and regularity of heart beat or arrhythmia), the secretion of stress hormones, and the arousal and formation of emotional memories.

I had experienced all of these symptoms and I certainly had deep and traumatic emotional memories. I became so certain that this diagnosis was relevant that I started referring to episodes of sudden loss of confidence or 'freezing' as an 'amygdala attack'. The literature on the amygdala also mentioned that research has shown that Buddhist monks who did compassion meditation (*tonglen*) had been able to modulate their amygdala and retain their sense of social connectedness. This also made sense to me as I read what Pema Chodron had to say about *tonglen*.

In January of 2005, there was a cold snap and the pump and pipes froze. Then it turned out that the pump had cracked and was useless. As on the previous occasion, exactly the same thing had happened and I'd had to replace the pump. For several months I'd hauled water. This had entailed regular visits to a gas station where I would fill two large plastic containers. Back at the house, I would ration out the water to flush the toilet, wash the dishes, and serve other purposes such as cooking, cleaning etc. I felt like a Luddite. Screw technology – at least with my own manpower I didn't need to be anxious about the next water crisis. Eventually, however, I gave in and bought a new pump for \$300. My friend Garry had advised me that I also needed an insulated pump house. What Garry said I did. Suddenly. Life was so much easier. Flowing water!! How everyone took it for granted.

But for it to happen again! This time because I had forgotten to turn on the lamp that hung above the pump and kept it warm. And it wasn't just the pump. The

foot valve in the well needed replacing and possibly even the line from the well to the pump. And then there was the problem of the well water, which had already undergone Government inspection and had been deemed unfit for consumption (unless boiled). I knew that it was only a matter of time before I would have to spend close to a \$1000 for a holding tank close to the house. Meanwhile, it was back to water hauling.

Gradually I was beginning to feel victimized with its accompanying thought form, 'why me Lord?' I remembered the initial phase following the ultralight incident where I had read Harold Kushner's book 'Why Bad Things Happen To Good People'. The bad things just seemed to keep coming. Ben was told that he had a growth in one of his ears, which would have to be removed. This would involve removing the eardrum. Not what a musician wants to hear. Annie learned that she had Crohn's disease after a fistula spawned a huge abscess on her bum. Joan had a fall down the stairs at her house on Galiano that had smashed her left hand and wrist. It took many years of rehabilitation before she could play the flute again.

In any case, Kushner's book, in my opinion, hadn't provided any satisfactory answer to the question he posed, other than God is not all powerful and cannot control who suffers and who does not. If you were a fundamental Christian or a devout Muslim, there was meaning in the moral universe. Do good and you go to Heaven. Do bad and go to Hell. Or in this life, as a Christian you could be redeemed for your bad actions by seeking forgiveness. If you were a Hindu or a Buddhist, moral justice came in the form of karma and rebirth.

Critics of Kushner make the point that the Jewish view postulated suffering as a part of the process of self-development. They further reasoned that faith is part of a growth process that can take away, if not the pain, at least some of the sting.

Then there were the New Agers; like the ones who said, "oh Ian, how wonderful, you're going through a transformative experience". In retrospect, yes – these major life challenges were transformative, and yes, you could call them 'spiritual emergencies', breakthroughs, rebirths. That all had meaning but still didn't provide solace for acute psychological and emotional pain, nor help explain why the 'bad thing' had to happen in the first place.

Despite my involvement with Buddhism, I was yet to fully understand or accept Buddha's First Noble Truth, that Life was full of *dukkha* (suffering) and our relentless search to avoid it just made matters worse. In other words, if bad things happen, accept it as part of Life and don't get hung up on the self-righteousness of whether or not you are a 'good' person. Secondly, it was not clear to me that Buddha was *not* saying 'Life IS suffering'. He was simply saying that suffering is a part of Life and if it happens, accept it. And don't ruminate on how much suffering one has compared to others. However, later when I did grasp this profound truth, I retained the sociological perspective that differences in wealth and living conditions contributed greatly to one's well-being, or lack of.

Despite the problems, some good things were happening. In the musical realm, I had been getting together on a regular basis with a colleague from Kwantlen College who had become a friend. Warren Bourgeois was a Philosophy instructor who knew what suffering was. He had written a book entitled 'Persons'. The book was an enquiry into how do we define a person. And based on this, when is a person no longer a person? This subject linked to the two most contested issues in medical ethics – abortion and euthanasia. The latter was a matter that had led to great grief in Warren's life in that his first wife had been stricken with multiple sclerosis. She was also a Philosopher with a brilliant mind. She had made it clear to Warren that if she ever reached the stage of not being able to function at a basic level of 'personhood', she did not want to be kept alive artificially and indefinitely. On one level, Warren's book was an account of how her (and his) will was thwarted by both the legal system and her parents' wishes. The direct implication of this for Warren was that for years before his wife finally died, much of his time and energy was spent in looking after her, visiting her, being with her – the 'her' that Warren would say was no longer her in any meaningful way.

Warren and I had worked up some of our favourite songs and with our harmonies, my piano and his harmonica, we had got good enough to want to share our music in public. We started going to the Wired Monk coffee house in Crescent Beach. Ben and his musician friends had made this their performing venue and, given their appeal, had attracted and supported other musicians as well as a growing number of interested spectators.

This also gave me the chance to play with Ben. We performed as a duo and then Ben joined Warren and I so we could be a trio, with Ben on drums or guitar.

I also continued regular practice on the piano and could see the progress in my playing. The transition from Blues pianist to Jazz pianist was evolving, and that was exciting. I decided that what was missing in The Studio was an acoustic piano. For many years, I had coveted the Yamaha U3 piano as the instrument of my dreams. I started checking out the market price for a second hand model in Craig's List. I discovered that was anywhere between \$4000 and \$5000. One day, an ad. for a Yamaha U3 not far from White Rock, caught my eye. I went to see it. Perhaps as a reaction to hauling water and trying to live off \$1100 a month (\$600 after land lease rent), I decided to take the agreed upon \$4500 out my savings

It was only about a month later, after the piano had been moved into The Studio, that one day in September of 2006, an event happened that was similar to the Ultralight in terms of the shock and disorientation that followed. Warren, Ben and I were playing at the Wired Monk. The word had spread that 'Ben and his Dad' were doing a once monthly gig and the place was full. Half way through the first set, and without being aware of what he was doing, Warren pointed his microphone at the speakers. Suddenly, there was a screaming feedback blast. I was directly in front of the speakers. I reeled in shock and instinctively put my hands to my ears.

The next day, I realized that my hearing had altered drastically. The first thing I noticed was a constant ringing in both ears, although it seemed as if it was located in the centre of my head. Then I noticed that certain sounds had become amplified and harsh in quality. For example, the sound of metal cutlery in the sink or of plates clanging together was brutal. The real shock came when I played my new piano. Instead of the wonderful tone of the Yamaha U3 that I had been waiting so long to enjoy, there was a brittle, metallic sound that was cuttngly invasive and unpleasant.

I hoped and prayed that this state would be temporary. I deluded myself at times that the constant inner drone was fading. I returned to the piano and played in different styles and at different tempos and volumes. I experimented with the volume levels of the TV and CD player. Everything had changed. I found I could not make out the dialogue some of the time on TV programs. One minute the voices were too soft and indistinct, the next moment the music track would be too loud.

When I was a boy, I had some kind of premonition that I would be blind when I was old (this was before I knew my father had glaucoma, and of course well before I was told I had inherited the same disease). But my sense of hearing had always been so keen, and had brought me so much pleasure in its faithful reception of the many shades and nuances of musical sound, that I had taken it for granted that this was the most developed and the most trustworthy of my five senses and one that would serve me all my life.

I couldn't believe or accept that my hearing had been permanently damaged. But when I saw an audiologist and was given hearing tests at St. Paul's Hospital. I was told that I had three conditions that were unlikely to change. The ringing in the ears was tinnitus. The amplification effect was called hyperacusis and the inability to make out softer sounds was due to upper end hearing loss in both ears. I was also told that acute tinnitus, while in the shock of first experience, was akin to being in an anxiety state. These conditions were not psychosomatic or a tricks of the nerves.

I was devastated. I didn't want to go near the piano. I stopped performing with Warren and Ben at The Wired Monk. I didn't want to listen to music or watch TV. The worst thing of all was the tinnitus. I had heard about this condition before (Joan's mother had complained of it) and had not been able to imagine a sound in your head that would not stop - ever. But that is what it was. When the realization set in that I could do nothing to turn this sound off, or to turn the volume down, I became anxious that the constant high pitched ringing would drive me crazy.

I began to realize that this was a huge challenge for my meditation practice. As long as I remained focused, or attached, to the unwanted sound, I would suffer in my obsessive desire to be rid of it. I also realized that if 'I' identified with the sound as 'me', I would be condemning myself to constant frustration, anxiety and despair.

I gradually became aware that my consciousness was free to choose what to be aware of, what to place in the foreground and what to relegate to the background. At first this seemed impossible. The tinnitus was just so loud and so intrusive, like the sound of a radio's static when in between stations. But over the next weeks and

months, I gradually transitioned from a feeling that I was being controlled by the tinnitus, to developing an ability to tune in to stimuli other than the constant ringing.

Another choice that I kept coming back to again and again, was that of being concerned with/attached to/stuck in *feelings* as opposed to choosing to couple one's consciousness with *perceptions*. Writing was a 'cool medium' (as McLuhan would say), one in which I could become a witness to either perceptions or feelings – one in which my nervous system could remain in a stable state. Music and the performing stage, on the other hand, pushed and pulled me into an emotional realm of expectation, anxiety, hope, despair, excitement and the full palette of sensations and emotions.

As states of depression began to coalesce into a more chronic condition, my will and my spirit struggled to keep my head above water. I tried to become aware of any ways of doing or being that seemed to counter depression. I realized the wisdom of Buddhist philosophy that urged acceptance and observance of whatever was 'arising' in the here and now. And if that was depression, then I needed ways to care for myself in that state. Becoming the perceptive witness to the voice of depression seemed essential. Throughout my life I had learned and relearned that facing problems was not my problem, being able to feel and show vulnerability was not a problem as far as I was concerned. The real problem was that I would lower my defences in situations in which I would have been wiser to keep them up. Sometimes I felt I was being a hero for being so open. More often, I knew somewhere that I was being a fool and courting trouble. On occasion I would recall that Ellie had once called me ingenuous, i.e. artlessly frank

Another way of caring for myself was one that most Buddhists would not approve of. There is no question that since starting to smoke marijuana on a regular basis (always just a few puffs at a time), I had experienced again and again therapeutic effects. Weed seemed to affect my brain chemistry in such a way that I felt relief from oppressive or depressive feelings. It was like a layer of insulation that kept the amygdala at bay. It helped me *see* things, both externally (perceptions) and internally (conceptions **and** imagination, convergent thinking **and** divergent thinking). Weed helped me to see options, assess them, choose from amongst them, and act on my decision. It helped get me out of my 'brown study' and get active. I kept a 'Weed Journal' and there was little, if any, reporting of negative experiences.

In addition to Pema Chodron and books like 'When Things Fall Apart', Ezra Bayda's 'Zen Heart', I read Eckhart Tolle's 'The Power of Now'. What Tolle said about the 'pain body' resonated profoundly. Here are some of Tolle's points:

- *The pain body is there because of certain things that happened in the past. It is the living past in you, and if you identify with it, you identify with the past.*

- *Don't let the mind use the pain to create a victim identity. Feeling sorry for yourself and telling others your story will keep you stuck in suffering.*
- *Learn to disidentify with the mind. **You are the watcher not the thinker***
- *A sense of not being good enough is another aspect of emotional pain that is an intrinsic part of the egoic mind. If it is unconscious, it will be felt as intense craving, wanting and needing.*
- *Unease, anxiety, tension, stress, worry – all forms of fear – are all caused by **too much future** and not enough presence.*
- *Guilt, regret, resentment, grievances, sadness, bitterness are all forms of non-forgiveness and are caused by **too much past** and not enough presence.*
- *When your deeper sense of self is derived from Being, when you are free from 'becoming' as a psychological need, neither you nor your happiness depends on the outcome, and so there is freedom from fear. (my emphasis)*

There are many levels of 'knowing'. On one level, I'd known what Tolle was talking about for years. The most obvious example would be piano improvisation. If I stayed in the present, without expectations or negative thinking ('I can't improvise like I used to'), or letting the conceptual jungle of jazz theory choke any spontaneity, then I could surrender to the moment, and trust the flow of whatever came out. I knew that depression was tied to the past just as anxiety was hooked to the future. But Tolle put things so clearly. He simplified and tied things together so well. Finally having a way of seeing 'I' (a subject) as *the witness* and 'me' being the repository of the ego with its roles, stories, identities and attachments was very helpful. All that pain-body stuff, that's not who you really are. It became easier to centre myself around consciousness (perceptions) rather than feelings. It helped to see myself as the open blue sky and not the clouds that were forever changing, like one's state of mind. Like Dr. Claire Weekes, Tolle helped me see how to apply practical knowledge in a way that was both elucidating and healing.

I knew that at the heart of my depressive states was shame, despair and anger that I was never 'good enough'. But the other side of that coin was a compensatory hidden belief that 'I was too good'. I was the good boy who had been honest and hard-working and who had values and principles and had stuck by them. And because of that, I had taken the accusations of others to heart, had been deeply wounded, had woven those strands into my very dense pain-body, and then beaten myself up with regularity to make matters still worse.

* * *

At the end of 2006, Annie had discovered she was pregnant. She had come to me in a state of distress. After a week of being torn apart, she had decided to have an abortion. Annie was grateful for my love and support and the event, however awful, brought us closer together.

However, despite this, I couldn't face the family at Christmas so I dropped off my presents at Joan's place and went back to my 'retreat'. On Boxing Day, I went to the Buddhist Temple on 64th Avenue. As usual, I was the only Caucasian amidst a throng of Sri Lankans. They were having a commemoration service for the victims of the huge tsunami of the previous year. Feeling like I didn't belong, I was about to leave, when a young man touched my arm and beckoned for me to stay. I whispered to him that I didn't understand Sinhalese. He whispered back that he would translate. In the midst of my loneliness, I was touched. I was reminded of all the third world students that I had taught English to over many years at Kwantlen. I had seen them arrive in this country with their souls intact, and then, as in Margaret Atwood's chapter on immigrant literature in 'Survival', I had seen how their openness and trust had often become guarded as they came to terms with the coolness of Canada and Canadians. In the temple, I was in a Sri Lankan community and they had welcomed me. I could have been in their country. I departed with my spirits lifted. I was deeply grateful

Things continued to deteriorate in 2007. This was a slow, gradual breakdown – unlike the previous two. The psychiatrists didn't like to use the word breakdown anymore. Dr. Slakov had said that my condition in the months following the Ultralight incident was an 'Anxiety State'.

There were three incidents within the space of one year that brought on acute anxiety and panic and reflected my increasingly confused state of mind. The first was one night in Vancouver. I had driven Ben into town to do a gig. Later, when it was time to leave, I couldn't turn the key in the ignition. Then I discovered that I had inserted my post office box key by mistake and that it was jammed. As I tried and failed to either turn it or extract it, I felt a rising sense of panic. Eventually, I borrowed Ben's cell phone and was fortunate to be able to locate a locksmith. An hour or so later, \$120 out of pocket and very shaky, we were on our way.

The next time was also while attending one of Ben's gigs in Vancouver. I had parked the car in a side street not far from Main. I was concerned about the road conditions. It had been snowing, it was misty and there was black ice on the roads. Two hours later, Ben finished up and I went to fetch the Suzuki to load up his drum kit. I was dumbfounded when the car was nowhere to be seen. I began to question where I had left it. Maybe it had been stolen. Anxiety increased and I began to panic. I returned to the club and asked Ben to help me look for it. Fortunately, Annie and her boyfriend Mike were also there. All four of us set off to search, Ben and I going one way, and Annie and Mike the other. About five minutes later, Ben's cell phone rang. It was Annie saying that they had found the car.

My relief was short lived as Ben then asked me if I would drive him to his girlfriend's house in Richmond. I should have said no. The roads were dangerous, the visibility was bad, I didn't know the route, and my anxiety level was at red alert. There was also the fact that the glaucoma in my right eye had been gradually lessening my ability to see in the dark.

Somehow I got Ben to his destination. Then at 2.30 a.m. I had to drive the 30 kms to White Rock. The trip was an exercise in deep breathing as a conscious attempt to ward off hyperventilation, possible panic attacks, and heart palpitations. In addition, I utilized techniques I had learned in the aftermath of the Ultralight experience, whether reciting the Lord's Prayer or beating my chest like a gorilla – trying to loosen the knot of tightness and frozen energy in my chest. Underlying all of that was my mantra – Claire Weekes' formula for how to deal with the symptoms of sensitized nerves: FACE – ACCEPT – FLOAT – LET TIME PASS.

It was about how to migrate from a temporal dimension to a spatial dimension. It was about how to exit the psychological time that was the domain of anxiety and panic – how to avoid the rumination of 'what if' whether applied to the past or the future.

It also helped to go from the verbal realm (and that included the inner verbalization of thoughts) to the realm of images – whether outer or inner. In my attempts to breathe 'normally', I had tried to analyze what, in my case, normal was. I had come to the conclusion that my natural, relaxed breathing could be described as a slow count to 3 on the in-breath followed by a count of 6 on the outbreath, then a little pause before the cycle repeated itself. It had helped me to visualize the rhythm as a figure of 8 loop. I could use this information and this image to adjust quickened, shallow breathing to an approximation of the unregulated cycle.

The worst of these high anxiety states took place in June 2007. I drove to Redwood Park for what was meant to be a brief walk in an attempt to get my energy somewhat unstuck. I wandered along trails that I knew and then on a whim, took a trail that I thought would circle me back to my starting point. As the trail got narrower, I didn't worry at first as I was sure I would soon hit the main trail. Then the trail petered out and I was in increasingly dense undergrowth, consisting of fallen trees, broken branches and rotting vegetation. I had gone far enough that there was no point turning back, especially because, as I kept reminding myself, Redwood Park was not that big. It didn't make sense that I could get lost. But I could feel my level of anxiety rising. I had recently got orthotics because I had a reoccurring ankle injury which was due to pronation. However, on this occasion, I had set off wearing only a pair of sandals.

It was very slow progress, clambering over and through tangled thickets of branches, stumbling as my feet sank through several feet of moss and wet leaves before feeling the reassurance of firm ground. I fell several times and skinned my legs. Then my sandals came off. I sat there in the rotting undergrowth. What if my sandals broke? The strap on the right one was already broken and held together with black electrician's

tape. I began to feel the familiar symptoms of a panic attack coming on – racing heartbeat, hot flashes, constricted breathing, dizziness, right leg numbness, and a sense of terror about needing to escape and not losing control. What if I broke an ankle? What if I had a heart attack? That wasn't so far-fetched; my doctor had said that heart problems could be as a result of anxiety, and I was on medication for high blood-pressure. And there was no-one around, no-one that could answer a distress call, and still no sign of a clearing let alone a trail – a literal case of not being able to see the wood for the trees.

Eventually, after what seemed like an eternity, I saw a clearing and knew that I would be OK. Thirty-five years earlier, I had been the top cadet in tackling the Royal Marines Assault Course at Pirbright in Surrey (U.K.) – back in the days where I felt I had no fear of anything. I took those kind of challenges in my stride. That's why I had been selected as 'officer material'. Now, as I shakily drove back, I felt like a frightened little boy, grateful that my right ankle had held up and that I hadn't succumbed to a panic attack. On the other hand, I felt it would be too embarrassing to tell anyone of my experience.

* * *

Buddhism has been described as an advanced psychology of the mind, both in terms of analysis, maintenance, development and healing. The more I read and practiced working with different techniques, the more I became intrigued. My teachers were Pema Chodron and Ezra Bayda. In answering the question 'why do we meditate?', Pema listed 5 things:

- (1) *steadfastness: the willingness to stay with the experience of the moment whatever that might be (like training a dog to 'stay')*
- (2) *clear seeing: let thoughts come and go with no judgments to enable a compassionate relationship with who we are at this moment*
- (3) *gradually gain more courage to experience emotional distress and accept its energy, rather than escape into thought*
- (4) *attention to this very moment: just 'being here' without escaping into 'doing', thinking, fantasizing, etc.*
- (5) *gradually gain more equanimity: the ability to say 'no big deal' without getting entangled in the drama and story lines of the ego-centred 'self'.*

As mentioned before, I learned that Buddhists differentiated pain and suffering. Buddha's '4 Noble Truths' were making the point that although (1) Life is full of pain and suffering (*dukkha* - inevitable and so should be accepted), that (2) pain only turns into

suffering (i.e. being stuck in the pain) through grasping and attachment (*samudaya*), and that (3) cessation of suffering (*nirodha*) is attainable through understanding the truth of impermanence, and gaining further insight and compassion by following (4) the 8-fold path (*marga*)

Specifically, for me this meant not blaming myself or others if things went wrong. And this was where the Buddhist teachings overlapped with 'Letters of a Scattered Brotherhood', Claire Weekes and Eckhart Tolle. In order to not suffer unduly, one had to let go of the pain, fear or anger. Things change so move on. Learn to forgive yourself and others. Learn not to measure your self-worth by comparing what you 'have' to what others have.

Understanding and compassion were what was needed. And to this end, there was 'Vipassana' meditation and 'Tonglen' meditation. Vipassana meditation meant to see things as they really are, by slowing down the mind so as to be able to focus on just one thing, e.g. breathing, a candle flame. Tonglen, on the other hand, was a heart-centred meditation that involved practicing compassion for ourselves, and others, by breathing in negative energy (accepting it for what it is), and then breathing out positive energy. We are the vastness of the open blue sky. We are not the passing clouds.

One day I had been in touch with a lot of anger towards Joan. I knew that if I processed that anger in my mind, it would just lead to more anger and resentment. I decided to give tonglen a try. I found a photo of Joan and her two sisters in which Joan looked fragile and vulnerable. While looking at the picture, I breathed in my burning anger as if it was black smoke and then tried to let compassion for Joan infuse the out breath. The results were extraordinary. In a relatively short time the anger had been replaced by empathy and love.

However, it wasn't always quite so simple as this – at least not in my mind. I had a deep belief in accountability that was hard to let go of.

One of my mentors, Jonathon Kozol, had a lot of anger due to what he referred to as the *conscious* irresponsibility of the ruling class when it came to the inequities and inequalities of the social system, and in particular the educational system. Kozol had come to speak at Dawson College in 1974, when I was working there as a Social Animator. He was a small, slight man with a deep and resonant voice, and a sense of outrage that he not only owned but conveyed with words that erupted with force and meaning. It is an epiphany when, once or twice in your life, you meet someone who manages to demonstrate in words and actions some of your most deeply held convictions. They empower you to have faith in your own experiences and observations by both reflecting and amplifying the essence of your beliefs.

Here are some examples of Kozol's writing:

"I am not concerned with school reform which helps to rescue children of rich people from the turbulence of guilt and shame – to name 'joy' or 'therapy' or 'self-respect' – but solely with those issues that enable us to understand exactly

*how it is that serious children are, or can be, **ethically defused**, within the walls of hard, impermeable self-interest, prior to their tenth, fifteenth, or twentieth year.” (my emphasis)*
(The Night Is Dark And I'm Far From Home, Bantam 1977, p. 14)

One aspect of this defusing of conscience is the way in which righteous anger is reinterpreted:

*“Anger is not accepted as the honest manifestation between irreconcilable interests (power and its victim, exploitation and its cause, victimization and the one who has the spoils) but solely as a consequence of poor communication. Nobody **really** disagrees with someone else once he explains himself with proper care.”*
(ibid, p. 133)

Likewise, the concept of ‘blame’ in ‘The New Age’ had been gutted and repackaged as a behavior that was even less acceptable than an expression of anger:

Evasion of the role of power is of course, the calculated luxury of those who wield it. It is, in the U.S., both a transparent and self-serving lie: self-serving for the power class within this land to understate the domination that it holds upon the lives of millions of poor people in our midst; self-serving for the nation as a whole to understate the power that it wields upon those nations that are in our stranglehold.
*School does its best to shut out almost any word that can convey intentional exploitation of one person in this nation by another. ‘Pain’ may exist, but **seldom ‘blame’** (my emphasis) ... ‘deprivation’ exists as a debilitated noun. ‘Deprive’, however, as a transitive verb with a malignant subject-noun, does not exist within the lexicon of public school. Certain unfortunate children may exist in an ‘unsatisfactory’ state of being, known as ‘deprivation’.*
(pp. 136-137)

And so for the educated middle class, actions, words, even perceptions become neutralized:

‘Little by little, we learn to remove ourselves from the immediate field of forces, actions, options or intentions, on which we have briefly stood, but always and forever at its indecisive margin, and situate ourselves instead upon a safe and sober ledge from which to look down on the action.’ (p. 180)

The first person who influenced me with their moral outrage was George Orwell. I remember how he conveyed his shame in the essay ‘Shooting of an Elephant’,

made all the more poignant by the fact that my father had shot elephants in his time. In Animal Farm and '1984', Orwell showed what happened when language becomes coopted in 'Newspeak'. Then Paulo Freire (Kozol's mentor, by the way), continued this theme in Pedagogy of the Oppressed.

Other writers who had conveyed their anger and outrage in ways that had influenced me were R.D. Laing, Germaine Greer, Milton Acorn, Helen Keller and Robert Coles. As far as I was concerned, these were the authentic voices of dissent, not the Rolling Stones or Bob Dylan.

Like Kozol, I had come from the educated middle class. Like Kozol, I had chosen to be a teacher and an opponent of the class system. I had experienced oppressive working and living conditions and crushing poverty. I knew what it was like to be unemployed and to strive every day to find a job – to have so little money that bus fares seemed too expensive at times. I had initially sought out the underprivileged on the other side of the fence because I had been ridden with guilt and because my mentors like Gandhi and Orwell had so convinced me that you can't help people unless you understand them, and you can't understand them unless you have experienced their reality, until you have lived that reality – and not just for a day or week like an astute politician sleeping on the street in the lead up to elections.

I had sought to be an emancipated man who supported the efforts of women, the disabled, immigrants and aborigines in their struggles to gain power. And in the process, I had become increasingly angry, not just with the conventional oppressors (landlords, the rich and powerful, societal institutions that upheld the status quo, etc), but with those that I saw as fraudulent 'victims'. The anger had been held in much of the time and had gradually turned into resentment and bitterness.

At the age of 60, I felt isolated and impotent. I was a BUM (Buddhist Unrepentant Marxist). I was angry but not supposed to be. After all, Thich Van Hanh, one of the favoured Buddhist teachers, said:

"One of the main causes of our suffering is the seed of anger inside of us" (Taming of the Tiger Within, p. 5, Riverhead, 2004)

I couldn't deny the Buddhist idea that anger was a poison if left to fester into resentment. By the same token, I couldn't deny the way in which Kozol's kind of anger was an appropriate energizer to apathy and complacency. I understood why the Dalai Lama had made the decision to escape the Chinese invasion by crossing the mountains to India, but I admired the warrior monks who had taken up arms to defend their monasteries and way of life. (see Buddha's Warriors: The Story of the CIA-backed Tibetan Freedom Fighters, by Mikel Dunham, Tarcher, 2004)

The question then became is it worth suffering in the cause of truth and justice? When I was younger, the answer would have been an unqualified 'yes'. But by 2007, I was desperate for a more peaceful life. I had contemplated expressing my anger

at the way both INAC and the Band were treating land lease residents by writing a letter or article, but as a non-aboriginal contesting an issue that had to do with aboriginal land, no-one, but *no-one* wanted to listen. I was powerless to alter the results of Joan's court action, and I was powerless to prevent the growing possibility that my home would be expropriated in the plan to 'develop the land'.

Land. Private land. The greed for, the investment in, the profits from, the stealing of, the exploitation of, the disputes over – land, for me, the essence of capitalism, the underlying cause of exploitation and war. People used the term 'landlord' without batting an eyelid. Land Lord! As if we were still living in Feudal times. The serf works his hands to the bone to support the lord of the estate. The lord 'manages his property' which includes collecting 'land lease rent'. The tenant's monthly rent pays for the purchasing and maintenance of the property; his rent pays his landlord's mortgage.

And I had seen the way in which one's quality of life was directly related to land/property. I had seen my parents' lives deteriorate when they downsized to a flat. I had seen the benefits of my rich Aunt Mollie's estate, and the cramped claustrophobia of Aunt Margaret's council flat. For over ten years,

I had lived in the most squalid conditions in London and Montreal. I had experienced mice, rats, cockroaches, mould, lack of insulation, inadequate heating, leaded paint, unsafe electrical wiring, inadequate plumbing, lack of running water.

In Montreal, I had no safety net. I was not eligible for welfare as I was a 'sponsored immigrant'. My sister was the one who sponsored me but she had made it clear that I could not count on her for help. I needed to work in order to eat and have a roof over my head. Fortunately, I could collect Unemployment Insurance if I was laid off and there were several occasions that UI helped me survive. I had to either share my living space and/or find the cheapest accommodation available. I had rolled cigarettes because it was cheaper, walked when I couldn't afford public transportation, rarely bought alcohol or went to any kind of restaurant, never bought drugs, and always bought clothes from the Salvation Army or Value Village.

I had lived on both sides of the tracks. I knew all too well how income and assets were related to living conditions. I had seen the easy life first hand while staying with schoolfriends who had wealthy parents, large houses and grounds. I had seen the realities of economic power, social power and political power. I had seen and experienced the way in which the lack of owned property, whether in town or country, restricted movement. If you lived in a small, rented room, you yearned to get out, but if you were poor and had little or no disposable income, then the city streets became an alien, private marketplace where all you could do was witness the purchasing power of others, and try not be caught 'loitering'. I had *not* experienced living on the streets or the consequences of being caught 'trespassing' and was thankful for it.

I had become a very angry person and wasn't fully aware that the danger was predominantly to myself. I knew that depression could result from suppressed anger. I knew that from experience. From time to time, there would be mini eruptions where I couldn't hold down what I was feeling.

On one occasion, I was asked to do an entertainment gig at an exclusive retirement home where the menus for each meal were printed and a large staff were expected to act deferentially to the wealthy old folks. One woman got testy with me because I said I didn't know her request, 'The Anniversary Waltz'. She made it clear that 'Entertainers' were supposed to come prepared and be able to deal with any request. I told her that I *did* know around 3000 songs but I didn't happen to know that one. Then I cut the session short and left. I decided not to return and to register my complaints about overbearing residents to the management. Anger expressed not so much combatively but as disgust and withdrawal.

It was glaring inequality that unfailingly triggered my simmering resentment. In contrast to the Hilton Hotel-like atmosphere of the \$5000/month retirement homes, there were Care Homes that had two people packed into tiny rooms, little recreation space, and overcrowded dining rooms with food that lacked both quantity and quality. I remember one in which I encountered a delightful Irish couple whose quiet dignity and grace shone out from their squalid environment. "We've been married for over 60 years," they told me proudly.

Along with the anger was ongoing grief about the loss of my dog Rusty and the loss of my hearing. My doctor didn't seem to know what to do. One day my blood pressure was 160/100 and he was so alarmed that he doubled my dose of Atenelol from 25 mgs to 50 mgs. He told me to stop taking Ativan and prescribed Clonazepam (for anxiety and agitation) and Zopiclone for sleep. Then he switched me from Prozac to Wellbutrin. I told him that Dr. MacBeth, the Psychiatrist that I had been seeing since Roy Slakov retired, was moving from Vancouver to Kamloops. My doctor referred me to a White Rock psychiatrist. After a few visits with her, I told her that I was so agitated, vulnerable and stuck that I felt I needed weekly or even twice weekly visits.

She then referred me to a Dr. Perzow in Vancouver. For the first time, I encountered a Freudian psychoanalyst. I didn't like the man and I didn't like his approach. As I lay flat on my back, he sat behind me and kept asking me why I had said this or that. After three visits, I had the pleasure of firing him, although I didn't put it quite like that. He seemed resistant to my decision, the result of which was a wave of suspicion and fear that he might try to commit me to a psychiatric ward. In the case of Drs. Slakov and MacBeath, I left their sessions feeling like I was a 'normal' person with a few problems. Dr. Perzow, on the other hand, was clearly concerned about my mental state. There were two problems with him; he only saw the mental state and not the person, and his approach left me in a worse mental state rather than a better one.

I felt it harder and harder to collect my thoughts or to talk. It seemed to me that I had nothing worthwhile to say – it was all negative. I didn't want to watch TV. and increasingly, I didn't want to eat. People who saw me expressed concern that I was becoming so gaunt. I had lost about 30 pounds in the last year. My self esteem was fractured. In my diary, there is an entry that says the following:

“When I was young, I watched my father’s constant anger and was horrified. I watched my mother’s anxiety and depression and was mute with incomprehension – it just seemed so overwhelming, so incapacitating, so much bigger and deeper than anything I had experienced. I watched my brother’s withdrawals, his sullenness and his increasing rebelliousness and it seemed as if we had so little in common. I didn’t watch my sister much because she was so seldom around. When I did see her, she seemed distant and aloof. I felt so healthy in comparison. Now I feel like I have my father’s anger, my mother’s anxiety and depression, my brother’s rebelliousness, and my sister’s aloofness.”

My body temperature seemed to be down. On the one hand, I was sweating a lot, on the other, I felt cold much of the time. With my thumping heart, occasional palpitations, high blood pressure and difficulty breathing, I developed a fear of having a heart attack despite all I had read in Claire Weekes’s books about the tricks the sensitized nervous system plays. With respect to my hearing, I was beginning to have to ask people to repeat themselves. One of the reasons that I had lost interest in watching TV was that there was no consistency to what I heard any more. It all depended on which channel, which program, the pitch and volume of speech, the volume of the recording, whether or not there was a music soundtrack, etc.

I was beginning to dread visits by my friend Tony. We had a pattern that I didn’t know how to break out of. Because I was trying to live off an income of \$1100 / month, Tony would bring food with him. My role was to be the cook. But Tony would bring other things; beer, wine, things that he had picked up from a thrift shop or a sale that I had mentioned I needed or that he felt I needed. He was incredibly considerate. He helped me with whatever problems I was having with my computer. He sent me articles that were relevant to some discussion we had had. I was grateful. However years later, I found out that Tony was resentful that I didn’t show my appreciation more. From my side, I felt I was always thanking Tony and that like the harried housewife, I could have done with a word of appreciation now and then for my meal preparation.

However the real problem was that as I sank further into depression, I found that I had less and less to say – a symptom that is referred to as ‘poverty of language’. I felt as if there was nothing but a vast pit of negative energy inside me, and that I was terrified, whether with Tony or my kids, that I would push them away and they would eventually throw up their hands in exasperation and desert me. In addition, I became less and less assertive and increasingly unable to venture a preference or an opinion. I felt stuck and trapped and even resentful that I was somehow beholden to Tony. I felt that I couldn’t be the ‘Ian’ that Tony knew – chatty, gregarious, able to draw Tony out. I didn’t know who I was anymore. All I knew was that inside me was a potent mix of anger, resentment, anxiety, agitation, fear and an indescribable pain, a psychic pain that has to be experienced to be understood. It took all my strength to keep going from day to day and to face an audience on those days that I had a paid entertainment gig.

By the same token, it was those very gigs that forced me to get up, shave, wear clean clothes, get out of the house, and give to others the one thing that I could give that was positive and energizing, and that was my music. In my crumbling sense of identity, this was one area that I could preserve some self-esteem.

In the late summer, I started working at a new place called Langley Gardens. One of the recreation aides there said that she remembered me from years before when I had done music therapy at a psychiatric institution. Her name was Susan and she was South African.

Susan was attractive, vivacious, flirtatious, funny, creative and unpredictable. She crackled with positive energy and initiative. After my second visit to her Care Home, she invited me to do 'Hot Yoga' with her. It was either that time, or the next time, that we slept together. It felt as if my luck had changed, that Susan had come to rescue me from my distress. At first, everything was wonderful. She loved my music, the sex was spectacular, her cooking was delicious and somehow she resurrected my sense of humour.

At Christmas, I invited her to Warren's annual Party. I entertained on the piano all evening and Susan wowed everyone as she alternated between catalyzing lively conversations with the guests and coming over to fondle 'her man' on the piano. Despite being ten years younger than me, Susan was the mother of five grown up children, all of whom were as attractive as their mother. Susan and I also had insecurity and jealousy in common. At first, it was Susan who was the possessive one. She had seen me in the role of the accomplished musician with skill and charisma. She had seen me at Warren's party where it may have appeared that Warren and Jan's friends were also my friends. Perhaps she hadn't seen my vulnerability and neediness.

When Susan heard that she would have to move because her landlord was taking back the mobile home in which she lived, I had cautiously mentioned the possibility of her moving in to the Ranch. Susan liked the idea. However, there had been several incidents where Susan had exploded in fiery anger at something I had said or done. One time was when I had sung the song 'Beautiful, Beautiful Brown Eyes' and made a comment that I loved brown eyes, Susan went into a tirade about how I didn't like her because she had blue eyes. As I got to know her better, it became clear that Susan had at least as much emotional baggage as I did. After yet another outburst, I told her that I didn't think it was such a good idea for her to move in. Apart from anything else, I explained, I was so sickened by the Government's political games to disrupt and eventually evict the land lease tenants, that increasingly I wanted to sell the house (if I could) and get the hell out of there.

Susan was upset that I had changed my mind and reneged on my initial suggestion. In the spring, she moved out of her trailer, put her possessions in a storage unit, and went off to Hawaii to attend a Yoga Instructors camp. When she returned, she let me know that she wasn't sure whether it was still a good idea for us to have a sexual relationship.

Now I was the one who felt threatened. I began to feel obsessive. It seemed that Susan might be considering a relationship with somebody else. She had admitted to me several times that she felt her biggest transgression was lying, so as far as I knew she might have had a fling with someone in Hawaii.

The bubble had burst and I sank back into the black hole. At times it seemed as if there was no limit to the height of anxiety nor depth of depression. From October to January, I had enjoyed a giddy, wonderful affair with Susan. Now it had turned sour and Susan was less and less accessible which in turn made my agitation and obsession greater and greater.

In March, the land lease tenants of the Rez all received letters from INAC giving the results of the house inspections that had taken place. I was incredulous when I read that unless I had \$60,000 of upgrades completed by September, my lease would not be extended. I had already spent at least \$50,000 on a new roof, new floor, new pump, new water tank, complete insulation and other improvements to meet the standards of the BC Hydro Power Smart program, interior and exterior paint, renovation of half of the house to create a completely sound-proofed music studio, a wood stove on heat resistant tiles, French Doors inserted in the wall facing the garden, and much more. They had to be kidding!

For years, I had been bracing myself for the last stand at the Alamo. I had told people on numerous occasions that I would not give up my house without a fight. I had envisaged myself chained to a tree as the government bailiffs and/or the bulldozers came up the road. But now, I barely had the strength to get through the day much less play at being Davy Crockett.

I started yearning to escape. I just had no idea where to go or how to go. A year previously, a Real Estate person who lived on the Rez, had told me that she could sell my house for at least \$30,000. Now, she and everybody else said that our houses were worthless. As to the other residents, a few seemed to be considering getting their upgrades done, but the majority said they would ignore the Government demands.

Somehow, I continued doing my Music Therapy / Entertainment gigs and amassing the paper work necessary for the unbelievably complex process of applying for Accreditation from the Canadian Association of Music Therapists (CAMT).

My doctor had referred me to a psychiatrist in White Rock and she had got me into a group therapy program. I had expected to meet 'real' psych. patients and was shocked at the first meeting when it seemed to me that I was considerably more 'fucked up' than the other members of the group. More shame and beating myself up. It seemed to me that I was descending through various layers or levels into the underlying stigma of 'being mentally ill'. These levels appeared as follows:

- Level 1 (acceptable to just about everyone) was 'self help' books.
- Level 2 - seeing a 'Counsellor' (acceptable to middle-class liberals)

- Level 3 - seeing a 'Therapist' (acceptable, especially if only once in a while, for purposed of 'growth').
- Level 4 - seeing a registered Psychologist (appropriate if on one's Insurance Plan, and if the problem was acute
.....
- Level 5 - seeing a Psychiatrist (acceptable only if kept hush hush)
.....
- Level 6 - seeing Mental Health professionals in a Hospital setting as an outpatient
.....
- Level 7 - going to Emergency and being admitted to a Psych. unit as an in-patient
.....
- Level 8 - involuntary commitment to a Psych. ward or hospital

Earlier in my life, I had mocked the idea of entering any of these levels until about the age of 25. At the age of 27, I had gone to see a McGill University counsellor to help get me through the one-year Teacher's Certificate Program. By the age of 30, I had accepted levels 2 and 3. By the age of 35, I had seen a registered Psychologist and Joan and I had seen Counsellors and Mediators.

By the age of 40, I started seeing a Psychiatrist (they were free), at first being selective about who I told and gradually caring less and less who knew. But as is indicated by the dotted lines above, Level 5 and 6 were altogether a paradigm shift. That was where the stigma really kicked in. The way I saw it, you did not want to cross that line, because if you did, you knew that you were then officially 'one of them'.

In my twenties, I had read Ivan Illich's book Medical Nemesis. Illich, like Kozol (and Michael Moore years later) was an articulate and outspoken critic of Western institutions. In Medical Nemesis, he argued that there was much evidence to support the notion of iatrogenic (i.e. doctor-created) disease. In fact he said it was endemic. Back to 'One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest' again. Roy Slakov had done his best to convince me that psych. units were no longer like that. He had shocked me when he told me that he thought E.C.T. was sometimes appropriate and helpful in cases of Clinical Depression. But on the other hand, he had normalized fears I might have had about the nature of any mental illness I might have, by telling me emphatically "Ian, your mother is crazy, you aren't."

By about the third meeting of the group, I was asked to open up and 'share'. I remember closing my eyes as I spoke because I didn't want to see visual responses let alone get verbal feedback. I was ashamed – ashamed that I had sunk so low, terrified of taking that final step to level 7, or the ultimate unthinkable horror of Level 8.

I wanted to hide away from everyone and everything. With my friends, I felt that if I spoke from my place of vulnerability, I would be seen as an energy vampire, sucking them dry, exhausting their patience and goodwill. To my surprise, one day Ben suggested that we go camping together and I felt such heartache when I turned him down. I had completely lost my confidence and didn't want to risk further shame and embarrassment, especially not with my own son. And yet, when I donned my magic entertainer/music therapy cloak, I could reach out and communicate while safe and secure in my abilities as a musician. However, at the same time, I was always afraid that something might happen to expose the quivering mass of nerves within.

I felt as if I was ugly and deformed both within and without. I had an ingrown toenail which made walking painful. I didn't like going to the pool anymore because all my toenails were yellow in colour due to a fungus infection that had gradually worsened from the initial state of athlete's foot. I considered covering them with bandaids but decided that would look ridiculous.

One day, near the end of June, in desperation I called the Crisis Line. I was advised to go to a walk-in clinic and was given the names of two or three that were still open in the evening. I was afraid that the doctor would take one look at me and refer me to a psych unit. To my surprise, I was seen by an upbeat female doctor who laughed when I mentioned my fears and said "oh they only let you in there if you're climbing the walls". Then she added, "you're only taking a baby dose of Cipralex so we'll just double the dose – no problem" I went away grateful for her reassurances and hopeful that the increased dosage would make a difference.

On the Rez, I told a few people that I wished there was a way that I could sell my house. Then one day a neighbour told me that she knew someone who would be interested in renting. That same day, I spoke to Susan on the phone and she casually mentioned that the apartment next to hers was vacant. It seemed like an omen, too much of a coincidence to disregard. This was it. This is what was meant to happen. I had some purpose. Some energy returned. I was able to make a decision.

July became a month of frantic disposal of half the house's contents. I gave things away. I threw things away. I got boxes from the liquor store and started packing. Then there was cleaning to be done. Tony, Lynne and Joan each helped. At times I would stop as I heard a protesting voice within screaming 'what are you doing, are you crazy? You're abandoning your home, the one thing you vowed never to do.' But then I would be spurred on by the prospect of getting away from the coercive tactics of INAC, and by the hope that Susan and I could renew our relationship. Why else would she have suggested my moving next door to her, I thought, conveniently forgetting that Susan had not sounded at all enthusiastic.

On July 31st. 2009, I moved into Susan's apartment building in Langley. It was high summer. Outside it was hot. Inside it was baking. The patio windows were exposed to the late morning and afternoon sun. The apartment was at ground level overlooking a

large courtyard and a parking area. If the curtains were open, people could see in through the glass sliding doors and the windows. I kept the curtains closed all the time. Some of my music gigs had stopped due to the summer break. Others I cancelled. My day and week had no structure whatsoever. I was in a strange town that could have been on a different planet. And from the start, it became clear that Susan was very guarded about relating to me in any other way than a neighbour.

In the first week that I was there, she invited me over a couple of times, but when she saw the state I was in, she started withdrawing. I heard her leave for work early and return late in the evening. I caught glimpses of her, through chinks in the curtains, watering plants in her back yard. As I experienced the pain of her rejection, all the memories of other failed relationships flooded in. I re-read passages from Eckhart Tolle on the pain body in the hope that insight might lessen the pain. I couldn't read. I couldn't meditate. I didn't want to eat. I paced, lay down, and paced again. I felt like I was "climbing the walls", to use the doctor's expression. Minute after minute, hour after hour, time melted into arid space like Dali's clocks.

Two, three, four, five in the morning, I tried to sleep and couldn't. I got up and went onto the patio to have a cigarette, then back for a cup of tea, then outside again for another smoke, then a lie down. And so on and so on, trying to kill time, trying to get to midday, then 3 p.m., then 6 p.m. – three hour chunks that each felt like an eternity. In an attempt to break out of this pattern, I started a daily excursion to White Rock. I would drive around in a daze, aware that I shouldn't really have been driving at all. Ideas of ending it all had returned with full force.

I kept reminding myself of what Lynne had said: "it's all brain chemistry, Ian." Whatever chemical reactions were happening, they effectively overcame any attempt to meditate or practice Buddhist philosophy or even utilize Claire Weekes's prescriptions for dealing with nervous illness. I kept returning to the idea of overdosing on pills simply because I had become so desperate to kill the pain, either temporarily or permanently.

I started watching to see if Susan's car was in her parking spot. If I heard the sound of a car, I would peek out of the window to check if it was hers. One day, I saw her getting out of her car. In the heat I was only wearing my underpants. As I heard footsteps down the hallway, I took off my pants and opened the door. Susan looked at me blankly.

"Wow, you're all skin and bone. I like my men with some meat on them," she said coolly as she took out her door keys. Later that evening, I knocked on her door and asked if I could come in for a few minutes. Susan said, "OK ... for a few minutes."

Half an hour later, Susan ushered me to the door saying, "thirty minutes with you feels like two hours ... I tried Ian I tried to unglue your stuck energy, but I gave up ... it was like treacle ... you keep having expectations ... if you want to keep wounding yourself, it's up to you."

Susan was right. I was all skin and bone. My weight had dropped to 168 pounds. A year earlier, I had been well over 200 pounds and the year before that, I had been around 215 pounds. And she was right that I kept on wounding myself as I had

done in previous relationships with my fears, expectations, assumed needs, stubborn will, and overconscientious loyalty.

On the 12th. August, I drove to Peace Arch Hospital in White Rock and entered Emergency. After two hours of waiting, a psychiatric nurse saw me and when I mentioned suicidal ideation, she admitted me. I was taken up to the psych. unit. When the doors closed, I vaguely registered that they were being locked. Finally – Level 7!

The next morning, I wanted to remain in my room but was told that I should go to the common area. I was shown the TV and the treadmill and told that there would be a group session at 11 a.m. Following that, I spoke briefly to a young man and asked him about the locked doors. “You mean you can’t get out of here?”, I asked. “You have to earn privileges,” he explained. “As long as you cooperate, you should be able to get a one hour pass in a week or so.” As visions of ‘One Flew Over The Cuckoo’s Nest’ returned, so did the prospect of Level 8 – the involuntary commitment that would be a consequence of my almost certain lack of cooperation if I was confined to this locked and guarded ward (there were two beefy male orderlies hovering around) indefinitely.

In the afternoon, Joan came to see me. An hour later, Lynne turned up. I saw the concern in their eyes. Did I see a trace of shame? I didn’t know. Then at 4 p.m., the head of unit, a male psychiatrist, talked to me.

“What are you doing in here?” he said brusquely. ‘My God, he thinks I’m faking it,’ I thought indignantly and then almost as quickly felt relief that he seemed to be saying that I was not ‘mentally ill’ enough to be in a psych unit. A ray of light shone into the murky gloom.

“Yes, maybe I shouldn’t be here,” I said.

“OK, get your things. You can leave.”

The doors were unlocked. I was free. I bolted out of there before anyone changed their mind.

Later on, my psychiatrist, Dr. Lindsay Kennedy, told me that there had been a disagreement. Apparently, my family doctor had thought that I should have E.C.T. whereas she hadn’t.

* * *

About a week later, Joan picked me up early on a Friday morning and drove me to Princeton to see our daughter Annie play in a Celtic Festival. When we set off, I curled up in the passenger seat, feeling like a small child. On the way, Joan would point to the magnificent scenery, and I tried vainly to see it through her eyes. By the time we reached Princeton, I was feeling a bit better. My daughter seemed happy to see me. I took her and her boyfriend to the Dairy Queen for an ice-cream sundae. I can’t

remember if we spent the night there or not but I do remember that the trip back was completely different in that I was more aware of the trees and the mountains. By the time Joan dropped me off, I felt almost 'normal'.

Back in my room, I realized that I had to get out. I had to move again. I had to get back to White Rock and away from Susan. Joan told me that I could hang out at her apartment during the day when she was at work, so I continued my daily drive to White Rock, only now rather than wandering around aimlessly, I went to Totem Coop (where Joan and I had lived for 12 years and raised our kids) and surreptitiously crept up the steps to Joan's place. One benefit of her set-up was that she had a patio which was screened from view. This meant I could sit out there and have a smoke in peace.

One day, as I was laying down flat on the carpet, I thought I heard someone on the roof above. There was a crackling sound as if someone was walking on gravel. Then, suddenly, I became aware of flames on the patio. I rushed to the patio windows and was horrified to see the whole patio engulfed in flames. Some instinctual force took over and I was able to act. I went outside and shouted 'Help' and then rushed back to get water. A neighbour entered the apartment and said that the fire department were on their way. Then the two of us grabbed saucepans, filled them with water in the kitchen, and then ran back and forth trying to quell the flames which were on the verge of spreading inside.

The fire truck arrived. Firemen entered with a big hose. It took ten minutes, maybe longer, and the flames were extinguished. The wood deck of the patio had been destroyed, The glass doors had shattered. The walls were blackened and there was water everywhere. We all went outside. There was a throng of Coop residents gathered in shock and alarm. The Police had arrived. The Fire Chief was there and wanted to speak with me.

"Is this your apartment?" he asked.

I told him that it wasn't. That it was my ex-partner's and that she had given me a key.

"How did the fire start?" he asked.

I told him truthfully that I didn't know.

"Do you smoke?" he inquired.

I told him that I did and that yes, now I came to think of it, I had smoked a cigarette out on the patio about half an hour before I saw the flames. I told him I remembered stubbing the cigarette out in the earth contained in a plant pot. And yes, there had been the remains of a dead plant.

The firemen looked at each other. The neighbours looked at me accusingly. The Fire Chief had a word with the RCMP officer and after getting a few details from me, he left. The fire truck left. I went back inside and called Joan.

The damage was covered by fire insurance but it took many months before everything was fixed. I didn't show my face at the Coop for years after that.

I felt like an automobile whose shock absorbers were completely shot

I renewed my search for an apartment in White Rock and found one on Columbia Avenue, down by Marine Drive and the promenade. At the end of September, exactly a month after I had moved to Langley from the Ranch, I had another spree of throwing things away followed by a move back to White Rock.

The day was stifling. The sun beat down. I had four helpers – Lynne, Tony, Annie and Ben. I had rented a van and after it was loaded, we set off for White Rock in three vehicles. The ground floor apartment that I had rented was really a basement, meaning that the three floor house was built on a steep slope of Columbia Avenue such that the main floor was level with the back lane and the base of the house was on ground that was high above the street. We toiled up and down the two flights of concrete steps.

I felt mentally and physically weak and this state was exacerbated by my sensitivity to the social dynamics of the situation. On several occasions, I saw Tony and Lynne talking together about how they felt that Annie and Ben weren't pulling their weight. Meanwhile, a few days earlier, Tony had asked me if Lynne was dating so this brought, for me, an unwelcome dimension to what was going on. Tony, Lynne and I all had in common the fact that we hadn't brought our respective close friends together. In my case, possessiveness and the need for boundaries grew out of anxiety about losing the few good friends that I had, and the roots of that went back to Leslie and Ellie. Tony was *my* friend. Lynne was *my* friend. My friendships with each of them felt threatened by a friendship between them.

Later, Lynne told me that Tony had asked her for her phone number. She had given it to him but also told him that she wasn't interested in dating. At the same time she also told me that it was really none of my business what happened between her and Tony.

Back to the liberal paradigm again – we are all free to do as we please without taking into account how it may affect others. There had been occasions in the past where I had met Tony and Lynne's friends but it had never seemed appropriate to me to follow independent relationships with them.

Ever since arriving in Canada, I had experienced cultural differences between Britain and Canada such as the respect shown to a couple as a unit, rather than relating to the couple as two individuals. This difference had been blurred, to some extent, by the anarchist spirit of 60's on both sides of the Atlantic but there still remained a difference in what was deemed acceptable.

* * *

A new place. I was back in White Rock. I was away from Susan and Langley. Other than that, nothing had changed. I was still in a clinical Depression, I was still

obsessed by Susan and my 'home' still felt alien. My real home was rented out and, irony of ironies, I was the 'landlord'.

If the overheated apartment in Langley had seemed like a hell-hole, the place on Columbia felt like living in a dungeon. As the Fall lowered the temperatures outside, the dungeon became increasingly damp and chilly. There was only one set of windows so there was little light. In addition there was a mouldy smell. My landlord lived above me with his wife. He was a large man in his fifties with a heavy tread – one that informed me as to the rhythms of his day, whether I liked it or not. Like so many people in White Rock, he was a Property Developer and like so many, he took off to warmer climes when the rain set in. He and his wife had a place in Arizona and in October, they took off for a couple of months. I was thankful that I would be spared the heavy tread that mingled with the incessant inner squeal of my tinnitus, but also that I could smoke outside without having to walk around the block so I wouldn't be seen.

I started up my music therapy sessions again, and despite my agitation and anxiety, they continued to go well as before – my lifeline to a semblance of self-esteem. I continued participating in the group at Peace Arch Hospital and gradually felt an acceptance and warmth from the other members and the leader, Allison. I was now on two different anti-depressants, Cipralex and Welbutrin – waiting and hoping that the latter would kick in.

When the landlord left, I cautiously began to play the Yamaha U3. which I had hardly played since buying it. The only way I could take the sound was with ear plugs and pressing the damper pedal down. With external sounds, it wasn't tinnitus that was the problem but hyperacusis. The microphone feedback of a few years earlier had created three different kinds of hearing abnormality: upper end hearing loss, the internal sound of tinnititis and hyperacusis (i.e. hypersensitivity to sound). The hyperacusis made the piano sound loud, harsh and tinny. Like the plates clanging in the sink, the effect of striking the piano keys on the auditory nerves was the equivalent of hearing nails being scratched on a blackboard.

I didn't want to play the damned piano. I just needed to find ways to help structure the day and give some purpose and meaning to my existence. My ongoing mega music project was learning advanced harmony and jazz piano technique. In order to do this, I knew I had to learn to play in every key. I was self-taught at the piano so I could not read from written scores. I could read most chord charts but not the more advanced jazz chords. Learning to play in every key was a mega project. There are twelve notes to a scale and a major and minor key based on each of those notes, which means that there are 24 separate keys to be learned, all with different combinations of white and black notes. But that was just the start of it! In order to play more advanced melody and harmony, you had to learn alternate scales, known as modes. There were approximately 12 of these for each of the 12 notes in an octave – 144 modes. Then there were 30 chords for each of the 12 notes – 360 chords. And of course 2 hands with finger configurations going in opposite directions.

That said, I discovered that despite the brain fog of my depression, I could slowly – very slowly make headway by taking tiny baby steps, e.g. I new chord and I new mode for I hand per day. The brief but focused mental labour helped take my mind off the downward spiral of negative thought.

Somewhere before Christmas 2009, the rain turned to snow and ice. One day I received a phone call from Dallas, the woman who was renting the Ranch. She told me that the pump was frozen and that she had no water and that as the landlord, she expected me to get it fixed. That gave me the impetus to realize that I had to get rid of the Ranch once and for all. I knew I wasn't going back and I wanted nothing more to do with Dallas who had not even paid the rent for over a month (she was supposed to write me a cheque for \$500 and I then sent my own cheque to INAC). It had to be done this way because despite the threats of eviction, I was still the land-lease tenant.

In addition to INAC saying that the Ranch needed \$60,000 of upgrades in order to get a new lease, there was the further threat that if and when (with the emphasis on 'when') the land was developed, the land lease tenants were responsible for the demolition of their own houses (including the foundations), and the removal of all debris so that the "land would be returned to its natural state." I had looked into this and had been told that the costs of getting this done would be at least \$20,000.

* * *

It might seem crazy to anyone reading this if I said that at the start of 2009, January 9th. to be exact, I got on a plane and flew to Calgary. Unmentioned so far this history of mental illness and self-discovery is my relationship with Pam Boyd. Pam was my first girlfriend. Pam and her family moved from Edinburgh to Edmonton when she was around 9 or 10. A few years later she wrote to me. We started up a pen pal relationship which over the course of the next six or seven years evolved into a fantasy romance. I was determined to make the fantasy a reality (it really had to do with losing my virginity). So having decided not to go into the Army, it turned out that I heard about, applied for, and ended up being awarded a Draper's Company Commonwealth Scholarship to go to Queens University in Canada.

That was in 1969. That Christmas, I took a train from Kingston, Ontario to Edmonton. Pam and I got to know each other a bit better, however unfortunately not well enough to have sexual intimacy. A few years later, we bumped into each other in Montreal. Then we lost touch completely for a couple of decades. However, I tracked her down In the nineties, as I wanted to send her a copy of Chameleon, the autobiographical novel I had written previously about my life up to about the age of around 26. We started up a sporadic e-mail correspondence that led to various

discoveries of what we had in common, e.g. children, failed partnerships, playwriting (we had both had plays produced and performed), and working with marginal / disabled populations.

Pam had founded and had managed a Drama Company for Disabled clients named MOMA. I was interested in what she was doing and she was interested that I was a Music Therapist. So in the Fall of 2008, she had invited me to visit Calgary, her home town. Later on she suggested I come at the start of the New Year, 2009.

It was a very strange interlude in what had been happening and what continued to happen back in White Rock. Not only did we collaborate professionally (I played piano in sessions with her drama clients, following which Pam offered me a job), but we both seem determined to make up for what failed to take place 43 years later. I had thought about Pam's offer. It wasn't just an interesting, paid job, it was also an invitation to collaborate personally as well as professionally – and therein lay the problem, as far as I was concerned. Despite my depressed, befuddled state, and dismal record of falling prematurely into yet another partnership, I was able, just, to hold on to the recent advice of my good friend Lynne. I had written down her wise words in my diary, and here they are:

- *Don't go looking for a relationship with women other than a sister like relationship (e.g. Lynne)*
- *You give up too much power in relationships*
- *Something happens that you don't have control of (i.e. the 'chemistry')*
- *Avoid physical intimacy*
- *You get hooked. Build a glass wall around you*
- *Don't ask questions about feelings and relationships.*
- *The kind of women you get involved with are looking for soft, kind, compassionate men. But when you are kind, you compromise too much, and that leads to irritation, frustration, resentment and anger.*
- *As soon as you stand up for yourself with women, you feel like a bad person, instead of feeling good that you just did it.*
- *Yoga teachers have a rigid way of looking at things (Pam and Susan were Yoga teachers!)*

* * *

It took a long time, but eventually I did follow Lynne's advice. I didn't take the job in Calgary and on the 3rd. March, I ended my relationship with Susan with the words: 'Susan, this is not working. I am ending my relationship with you. I do not want further contact.'

The lyrics that say 'Please release me, let me go' would be better addressed to the addictive, clinging ego within myself than the other person. What liberation in being proactive rather than reactive! What sanity in walking away from fear and a relationship that produces pain rather than pleasure and contentment. What wisdom in the notion of pruning dead, sickly or unwanted growth.

I recovered slowly from the Depression. The medication helped. My music therapy work helped. Getting away from the toxic situation on the Rez helped (I sold the house to Dallas for \$1 – and four years later I heard she sold it for \$10,000). Buddhist meditation and practice helped. Dr. Claire Weekes and Letters of a Scattered Brotherhood helped. Above all, close friends like Lynne, Tony, Warren, Joan and the rest of my family helped.

I moved to Vancouver in August of 2009 and another chapter in my life started – one that so far has been pleasurable and fulfilling. Three strikes and not out. If a fourth strike occurred, I would be able to handle it better.