

9. J's Story.

J... grew up in a gentle and close family in Gloucestershire. Daughter of a carpenter and joiner, with two brothers, the family lived in a small house adjoining the forge of the local farrier. **She writes:** I am writing an account of mental and spiritual experiences which, hopefully, will help others, both those who are suffering the distressing condition known as schizophrenia, and those who try to understand and treat it. I expect that some will recognise these experiences as being similar to those that they have had. But to those who have not, I merely suggest that they keep an open mind and believe that I have written only the truth.

I was brought up to go to church, and took part in the choir and many church-based activities. Following success in the Higher School Certificate in 1947, I went on to Reading University to study for an Honours degree in English. I had known throughout my early teens that I wanted to be a Librarian, and after my degree, and following a year's practical training in Reading Public Library, I attended the School of Librarianship at University College, London. With a Diploma in Librarianship, I began work at the National Central Library in London.

I grew up with the normal range of childhood ailments, but at ten, I began to have severe pains in my side and stomach, accompanied by severe headaches and vomiting. Doctors could find nothing specific, and one told my mother that I would have to take pain-killing drugs for the rest of my life. My mother, however, was determined that I should be spared this horrifying prospect, and took me to see an American doctor who practised as a chiropractor in Cheltenham. Using skilled manipulation and various medications that she prescribed, this most kind lady effected a cure that has lasted until this day.

My mother described me when young as having a very vivid imagination. What I was seeing were what can only be described as 'visions of glory'. William Wordsworth wrote about such an experience perfectly in his ode "Intimations of immortality from recollections of early childhood". The whole poem expresses so exactly what I also have experienced.

Not in entire forgetfulness
Not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is out home".

The beauties of nature, the colours of the flowers, birds, trees, the rhythms of the seasons, all were a joyous part of and at one with an inner light, often pure white light, which I could see. Not only was I seeing the external, physical sun moon and stars, but on many occasions, visions of an inner sun moon and stars, also of beautiful sky-scapes which delighted me. I could sometimes 'see' through physical walls to far distant beauties. I now realise that my consciousness was on a spiritual level, which meant that material things were not registering as solid, as normal everyday consciousness.

These visions, and many others that I could describe if invited to do so, lasted for many years. I also felt swirls of wonderful, blissful energy as if I had been caught up in a whirlwind. It would happen while walking particularly in the countryside. A "still, small voice", heard when I was walking in a lovely garden in Oxford, called me by name. I later dedicated my life, even though lived in the world and not in an enclosed community, to God through Jesus Christ. At that time, I did not know how unusual my experiences were, but all of them filled me with complete bliss and love for everyone and everything.

Gradually my consciousness was drawn out into the everyday world and visions ceased. Looking back, I realise that the lower vibrations of the material world gradually 'came in', as I call it and encircled the inner vision, causing darkness and the forgetfulness of the former glories. At the time one does not know that this is happening. The whole process is, in my opinion, spiral movement. As we live on a spinning planet, with different levels of energies acting and interacting on human bodies, the mind becomes enmeshed in the human condition. It is a downward spiral at first, which in due course becomes an upward one.

At age nineteen, while studying at University, under great pressure trying to get accustomed to living alone in 'digs' – although I had a very kind landlady – never free of persistent catarrh causing dull headaches, anxious about keeping ahead of work commitments, having very little leisure time and depressed by the failure of two developing, but platonic friendships, I said to myself one day in utter despair "There is no meaning in anything. It's all just words, words, words". At that moment something in my head just snapped, causing complete chaos inside. I could hear voices uttering unspeakable blasphemies. Whenever I lay down to sleep at night, shapes, colours, people's faces churned round and round endlessly. For the first three nights after my breakdown, I cannot remember sleeping at all. This went on ceaselessly, day and night, utter torment, complete hell. At this point I must state categorically that the 'still small voice' heard in that garden in Oxford, was totally different from these demonic ones.

Outwardly, although it may seem hard to believe, I seemed normal, if somewhat withdrawn. I could still talk to people, do my work, although with considerable difficulty in concentration. I could shop, eat, do chores, cycle to lectures. My mother, whom I only saw occasionally in those days, since I was living away from home, remarked during one visit that I seemed "hag ridden". How apt that phrase was! I did not tell her or anyone, except by letter to the University psychiatrist describing what had happened, but never received an answer. However, I think the psychiatrist must have asked one of my Tutors to keep an eye on me, because she started inviting me to her home and taking me to the cinema.

I was like a zombie, my mind that had one time been so clear, now darkened. I remember staring at myself in the mirror, my body feeling dead, but yet something in me still aware of all that was happening. At no time did I contemplate suicide, but I desperately searched my memory for something that would alleviate the horror of my inner turmoil. I remembered having been given a palm cross one Palm Sunday, when I was only seven or eight.

The recollection of that lovely day, the joy of that time, surrounded by loving people, the sun shining brilliantly outside the church, was calming and consoling. For years, during every waking moment, I tried to keep the thought and picture of that cross in my inner vision. I read the bible voraciously, copied whole chapters into a notebook, kept a crucifix under my pillow. I also tried to visualise in the inner darkness, the colour and shape of the 'inner' sun, moon, and stars that were once so natural to see.

After leaving University, doing a year's practical library work and obtaining my Diploma in Librarianship, I started full time work. I met and married a very considerate and loving husband. We had no family. The 'voices' did not abate even during the period of our marriage, but although he knew that I was suffering from some mental struggle, he did not know the details. He was vegetarian, just not liking meat from boyhood. He never tried to convert me, but gradually I became vegetarian myself, for several reasons, and have never wanted to revert to meat eating. He died in 1982.

I have had several good, satisfying jobs in libraries; made very many friends; have all sorts of hobbies – walking, reading, listening to music, embroidery, knitting, attending evening classes and study tours abroad. I do voluntary committee and community work since taking early retirement, do gardening and have a pet cat.

Through being a vegetarian, I was led to a guesthouse in Glastonbury, which turned out also to be a spiritual centre. I had remained through all the years a staunch Christian, attending church, if not really regularly, at least at all the main festivals, but this was something, at Ramala as it is called, which began at long last to draw me out of the darkness. The Christ light is worshipped there as living reality. Their teaching and associated art work reawakened my visions. I don't mean by that that I experienced them as I had done in childhood, but I knew that they were being expressed through the work of Ramala. It led me on to an even more wonderful realisation, connected with the former glory, which has restored life, life, light hope, joy.

By dint of keeping my inner vision fixed on the symbol of the cross, and on the memory of the glorious light, through all the pain of the psychological, mental spiritual ordeal – and at times it has been physical pain too – the voices have gradually lessened.

For quite some time now, a kind of inner peace has been growing. The noisy anger racing round inside as trapped energy seeking outlet, has been brought under control by my not permitting it to erupt, but transmuting it into a constructive, loving force. I mean that by also holding in my mind's eye, the picture of a perfect pink rose, symbol of pure love, and by sending out to all whom I meet, good will, as we are commanded to do, the mind settles down. Incredible though it may seem, the body has come through all this practically unscathed, as I have been in good physical health after shaking off the childhood migraines and the catarrh of student days.

This experience has taught me numerous things about the body and mind, especially the necessity, whatever happens, of keeping on bravely with what one knows to be the inner truth. It is best, at least for me, to try not to

'think', but to empty the mind, which is fantastically difficult to do as there is always something buzzing into it. One has to try to trust the invisible higher power than man, which does guard and guide, if one will only ask. I had placed my life in God's hands years ago.

The positive and negative forces of energy are forever working on the human organism. Everything is seeking the balance and rest of the inner core. The ordinary conscious mind flies outward to the perceived world, getting distracted, pulled down and obsessed by material objects, be they animate or inanimate. If one can so concentrate the mind on the central, inner peace, in whatever form that may take for the individual – and it takes iron-willed determination, perseverance and above all, hope, regardless of what is happening to the body in daily life, - letting go of worries, be assured that progress begins to be made, even if it does not seem like it. Gradually, so very gradually, the niggling, saw-like, anxiety-filled tensions of the mind fade away, and one is left with renewed clarity of vision, revived joy in the beauties of nature and peace which passes all understanding.

It helps, too, if one can observe the whole process impersonally, as if it were someone else's mind; again, difficult to do, but not impossible, the key word being detachment. This does not mean that one should not do all one can for others when one sees their problems and difficulties, but while sending out goodwill to all, learn, as doctors and nurses have to, not to become emotionally involved.

As an explanation of the Gospel of St. John states, "The physical has its work and purpose, otherwise God would not have created it, and the physical life too has its place in the development of man. We cannot cast aside material duties, for we are here on earth to master matter, and the soul who neglects to watch where it is going has a tumble and suffers a few cuts and bruises. There must be a harmonious balance between all planes of being. Harmony, balance, this is the object of life". This passage underlines many of the things which I have been trying to express.