A State of Depression

A STATE OF DEPRESSION

Margaret McRae

M
MACMILLAN

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Foreword

by

Dr. T.W. Goldblatt

The central figure in this drama is a young woman who is going through what can only be described as her personal agony. In giving this account, so many years later, of the path she traversed, she has unwittingly provided a picture of indomitable courage and remarkable determination, perseverance and integrity. As a witness of her suffering and of her achievement, I humbly pay this tribute. At the time I was partially aware of these qualities, as it was on the basis of their presence that I knew the work necessary could be done. But it is only on reading her own story, after such a lapse of time, that the full impact of her brave struggle has struck home.

When, a short while ago, I received a letter asking me to write a foreword to a book in which the author had given an account of the traumatic experience of her illness, I was non-plussed because the married name under which she wrote meant nothing to me and her maiden name, while vaguely familiar, stirred no memories. Checking through my files, I found, to my dismay, what I had expected. That after so many years, the notes had long since been destroyed and I had no record of treatment, of its course and development. Indeed, there was not even a history to remind me who she was.

Fortunately, memory returned on reading the manuscript and I recalled vividly the full intensity and poignancy of the treatment sessions described. It is a strange experience to re-live meaningful events through the eyes of another person. Some, of course, were seen quite differently by me. Often I did not recognise myself as much of the phraseology used was unlike my own. In any event, when material is condensed

it does tend to assume a different aspect. It also became evident that I appeared as having been far more directive than was actually the case. Nevertheless, in essence, her description gave a full and true account of that journey. Of special interest to me, as a therapist, were some of the differences. For example, she described the consultation as one in which I sat behind my desk. I knew this to be factually incorrect as I have never interviewed a patient for consultation other than face-to-face. Any other method would be totally alien to my approach to therapy. Yet her recollection that the consultation took place in this way, although factually incorrect, was nevertheless a true reflection of her emotional experience of me on that day as distant, unapproachable and probably unhelpful.

Equally, the apparently extraordinary game of musical chairs did not take place in fact. No chairs were ever removed from that room or hidden. I needed but to shift their positions a few inches to make them available for face-to-face interview or for reclining on the couch. Yet, once again, this is a true picture of her experience of me as cold, brutal, unfeeling and insensitive. In my own personal analysis, I remember commenting one day on the advent of a new chair, only to discover that it had been an ancient inhabitant of that room long before I first attended.

Reading such an account also makes one aware of one's method, of changes in technique and one's fallibility. Yet, whatever the errors or seeming errors, whatever the inadequacies or apparent inadequacies, the fact remains that on the basis of treatment once a week, this young lady, who arrived in dire straits, was able to leave after eighteen months well and ready to take up her life again and forge a new and healthy future for herself. And I believe it is evident from the account that this was the result of her will to get well, the work she did both in and outside that consulting room and from the events that took place in that room, none of which were haphazard and all of which were carefully thought out, seriously considered and carried into effect.

Despite some qualms, it has given me much satisfaction to read this story. This is not the moment for a technical discussion. Nevertheless, it is appropriate to draw attention to

certain developments and psychic patterns evident during the course of therapy. The way in which feelings and thoughts not acceptable to the Self are split off and put into the therapist and experienced as being present in him is clearly visible. Similarly, the consequence of this process of projection, that is, the experience of him as an awful person, even cruel, is also very evident. The manner in which she grows to fear these feelings less, becomes able to tolerate them and eventually comes to terms with them is demonstrated. And finally, the re-integration of these aspects of herself into her own personality so that she begins to feel a whole person again can also be seen.

One is presented with a picture of someone reliving childhood emotional experiences and fantasies together with another person and experiencing these emotions in a different way because of the other person, as a result of which healthier concepts of the Self emerge and healthier modes of living can develop. What is demonstrated is the way in which the technique of psychotherapy based on a psychoanalytic approach can enable a person to live through past experiences and emotions and, with proper guidance and help, relive them differently and thereby support, activate and stimulate those self-healing properties we all possess. And thus begin to find one's own way back to health.

I am truly grateful to the author for this evidence. It is a gift in return, a precious gift, quite unexpected and absolutely independently given. It comes as a confirmation and validation from an unsolicited source of the efficacy and value of psychotherapy. Such a gift gives one encouragement to continue with this demanding, exacting but sustaining work so as to offer others the same opportunity to rediscover themselves and their lives.

London, 1985

T. W. G.

Preface

At the end of each psychotherapy session I wrote down everything that I could remember. These notes were originally intended to be used by me as a means of helping me to overcome my illness. It is these notes that form the basis for this book.

It is hoped that those who read this book will be enlightened if they are seeking knowledge, and encouraged if they are seeking help.

For the general reader the book is intended to dispel some of the fears that those who claim to be sane have concerning those who are mentally ill. In one sense this book is a plea to all those who come into contact with mental illness, to regard the sufferer with tolerance and understanding.

This book is also an appeal to those who know that they are under psychological stress to seek professional help, rather than to allow a crisis to overtake them, and perhaps even destroy their lives.

Billericay, 1985

M. McR.

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This book is gratefully dedicated to Dr T. W. Goldblatt, the psychotherapist who treated me throughout my illness from February 1967 to August 1968. Without his patient help and kind understanding I would not have survived.

My heartfelt thanks are also due to 'Rita' and 'Pat' who supported me at a time when others would have fled.

My final thanks are to my husband Francisco who painstakingly read the entire manuscript and gave me invaluable help in improving the writing style. Without his help and guidance this book might never have been written.