

## About a Girl

**Sanyal N\***

Published Author, India

**\*Corresponding author:** Ms Nilanjana Sanyal, Published Author, 11/F, Deodar Street, Allenbury-Garcha Crossing, P.O. Ballygunge, Kolkata, West Bengal, India, 700019, Tel: +91-33-46020657; Email: nilanjanasanyal@rocketmail.com

### Case Report

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### Abstract

The year 1997 marked the beginning of a most powerful emotional struggle which has continued up to the present day. My defenses have weakened and further ailments, mostly physical have arrived including a bronchial-pneumonia attack which almost took my life. They put me on Oxygen and once again I survived. I am also slightly obese which is causing numerous problems in the lower limbs. I am currently undergoing my menopause at the age of 38. My mother, who is Arthritic, walks with a slight limp and my father has aged, but they are fighters in their own right too. It is in the equations of love that I have truly discovered the joy of being human. I might like to add a word or two here. That I have always been taught that "great suffering presupposes some great purpose..." I have always believed in my power to change things from the way they are to the way I think they are supposed to be, like changes in the conditions of the poor for instance. I am, still, despite every pain and suffering that has been inflicted on me and through the power of advanced alternative medicine, waiting to dart towards a day bereft of poverty, inequality, loneliness, homelessness and mass hysterical violence. A day free of depression, melancholia and suicides...I have also now become a spiritual seeker.

**Keywords:** Depression; Shouted; Emotional; Pneumonia

### Introduction

My adventure with mental health issues began in my early twenties, when I was about 23 or so. I had always heard voices and sounds that weren't there, as far back as I can remember, but I had long learned to ignore them. But starting when I was about 23, over a course of a few months, I went from an outgoing, happy-go-lucky kid to a moody, painfully shy, paranoid person who periodically experienced periods of highs as if I was on drugs and long, dark periods of deep depression. The hallucinations became more acute, and the voices often woke me up at night or led me to believe that someone was calling me,

and became more vulgar in nature, often telling me unkind things about myself or consisting of shouted curse words.

I had always been the studious sort, so a long way following my 21st birthday (the year 1995) I was under the arc lights on campus in university where I was pursuing Psychology (Hons). There, I found a book called DSM-I, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illness. In this book, I looked at the list of illnesses and found one that fit my symptoms: Manic-Depressive Disorder with Psychotic Features. The features of this illness matched my mental state almost perfectly.

So, what had I to do with my newfound knowledge? I wanted to be a civil servant as part of the Indian Administrative Service, (this in the days before I was diagnosed with being myopic and that hope dashed). I already knew that civil service absolutely excluded any sort of mental disorder.

In the year 1998, following the unsuccessful completion of a University of Calcutta MBA (I had by then lost a friend who had committed suicide in the college hostel, was hit by a red-liner bus in New Delhi, had qualified the Common Admission Test to the IIMs yet was forced to quit as the hostel authorizes never cared!) I traveled to Orissa where I joined CYSD, a corporate NGO in Bhubaneswar. Now that is another story.

We were a team of four colleagues, Maya Sen (a PIO), Kate Catherine Alex Fairfax (from New Zealand), my immediate neighbor in the hostel, Judith (from the Netherlands) and myself. We were great friends too and often spent hours frolicking and massaging each other besides sharing a cabin and goodies! Judith and I would often teach Ramesh the cook, and his junior Baldeo. By that time, I had just lost my paternal grandfather and was at a complete loss! After finishing college, having highs and lows during the time, but not too bad, I had enlisted here. I had dreams to fulfil. Soon thereafter, another bout of depression hit. This lasted for nearly a year, and I was a pretty terrible individual during this time, barely getting by. Then another high hit, and for almost a year, I was up, working past duty hours, excelling at everything. Then I was on an even keel for a few months, acting almost normal, then more depression for several months. And so on and so forth. The worst was yet to come!

Kate's mother, Mrs. Beverley Fairfax was in town and so was Judith's friend, Edwin. I was all alone in the hostel. It was raining heavily and yet I was in the midst of a deep medicated slumber. Suddenly, there was a knock on the door. I looked up to find Ramesh trying to unlock the French window and enter the room. Earlier, Baldeo had also tried to drug my food. Now, these could have been the perfect ingredients of a Stephen King spine-chiller. But the Lord often acts in mysterious ways! I knew He would be there for me. So, I mustered up all my courage and threatened to inform the Management. Ramesh quietly left the room. The next day, it was all over. Despite their best efforts, a few of my colleagues, who were backing me, were forced to withdraw their accusations against Ramesh and Baldeo. I was shocked to the core. I lost my job and the Management decided to send me back home with two complete strangers. Kate gave me a hug for one last time. Soon, we left for home. And I had a severe emotional breakdown of sorts.

As usual, my father was fuming. So, I sat on the knowledge. Told no one. I continued with my life, in addition enduring ever-worsening emotional abuse at the hands of my father and physical abuse at the hands of my brother that was probably the genesis for the additional diagnosis of Social Anxiety Disorder that would come over a decade later. It took a long time for my life to reacquire direction after I started wearing glasses and could no longer be considered by the Civil Services as an IAS. My depression went and came, until it finally stayed for many years, increasing in intensity. It seemed that almost all girls were out of my league, lacking almost totally in self-confidence as I did, and I began to withdraw more and more. I knew what was going on, but no longer seemed to care, and my parents, only sibling, and relatives had no idea.

In mid 1999, I started on my highest high ever. I was physically capable of great deeds, excelling on PT tests, running, working through injuries, carrying heavy loads, everything. I was confident to the point of increased self-esteem. I stayed awake sometimes for a week, then slept for a few hours and stayed awake again for many days. This was followed by my lowest low. It was the day my brother was to sit his IIT examinations. I work up, half paralyzed. I was just not able to move. Then my parents took me to the hospital, where I stayed for a month.

Sometime after that, I was diagnosed with Schizoaffective Disorder. Remembering the DSM I had read many years earlier, I asked the doctor if that was the same as Manic Depressive Disorder with Psychotic Features. He said yes, but it had not been called that in over a decade. The doctor prescribed medication, and, after an adjustment period, began to improve (for the most part). In addition, he diagnosed me with Social Anxiety Disorder.

Schizoaffective Disorder is a type of Bipolar Disorder (formerly Manic Depressive Disorder). It is characterized by mood swings similar to normal Bipolar Disorder. These consist of periods of deep depression, where one has no energy, has dark thoughts, lack of self-confidence, feelings of malaise, worthlessness, and fear. These are punctuated by periods of mania, where one has boundless energy, flights of fancy, feelings of no limits, not sleeping or sleeping very little, and like you can do anything. Often the mania comes complete with behavior such as speeding in cars, spending and running up charge cards, mad bouts of things like deep cleaning the house, wanting to outdo everyone else, and creativity. (Patty Duke, a notable bipolar person, has described the mania as a "brilliant madness.") In between these states, there is a

relatively short period of behavior that society would term "normal."

Schizoaffective Disorder also has a component of psychosis. This is not being what society would term as a "psycho," which is properly known as Sociopathic behavior. The psychosis is characterized by hallucinations (in me, most commonly auditory hallucinations, but sometimes visual and even olfactory). The sounds I most often hear are curse words, people calling my name, train whistles, growling, and a sound as if standing outside a sports stadium. Visual hallucinations are most often vague black shapes out of the corner of the eye, but sometimes when driving, I see deep potholes on the road on which I walk. Olfactory hallucinations are most often of dog feces or white glue.

I had never really been the usual couch potato, although then I lived a mostly sedentary life. I also realized at times that all my discomfort had to do with a powerful emotional storm that had covered my last sixteen years and would continue for many more years to come.

Having said that, I could safely assert that I knew better than anyone else what the term 'illness' meant. Indeed, I had been unwell over a very long period of time. My body defenses had weakened and I never seemed to recover. But I was a woman of courage. Because courage is what sustains you during your most trying circumstances. And I was a fighter, would continue to be one and a survivor all rolled into one.

It all started in the year 1997 but we shall leave it at that for the moment. Instead, we shall talk about a condition that every woman or girl has to go through during a most crucial period in her life, the 'menopause'. My life had been devoured by pills and those on pills are not supposed to possess any sense of happiness or reason!

In the fall of 2004, my parents brought me to Dr. Malhotra's office for an initial classical homeopathic consultation. I was once again and much to my dismay diagnosed with a Mental Health condition soon after.

"Nilanjana, can we have you inside our chamber once again?" The two lady physicians assigned to me were impeccably dressed. All I remembered then was that one of them literally fell off her chair while the other decided to take up my case!

Together, Dr. Priya Malhotra and Dr. Ashwini Usgaonkar took a look at my reports carefully. Then, my

parents were requested to sit at the reception while I was asked a few questions. The doctors noticed that the young girl was doing some erratic talking to the point of her own exhaustion; there was no linkage between words and sentences and that the syntax was incorrect. At the other end, I looked morose and depressed. My doctors could make out this was a mood disorder characterized by a chemical imbalance of the drug Serotonin in the brain. The MRI and CT scan reports confirmed the same.

Dr. Malhotra then once again requested my parents (who were most certainly tense and nervous by then) to comment on my language skills. "She is a walking encyclopedia but can't put words in sentences together. She will just say the individual words." Dr. Malhotra then did a complete and thorough assessment of my symptoms. She observed my behavior and asked my mother a long series of questions about my personality, food preferences, sleep habits, likes and dislikes, as well as a thorough questioning of her physical symptoms. As classical homeopaths, both Dr. Malhotra and Dr. Usgaonkar always prescribed based on the whole person, so they were interested in getting a complete picture of both the mental and physical symptoms. Once the initial consultation was over, they analyzed their notes and came up with a constitutional homeopathic remedy that suited me as a whole person (mentally and physically).

During the first follow-up, I came to the clinic a month later. My mother reported that my progress was unbelievable. "After giving me my homeopathic remedy, the erratic behavior started to disappear. It was incredible, the changes my husband and I noted in our daughter," my mother was quoted as telling the doctors.

My parents were advised to repeat the remedy once every two weeks, since I was on a high potency of the same. In some cases even a single dose of a remedy can last for weeks or even months. Thereafter, my medicines were sent via courier to her outstation (residential) address. Things had been pretty mellow with me ever since, she kept making progress, some of her mood fluctuations (occurring ideally before the onset of her menopause) were subsiding, the excitement/mania was much diminished, yet my parents remained much concerned about my need to manage my anger. They most certainly wanted more.

"I'm sure lots of warrior moms out there will agree with me, we all want full recovery so the million dollar question is: how will we achieve that? Well I wish I had the trillion dollar answer but I don't, all I can say is that we need to keep digging for that one thing that will set our kids free, recovered, and healed. These words to me

mean happy, healthy and enjoying life again.” My mother, who has incidentally taught me that “life is beautiful” asserted.

“These three words raise much controversy in the mental health community as many take warrior moms as moms who don’t accept our kids as they are. I say to them it’s because We LOVE our kids as they are that we want to heal, recover and set them free. What do I mean by my previous sentence well that my daughter was born perfectly healthy, happy, and free to be whatever she wanted to be. This was an accident. My daughter wasn’t born with emotional problems or any other health conditions. My daughter was perfect in every way; she was diagnosed with the illness because of that so now my mission is to help her be healthy again. Nilanjana had come so far and that’s not because she “grew” out of it like many people might think.” The mother continued. “My daughter is still either not happy or enjoying life a lot more now; we still have more healing to do to get her to a much healthier place. I’ve been thinking a lot about what and how we will get her to the end of our journey, what clearings to try next, remedies, etc. Having this responsibility is not easy, its nerve wrecking at times. And I know there’s more to come.” My mother added.

“The Joy Of Being Human...” was the girl’s first major catharsis and I turned out to be a prolific writer, publishing six books, including one from Germany within the span of five years. What started as a compulsion soon became a matter of choice. I wrote, and I quote myself thus: “I was born into a progressive Hindu family. When I was about two, I was told by a soothsayer that I would win over the cosmos one day. Forget about winning over the cosmos, I don’t even have gainful employment for years altogether. India has ratified the “Convention on Persons with Disabilities” but the story is the same for us. Disability is NOT a disease, although it can be the cause of much discomfort. But being a woman and disabled (I have managed to overcome my disability in the course of time) is being twice disabled, and I have spent my most youthful years in relentless search of peace and happiness.

Most people do not realize the joy of being human. I remember the words of Jean Vanier “A community is only being created when its members accept that they are not going to achieve great things, that they are not going to be heroes, but simply live each day with new hope, like children, in wonderment as the sun rises and in thanksgiving as it sets. Community is only being created when they have recognized that the greatness of man is to accept his insignificance, his human condition and his earth, and to thank God for having put in a finite body the seeds of eternity which are visible in small and daily

gestures of love and forgiveness. The beauty of man is in this fidelity to the wonder of each day.”

“One fine afternoon in the winter of 2004, my physicians, two impeccably dressed young women my age called me inside their chamber. ‘Nilanjana, can we have you inside the chamber once again please’ the softer voice in grey trousers and a white shirt with the usual cloak resonated. I was lost in my own thoughts, of Amartya Sen and Welfare Economics, Famines and Entitlements, poverty, inequality, peace and non-violence. As I started speaking, one of the two literally fell off her chair while the other decided to take up my case.

I was not born with depression. I had my mother tell me that she had bled in the third month of her pregnancy, but this obviously with my limited comprehension of Medical Science could not have been the reason.

Following my undergraduate studies, I opted for business studies but failed to find a good hostel environment. We were literally inmates inside a cage, and one morning, one of the hostellers had to be rushed to a doctor with migraine. It wasn’t migraine. It was that terrible feeling of lowness, or whatever and she had to be given electro-convulsive therapy. So, I was hardly ever surprised when it was all my turn the year being 1997. And July, the month, if I remember correct.

The year 1997 marked the beginning of a most powerful emotional struggle which has continued up to the present day. My defenses have weakened and further ailments, mostly physical have arrived including a bronchial-pneumonia attack which almost took my life. They put me on Oxygen and once again I survived. I am also slightly obese which is causing numerous problems in the lower limbs. I am currently undergoing my menopause at the age of 38. My mother, who is Arthritic, walks with a slight limp and my father has aged, but they are fighters in their own right too. It is in the equations of love that I have truly discovered the joy of being human.

I might like to add a word or two here. That I have always been taught that “great suffering presupposes some great purpose...” I have always believed in my power to change things from the way they are to the way I think they are supposed to be, like changes in the conditions of the poor for instance.

I am, still, despite every pain and suffering that has been inflicted on me and through the power of advanced alternative medicine, waiting to dart towards a day bereft of poverty, inequality, loneliness, homelessness and mass

hysterical violence. A day free of depression, melancholia and suicides...I have also now become a spiritual seeker.

Traditional Western medicine has no cure for emotional pain and suffering. My psychiatrist once boldly asserted that 'I cannot achieve anything in life following this day.' That was the year 1997. But Classical Homeopathy has proved him wrong. Because Homeopathy can prove anyone wrong. For instance, there is a strong remedy called 'Kali Phos' I am told. But I am only a patient, a very patient patient that too.

Unlike allopathy, homeopathy is safe and has no side-effects, once again I am told. It goes to the roots of each problem. It adopts not a myopic but a holistic view of the problem in question. This is painless and non-invasive unlike traditional Western medicine. I used to sit for hours at the clinic observing people but the doctors/staff never chided me. Classical homeopathy has accorded me the dignity of a complete person, complete in every respect, personal, professional and now deeply spiritual and socially conscious. My doctors have 'enabled' me come out of my cocoon so as to say and spread my wings and fly. I am also now highly educated with help from my doctors and strongly contemplating working on humanitarian and spiritual concerns as well as the social dilemmas ailing suffering humanity.

They say 'it's a world where only the fittest survive...' (Charles Darwin). By enabling me to think positive and taking me away from all that painful, invasive therapy to a world of "sweet pills", my homeopaths have proved to the world that a person (read 'patient') with a mental health condition need not be confined to an institution for life. That there is hope for such patients. Homeopathy has made it all possible for me.

The standard treatment for these disorders is a combination of psychiatry and psychology. The psychiatry is primarily medical treatment with medication. I have required a variety of these over the years, as I tend to build up a tolerance to medication and they have to give me ever-increasing doses, until the doctor cannot prescribe a higher dose without poisoning me. Then we have to switch to a new set.

Medication is a two-edged sword. It can do wonders, replacing the neurotransmitters that nature has given me

a shortage of, but all have some sort of side effects. My first one was a dose of Alprax followed by Lithium. I was then switched to Tegretol. The medication is not a cure-all. The mood swings are almost, but not completely, stamped out. There is still a large component of paranoia in my life, leading to worry all the time about almost everything.

People are afraid of those with mental health issues, no matter how benign. The looks they give you when you tell them are priceless, as if they expect you to leap at their throats at any moment. Almost all people seem to associate any sort of mental illness with "going postal." When I go to a job interview, the conversation goes along fine, the employers are impressed with my skill set and certifications, are very positive, seem about to hire me...then, "the question." What have you been doing since you left college?

It's been 16 years without a job, after all. So, I can go with one of three routes at this point: 1) I can tell them straight out, which abruptly ends the conversation (thank you, but I don't think you are what we're looking for in this position, etc, etc). I can 2) Tell them that it was due to a disability or long-term illness, at which point they always immediately ask what the illness or disability is (even though that is infringing on one's privacy). Here, I can either tell them (thank you, goodbye), or inform them that such a question is illegal (thank you, goodbye). The third route is to lie shamelessly. I have tried this, but I think they know something in my eyes or face maybe, or I don't make up a good enough story, something. Anyway, at this point, the answer is always thank you, goodbye. I have gotten this answer from workplaces from tech firms and non-profits to places like the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Manovikas Kendro (an organization for special children) and IICP (Indian Institute of Cerebral Palsy) et al.

Sometimes, even "Shrinks" (psychiatrists) can go overboard. They just refuse to give you a chance to express your feelings of pain and agony. Mental illness is something that should not be a curse, as it can be treated to the point where the victim is useful to society. However, until society gives up its prejudices and welcomes the mentally ill into the fold, they will be kept on the fringes and shunned.

