



Trisha Goddard, 45, TV Presenter

The other day a cab driver giving me a lift home recognised me and started telling me how he'd just picked up someone from the psychiatric hospital. He described this person as a "weirdo" and a "right nutter" and said he was really scared. "You'd better be scared again" I told him, "because I've been in a psychiatric ward, in fact one in four of all the people in your cab will have had a mental health problem." It clearly made him stop and think.

I started encountering bouts of depression from the age of 14, though it wasn't diagnosed until I was in the acute wing of a psychiatric ward in Sydney aged 37. Until then I'd done what many people do, lurched from one way of coping to another - frequent marijuana use, obsessive dieting and heavy drinking. I also kept getting into awful abusive relationships because I was so detached. I had two suicide attempts but it was only after the second that people took notice.

I saw a psychiatrist twice a week after that and discovered I was a stereotype of the 'smiling depressive' - in other words not the bleakly down and withdrawn depressive but someone who is hyper-active, busy non-stop, often very talkative and uninhibited. We are the ones who when we go, go with such a bang that we self-combust.

My family has a predisposition to mental health problems - my aunt has lived with bi-polar disorder for much of her life and I had a sister with schizophrenia who burnt herself to death in 1988. I was working in Australia at the time and came back to England to be with her for the six weeks it took her to die. Trying to explain to people back in Australia why I'd dashed over here, without mentioning mental health, seemed not only to deny my sister's struggles but to deny her very existence. That's when I decided to tell people about the mental health problems in my family.

Secrets and lies will destroy you every time. If I hadn't 'come out' safely to a journalist in Australia after I ended up in a psychiatric wing I'd be tip-toeing around today coping with the added stress of secrets and lies. **My sister had schizophrenia but that wasn't what killed her - it was the stigma. With the stigma comes ignorance and fear and people have personal life choices taken away from them.**

I've been very lucky with my employers. When I was head hunted by Anglia Television I explained to my boss that I lived with mental illness and therefore needed time for myself; as a result I've been allowed to arrange my days to safeguard my good health.

Nowadays I always talk about living with depression because I've managed to create the circumstances whereby I don't have to suffer anymore. I've learnt what I need: for instance I've got an obsessive side which instead of fighting I now use productively by taking masses of exercise. I've also learnt that I'm not good in cities - I need the woods for my soul - so we moved to the countryside.

My husband and two daughters are my care team and we have a contract that if they see me start becoming a bit frantic and detached they bring it to my attention. In order for them to feel secure I'll act on their concerns even if I'm convinced I'm not "skidding". I accept that they are the experts. And now so am I.

FACT: In a 1998 survey, 99% of mental health workers said that they believed discrimination could have a significant impact on mental health. 60% of them had worked with clients with long-term emotional problems resulting from discrimination. (Health Education Authority, 1998)