

CHAPTER 6

MENTAL, EMOTIONAL & PHYSICAL BREAKDOWN

September is a month noted for its pressure. At the time when one is studying hard for exams, daylight saving commences and an hour is taken off the day. September is the busiest month for psychiatrists

One night in September 1976 I became distressed and disorientated at about 3am in the morning – extremely, paranoid and frightened; emotionally weakened after years of pressure, study and religious ‘guilt tripping’

7am the next morning found me outside a dairy in the suburbs of Hamilton some 300km away. I asked at the dairy if anyone knew my sister Helen – a call was put through and Helen turned up within 15 minutes

She greeted me warmly and phoned my parents – they turned up later in the day and I was taken to a psychiatrist in Auckland – a Dr Laurie Gluckman

Three weeks of intensive medical treatment followed including psychotherapy and ECT. The ECT was carefully and professionally administered by Dr Gluckman personally under carefully controlled anaesthesia. Let me make it very clear that Dr Gluckman was at the top of his profession – this was not a situation where I was tied to a rack against my will and jump started with a battery cable

ECT was to continue for the next ten years

A cocktail of drugs was prescribed – namely tegretol, stelazine and prothiaden. Initially the dosages were very high resulting in a range of side effects including progressive weight gain from over eating – I remember, at one stage, eating 22 sandwiches for lunch

It was a dreadful time – the constant depression, the side effects from the drugs and having to live it all with the EB looking on – many saying straight out I had brought it all on myself and deserved to suffer

I completely retreated into the security of mental illness for the next decade – just glad to stay away from the meetings and sleep, often for very long periods. At night I needed sleeping pills to get off to sleep – it took me years in the 90’s to get over this addiction

My parents were very kind and supportive. Of special comfort was my sister Lynette who married in 1979 and went to live in Whangarei with her husband

My EB neighbour Lewis Simpkin made a special effort to understand and became a kind friend. He was, you may remember, one of ‘the good boys’. Although of similar age we had never been close but he put many hours into trying to understand. His mother was a Forrest – a well known intellectual family who had suffered from time

to time. Another friend was Desmond Simpkin. His mother had been treated in the 60's for a psychiatric disorder – the condition was much misunderstood and she was much maligned, unnecessarily so at the time. Overall, the Brethren community were kind and sympathetic.

It would be entirely untrue to claim that they were unsympathetic or did not make an effort to understand. Certainly, I was aware that SOME were unsympathetic and I avoided them as much as possible. However, looking around the fellowship at that time it troubled me somewhat that there was such an incidence of psychiatric problems.

I doubt that I ever healed completely or that I completely understood the condition I was suffering from. At that time there was no definitive diagnosis – perhaps it was my mistake in not ensuring that there was one.

The decade dragged on – in 1985 I was 32 years of age and unmarried. That was all about to change.