

It was the summer of 2006 and here I was, sitting in an office in a mental hospital talking to a psychiatrist. 'You're mentally ill,' he said. I was appalled and said, 'how dare you, I am not mentally ill, no one in my family has ever had a mental illness and everything I have told you is the truth. I have no time for this rubbish,' I said. 'I run a business and I am taking a degree also, I want out of this hospital, you have no right to keep me here, I am too busy for this.' As I was of no danger to anyone or myself, they released me. My son was appalled, he kept saying 'Mum you're not well, you're thoughts aren't quite right.'

At the time, I was just recovering from a trauma a few months earlier, I had my drink spiked whilst visiting London. To me, it was logical that I was suffering from PTSD, why could the psychiatrist not see that, I had proof that it happened. I received horrible phone calls and text messages from these people afterwards. I had their phone numbers logged in my mobile phone. As time went by my thoughts became more disturbed, I believed that I was at the centre of a conspiracy. I believed my computer had spy ware, my phone and mobile were bugged and I believed I was being communicated with via my TV. I believed that a group of people wanted me to suffer and by the time I was 50, they would have me in prison.

Sleepless, paranoid, frightened and exasperated, I told my story to anyone who would listen. Soon people stopped listening and I found I was very alone. So I started drinking bottles of wine to sleep and to self-medicate. This made the situation worse and I started to believe that during sleep I was taken from my bed by men from London. Then, I looked for help and spent six weeks in hospital. I had a fantastic psychiatrist who sat me down and explained, 'your brain is not functioning properly, the chemicals in your brain are unbalanced, with medication you will be well again.'

True to his word, I was well again, but I had done a lot of damage. I had destroyed a lot of trust between myself and my business partner by accusing him of dishonesty. I got my degree but the marks could have been better. But more to the point I had destroyed a lot of relationships. My youngest son who was only 19 decided he never wanted to see me again, that I was 'nuts.' My mother said she was frightened of me and never to darken her door again. My best friend visited me in hospital in the early stages of my recovery but I haven't seen or heard from her since.

Mental illness has such a stigma. I was ill, not bad or dangerous in any way. When I was ill, I never harmed a spider. I talked rubbish, was frightened and more than anything very very lonely.

MIND say 'you have more chance of being hit by lightening than being hurt or killed by anyone with a mental illness.'

One in four adults will experience mental health problems at some point in their lives and 87% of people with mental health problems reported the negative impact of stigma and discrimination on their lives, according to a Stigma Shout survey.

The general consensus is that I got ill through a combination of stress and the trauma I suffered in London. Since taking medication, which successfully manages my psychosis, I am as normal as you are. What is normal? I don't have strange beliefs anymore, I know I am not being taken from my bed and I am not going to jail when I am 50.

Having the illness was just a blip in my life. It is one part of who I am and will not define me. Anyone can become ill, it does not discriminate. Stress, a trauma, an illness, a bereavement, a divorce, an accident, drugs, can all trigger off a psychosis.

I was 40 years old when I took ill. I never in my life imagined it would happen to me, but it did and I survived. Now I live a normal life again with medication.