



Thank you for taking the time to complete the feature questions below.



Please, tell us about yourself, where were you born and raised? What was life like growing up in childhood? A little bit about your family?

I was born into a naval family so we moved around a lot. I was born in Wales but did not live there long enough to have any memories of it. I went to boarding school quite early in order to facilitate some stability in my education.

What is the earliest childhood memory you can remember?

Most of my early memories are in Singapore but my very earliest memory is just before we went, when I (aged about 2) was being looked after by my Nana and after dark one evening I remember jumping up and down on the rubber slats that were under her sofa cushions. I remember it being an absolute blast! I think this was when my Mother was in hospital having my sister.

What education course did you follow or where did life take you after this?

I did well at school, thought I might become a musician but chickened out of the audition so found myself studying mental health nursing instead. I have no memory of how I heard of it or how/why I applied. I had never even heard of it being a job you could do before then. Years later I topped up my nursing qualification to degree level then in 2009 I embarked on a PhD looking at the experience people who self-harm have of contact with mental health services when they are in a general hospital. I have just finished it 7 ½ years later!

Would you like to share how you got involved in Mental Health?

By accident I guess, as I said above I don't really know. I do think that if I hadn't had the fortune to go down this path I would have been a patient of mental health services way more than I have been as I continually have to 'actively manage' my mental health to this day.

Please tell us more about the work that you do?

Work is my main coping strategy so I always work too much. I now work for the University of Southampton as a lecturer where I teach upcoming healthcare professionals and research network use in self-management of mental health as well as other mental health related issues.



I am also co-founder/director of The Good Mental Health Cooperative which is an activist organisation that works to reduce stigma by improving community wellbeing and understanding around mental health. All of us that work for the organisation have our own lived experience of mental distress which actively feeds the ethos of the organisation.

<https://goodmentalhealth.org.uk/>

I am also the director of The Sanity Company, which primarily publishes childrens books aimed at helping them develop good mental health and problem solving abilities.

<http://thesanitycompany.co.uk/>

I am also a musician, a singer/songwriter/pianist who plays with lots of musicians in the South. The band I play with the most is Walker Broad, we play a mix of blues, folk and jazz with a bit of a latin edge. We've just come back from a short festival tour of France which was great fun! <http://webplus.broad.ology.org.uk/walkerbroad/>

What has been some of the best moments of your life and career?

I am most proud of my children, they are wonderful people and the reason I am still here. They have given me countless joyful moments.

A stand out moment from my career, and there are many I could choose from, was when I helped a lady who had had a stroke realise that although she could no longer speak she could still sing, that way she realised that if she sang to everyone instead of talking she could communicate again. It was a lovely moment. Quite tearful on both sides and it was the first time probably that I truly realised how transformational the arts can be in healthcare.

What projects are you currently working on?

Too many to mention here, checkout the websites above to get more of an idea.

Do you have any 'coping strategies' that you use?

Music music music, for me this is essential. However, work is my most successful strategy and in order to carry on doing the music (as I often stop playing when I am feeling unwell) I had to make it into work (via the band) so that even if I am feeling poorly I have to do it as the show must go on! So I still get the restorative powers of music even when I am being wilful and sabotaging my own mental health.

How do you view the journey of recovery?

The same as the journey of life, we are all dealt different hands and different coping capabilities. I feel I am on a continual journey of discovery rather than recovery, I don't



recover things, I keep discovering things. I prefer to think of mental ill-health as a reaction to life's trials that is influenced by biology, psychology and other social factors. This is more realistic to me than blaming an individual by labelling them as ill to me.

May I ask what your personal beliefs surrounding the explanation of mental health experiences are?

I guess I've already answered that a bit above. Generally, in a very brief nutshell, I think that we react to life events and the way we react is influenced by our culture, upbringing, physiology, psychology and social factors. Overcoming these hurdles builds resilience but can also leave cracks which we can still disappear down from time to time if the cards are stacked up in the right way. When our behaviour becomes too difficult for others to understand then we get labelled as ill, this is easier than taking the time to really understand. This is something I would like to change.

What does the future hold for you? -Upcoming events/news etc.

Who knows, bring it on!

Favourite Quote?

One of my favourite books is 'Illusions – the adventures of a reluctant messiah'
by Richard Bach.

I love the last quote in that book which says
'...everything in this book might be wrong...'