

# **DONALD'S STORY**





## **The Sunflower**

I have chosen the sunflower as the cover for my story  
as it has the effect of lifting my spirits.

The sunflower is commonly used by mental health  
organisations as a symbol of hope and light.

It is the emblem used by the  
Schizophrenia Fellowship of NSW and  
the Sunflower Foundation.



# Donald's Story – A Story of Hope and Inspiration

This is the story of a man who suffered from Schizophrenia for a total of 41 years. Schizophrenia embraced the greater part of my adult life, yet it is a story of hope and inspiration. My eldest daughter, Claire, suggested this title. The very same title had crossed my mind many years ago, and at the time I was concerned that it could be seen as boasting on my part. However, Claire's appraisal has helped to confirm that it is a most suitable title for what has been my journey.

The illness of Schizophrenia causes the human brain to malfunction. It is seen by many as being the most distressful of all mental illnesses. Schizophrenia disrupts the normal thinking processes of the brain, causing a person's personality to change and consequently their behaviour. It is certainly not, as some irresponsible people tell us, a split personality, such as that fictional Jekyll and Hyde. Even with Schizophrenia there is hope. Even when the illness has been present for many years, during which time there has been a repetition of acute psychotic episodes, there still does exist a possibility of recovery. I am living proof that such a recovery can definitely take place.

A very good friend of mine of some fifty years described it in these words. "Donald, you were another Rip Van Winkle, who fell asleep for all those years to eventually wake up and come back into the real world." My treating psychiatrist put it in this way: "Donald, it is as if you were trapped in a raging forest fire that was totally out of control, and you were badly burned by the intense hot flames. The burns healed, but you were left with scars."



During my early twenties life was so enjoyable and full of promise for the future

# The First Episode

For me, the illness of Schizophrenia first became evident at 24 years of age in 1965. At the time I was an Acting Senior Technical Officer working at Australia's International Shortwave Receiving Station, then located at Rockbank, a farming area located just 30 kilometres west of Melbourne. I had only been there for approximately 18 months when my whole life was to be completely turned upside down. My mind was to betray me. It is not possible to recall precisely the correct sequence of events that occurred, but I can remember some aspects in surprising detail.

Following my arrival at Rockbank in 1963, I found myself becoming depressed. This was firstly as a result of isolation from my previous social life in Sydney, and also because I had twice failed an exam that would ensure my permanent appointment as a Senior Technical Officer, which would have allowed me to advance further in my chosen career. In preparing for exams, I found that I could no longer concentrate on the subject, comprehend, or even remember what I had just read. I also had great difficulty learning the technical operations at the shortwave receiving station. Working the midnight to dawn shift, the very nature of the job could create stress because of the many hours spent alone and the sole responsibility involved in ensuring the receivers continued to operate on the international circuits.

I had also begun to withdraw socially and become irritable and short tempered. Around this same time my father remarried, my mother having passed away several years earlier. I was granted leave to return to Sydney to attend the wedding. At the wedding reception I can remember talking to other guests – everything seemed quite normal to me. However apparently only several days later, while still in Sydney, I was to experience what is described as hearing voices. This is when the person believes that their own thoughts are actually those of another person who is suggesting or even commanding that they act in a certain way.

In my case, the voices told me to go to the domestic terminal at Kingsford Smith Airport in Mascot. I purchased a one-way ticket on the very first available flight to Melbourne. When I arrived in Melbourne, I immediately paid a taxi to take me to Rockbank, a journey of approximately 30 kilometres. On arrival at Rockbank I walked to a nearby farming property and insisted, actually I demanded, that the farmer's daughter who was about my age, was to accompany me on a date. I can now see how I came to behave this way. It was because I felt that I was losing my ability to socialise and also my ability to secure a permanent position in my job. I felt that I

was losing my grip on the life I wanted, which involved a steady job with enough income to support a wife and family. But if I could win the affections of the farmer's daughter, I could become a farmer and all my problems, financial and social, would be solved.

Fortunately, her parents immediately realised this was not the Donald that they had come to know in the past. They immediately contacted the station manager, who in turn contacted my father in Sydney and before long I would be flown back to Sydney. I can remember being seen by a local GP at Footscray and being given an injection to sedate me. I was then escorted by the husbands of my two cousins in Melbourne through the busy domestic terminal crowded with people and led up the steps onto a late-night flight. The airline knew my situation and had agreed to fly me back to Sydney. I was seated at the rear of the plane and cared for by the cabin crew. On arrival at Kingsford Smith airport, I was met by both my father and brother, who was a pathologist. I was immediately taken by car to a private psychiatric hospital named Bromalan, which was located at Strathfield.

On admission, I was locked in a very small room with only a mattress on the floor. I protested loudly by banging on the plywood door, hitting it so hard that I punched a hole right through it to the corridor outside. I cut my hand as the result. A big male nurse entered the room to give me an injection. If he had said to me to please sit down as I'm going to give you an injection that shall relax you, I would have cooperated. Instead, he grabbed me from behind and attempted to jab me with the needle. I objected to being manhandled in this manner. I automatically pushed him aside, causing him to lose his balance and fall down to the floor. He quickly got up and jabbed the needle into my thigh.

The following day, I was allowed to walk along the corridor but I was made to wear a restraining jacket, also known as a straitjacket, for the remainder of the day. I was so humiliated. That evening, I was put to bed in the male ward, pending the arrival of my psychiatrist that evening, Dr Bruce Stephen, whom had been recommended by colleagues of my brother. The first of a series of electro-convulsive treatments (ECT) was given that night. More were to be given during my five week stay in hospital, in conjunction with insulin shock treatment in the mornings. After a treatment I would occasionally experience a dull headache.

I understand that the thought of having electricity pass through your brain is uncomfortable. The thought of ECT, or shock treatment as it is often labelled, does lead to visions of something very terrifying. Its bad reputation comes from its use in the past where people were not sedated, but fully conscious and nor were they given

muscle relaxants. Serious injuries such as bone fractures or dislocations were not uncommon. ECT is very different today, I can assure you. I received a total of 60 treatments during a period of 12 years. Firstly, patients are given muscle relaxants and secondly, patients are asleep having been given anaesthetic similar to that used in surgery. The use of ECT is constantly being improved and today is even better than it was in my day. When I awoke from my treatment I was lying in a comfortable bed, and the medical staff and equipment would no longer be present in the room. Often I was able to get up, get dressed and have breakfast.

During the second week after admission I put this question to the doctor. "Have I had a breakdown?" He replied, "Yes Donald, you have." He said no more than that. I interpreted the doctor's comment as confirmation of my own honest belief that my breakdown was a result of only nervous exhaustion caused by the stressful nature of my job. To my mind that was a rational thought. I was certainly not prepared to entertain the idea that I was suffering from a mental illness. The truth was that I was in a constant state of denial.

I can remember stories from when I was a teenager about psychiatric hospitals such as Callan Park, Rozelle, Gladesville and the Reception Centre, with those high walls which surrounded them to prevent the inmates from escaping and patients being given shock treatment against their will. During the mid-1950's my sister was admitted to North Ryde Psychiatric Hospital. As seen through the eyes of a teenager, she had appeared to me to be going mad. Sadly, she never experienced a full recovery and these were very worrying days for all families involved. Despite her illness, my sister and her husband successfully raised three children. Later they were to become grandparents which gave them great joy.

I must point out to you that when I was initially admitted to hospital, I was so ill that I was not really aware of what was occurring around me. In regard to the ECT, this treatment was given each time I had experienced a psychotic episode throughout my life. However, a greater number of treatments were necessary to combat the clinical depression that followed each psychotic episode. Clinical depression is depression that is so severe that medication alone is no longer sufficient to overcome it. When it was decided that more ECT was required to treat me, I was disappointed because I had not been able to lift myself out of the depression and disappointed that they had to resort to giving shock treatment. I felt that I was not able to win the battle. Prior to the first session, I remember asking my psychiatrist, "Do I have to have this?" Holding my hand and speaking to me in a very gentle and sincere voice he replied, "Yes Donald, it will help to get you well again." And with those reassuring words the attending anaesthetist inserted the needle into my outstretched arm. Within a matter of seconds, I drifted away.

Of course, in addition to the ECT, medications were also used by the doctors and supplemented by many hours of psychotherapy where the psychiatrist counselled me. We talked things through, working together as a team, the goal being my recovery. How different it is from when you are treated and cared for by a physician and surgeon to that of your psychiatrist. For one thing, progress to recovery for a psychiatric illness is so much slower. In the early years, I was so fragile that I felt the need to see the psychiatrist at least twice a week, where he would possibly change my medication. Some of these medications were found to have unpleasant side effects and so then my doctor would prescribe another. It took a couple years for me to come to terms with how the psychiatrist managed the illness.

Even though I was certainly unlucky in life to experience this most devastating illness, I was most definitely fortunate to be a patient of such a revolutionary and highly regarded psychiatric hospital of its day. Bromalan Private Hospital and its staff were featured in the official journal of the Private Hospitals and Nursing Homes Association of Australia in 1974 under the title "New Dimensions of Psychiatric Care." Many psychiatrists in private practice would send their patients there as it had acquired such a good reputation.

One of the intermediate bedrooms at Bromalan Hospital



Separate from this hospital there existed a network of accommodation referred to as half-way houses. Here, former patients were able to re-establish themselves in a work situation, therefore gaining a re-entry into society and regaining the confidence that comes with this independence, along with the feeling of achievement which naturally follows. A therapeutic gain is acquired when people live together in a community where each person is expected to help themselves whilst also aiming to help, understand, support and encourage one another.

The transition from psychiatric patient to becoming a productive member of the community can slam a person up against a whole battery of personal crises. A patient should be treated and guided through their transition by the kind of professionalism and specialised environments that existed at Bromalan and the chain of homes and units located in the surrounding suburbs. The door at Bromalan was always open if you felt the need for a more protected environment. It was not only the facilities but also the nursing and support staff who created a very nurturing environment which really could induce recovery. Hope and encouragement centred around the family environment. This entire complex was the brainchild of Jack Birchall, a former psychiatric nurse at Rydalmere Psychiatric Hospital in Sydney. Jack was both the owner and administrator of the complex - a truly remarkable man with such deep-seeded concern for the care and welfare of those affected by a mental illness. Jack Birchall was a true visionary and humanitarian in every sense of the word.

Matron Jean East and Mr. Jack Birchall



Upon discharge from Bromalan, I moved into a 'half-way house' called 1B. 1B was located just next to the hospital and housed many former patients. At 1B you were no longer a patient, but a resident. From here, we would go to work during the week. However, 1B was only a temporary arrangement and shortly afterwards we were all relocated to our new home, formerly a boarding house located in the adjoining suburb of Homebush.

I flew to Melbourne to ask my aunt if she was aware of any mental illness in the family tree as naturally, both my doctor and I were interested to know. Her response was, "Donald, it would be better if you did not ask." Mental illness is often stigmatised by those who are ill-informed and those still living in the past. I did not pursue the matter any further with her, however her response made me only more determined to find out. I had always been very interested in my family tree. I had met my mother's father, but my father's father was never mentioned. Eventually, I obtained my grandfather's death certificate from Melbourne and it read that he had died of cancer of the tongue and pneumonia. However, his residential address was the large government psychiatric hospital in Melbourne for the aged. You can draw the obvious conclusion, as my sister and her eldest daughter both suffered from Schizophrenia and of course, myself also. These revelations weigh heavily on the belief that the illness can be carried by family genes. Naturally, later I was deeply concerned about the possibility of my own two daughters inheriting the illness. Fortunately, neither of them did.

Eventually I handed my grandfather's death certificate to my father. He read it, then handed it back to me. He did not utter a single word. I in turn made no comment, evidently a very sensitive subject. On a previous visit to Melbourne to see my mother's sister, she had told me that my dad's father had walked out on his family, never to be seen or heard from again. At the time my father was only 5 years of age and his brother 3 years of age.

I eventually took the very brave decision to leave behind the protected environment that the rehabilitation home provided and venture out once again into the unprotected world – our society – where you do meet many indifferent and uncompassionate individuals. I was now working at the International Shortwave Transmitting Station at Doonside and rented a very comfortable, single-bedroom unit at West Ryde. In my mind, I believe I kept telling myself that I had experienced a nervous breakdown and was mentally exhausted as a result of the nature of my work. I was in a continual state of denial. It was not until some four years later, when I experienced my second psychotic episode that I came face to face with the truth.



This photo of myself is taken only a few months after being discharged from hospital after the first episode. The photo captures just how the illness effects both your physical appearance and emotional state.

71 Hughes St, ~~mark~~

27<sup>th</sup> Sept 1969  
3 EVERTON RD  
STRATHGIE

Dear John,

Just a short note to you,  
enquiring about "Mitzi"

~~It is not that I~~

It's been such a long time since  
I last had news of how she's  
~~making out~~ is making out.

~~Best~~

~~If you still have her don't be  
slam.~~

Also please pass on my regards  
to your wife. How's the family? All  
well I hope.

Could you please let me know  
your telephone number at 71 Hughes St,  
as ~~number~~ the telephone number ~~is~~  
has ~~been~~ apparently been changed.

Kindest Regards

Don Wither

PERSONS  
THIS IS A COPY OF  
LETTER I ATTEMPTED  
TO WRITE, ENQUIRING ABOUT  
MY GERMAN SHEPHERD DOG  
HAD TO GIVE UP WHEN I  
FIRST ENTERED HOSPITAL IN 1966.  
IT ILLUSTRATES HOW SCHIZOPHRENIA  
AFFECTS MY ABILITY TO COMPOSE  
SIMPLE LETTERS.

POSTED Sept 27<sup>th</sup> Sept 1969

This attempt at writing a letter is an example of my inability to write, concentrate or function clearly. When I was not well, I was enquiring about my lovely German Shepherd that I had to give up on entering the half-way house. At the time, so much of my life was falling apart around me. This serves to demonstrate just how the illness affects the human mind.



My German Shepherd 'Mitzy.' She loved to go driving with her master.

# The Second Episode

What was to become my second psychotic episode proved to be the most terrifying and bizarre, and later the most embarrassing time of my life. I was totally unaware at the time that a second episode was starting to occur. I was now 28 years old and I couldn't see that the delusions were starting up again. Then one Saturday afternoon I was driving my car along Concord Road to visit some friends. A large truck passed me in the opposite direction. In the driver's cabin, there was one of those plastic hands fixed to a spring that appeared to be waving. I saw this, but my mind misinterpreted what I saw. I developed the false belief that I was a person of such great importance that people were waving at me as I went past. Instead of visiting friends, I continued on in my car to the International Airport, parked my car and walked to the freight terminal located next to the passenger terminal. My aim was to sneak across the open area between the buildings and to the aircraft parked on the tarmac and board the plane, being careful not to be seen. I believed I was going to be flown to America where I would attend an international conference as a keynote speaker and receive an award for my achievements. In those days, security was not like it is today. On walking across the open space between the buildings and the plane, not one person appeared to notice my presence. But I feared I would be caught, so before I reached the plane I turned back and returned to my car and to my unit.

During a psychotic episode, the thoughts you experience and the decisions that you make all occur at such speed that what you will do next is very unpredictable. My delusions and hallucinations were so strong that I was totally unaware that there was anything wrong with my thinking. The delusion of success and the following thoughts of grandeur were in fact the opposite of reality. I feel they compensated for what I had not been able to achieve, both in my high school studies and technical training, and my more recent failure to pass an exam required for promotion. I also feel that isolation from my previous very enjoyable social life was a contributing factor.

Back home, lying on my bed listening to the radio, I thought that the presenters were speaking directly to me. The voice told me to proceed to Darling Harbour. I gave no thought to showering, shaving or changing my clothes. I didn't even put shoes and socks on my feet. I lifted myself from my bed and wandered down to my car in the parking area below. The April morning air was chilly. I got in my car and drove out to Victoria Road, merging with the traffic which was moving at a fast pace. Everyone appeared to be in a great hurry and heading towards the city.

The psychotic episode was now in full flight. I believe I had been hearing voices for some days. The traffic was moving rapidly, or that was my impression at least. I was very tense now. Both of my hands were embracing the upper region of the steering wheel and my fingers were frozen to the rim. My eyes were wide open, looking straight ahead over the engine bonnet and focusing on the rear of the car directly in front. I was leaning right forward, the steering wheel against my chest, and my nose pressed against the windscreen. I drove like a race car driver who makes use of the slip stream of the car in front. I changed lanes rapidly if a vacant spot appeared in order to advance. I edged as close as I dared to the vehicle in front, repeatedly tapping the brake pedal then jumping back on the accelerator to gain ground. Had I bumped the car in front at any time I would have caused a chain of accidents resulting in a tragedy. Only good luck prevented this from happening.

I was approaching the western entrance of the old Pymont Bridge, but the wheel of my car hit the gutter and I came to a halt at the base of a lamp post. I immediately jumped from the car to abandon it, running towards the city. I saw a uniformed policeman near the eastern end of the bridge. I put my arm out and touched him as an act of defiance to a figure of authority. Such was the state of my mind. My action brought no response from the policeman. I turned right into a street lined with warehouses. A short distance on, I came upon a warehouse that looked familiar. It was the warehouse from which I had purchased Christmas decorations some years before. I ran inside.

I was still in an agitated state and had been for some days- exactly how many I cannot say. I stood in front of an old lift well, with a concertina door. By now, my fear and anxiety were running out of control. The voices were saying I must keep moving, and the only way forward was down the lift well. To jump down the lift well was not an act of suicide, but a means of escape. My intentions must have been clear as two men from a nearby shop stood beside me ready to grab me if I attempted to jump. Onlookers were starting to gather. I could hear the wailing of a police siren getting louder and closer. I soon felt two big, strong hands take a firm hold of me. It was two uniformed policemen. My running had come to an end.

Obviously, an astute person had made a phone call to 'triple 0'. I felt a sense of security while being held by the police officers and led away from the lift well. I was walked to a paddy wagon parked outside in the street. The crowd of onlookers was dispersing. I was gently lowered to the floor of the paddy wagon and the rear screen door closed behind me and locked. I can still recall hearing one police officer say, "the poor fellow" to the other officer. Goodness knows what the outcome would have been but for the quick thinking of the person who called, and the quick

response of the police. The vehicle moved off, accelerating and breaking as it rounded the corners. It was a bumpy ride, there was no safety belt and I was constantly sliding across the floor. I was lucky not to be injured. Today, an ambulance is employed in these situations.

My psychotic episode had not yet finished however. Through the police van window I saw the mast of a ship tied up at the wharf. In my mind, I was going to be smuggled aboard this ship and taken to Russia. Of course, this was just another delusion. The police vehicle moved on and after a while came to a halt. I was led into a building and seated in a room. I was at the Balmain General Hospital. In the meantime, the police had been busy. From my car that I had earlier abandoned, the police were able to establish my full name, age and address. I was soon on my way to the Psychiatric Hospital at North Ryde where I was admitted. This is the very same hospital where my sister had been a patient during the 1950's, also suffering from Schizophrenia.

On admission, I was given a physical examination by a doctor. I was still not uttering a word to anyone. I was then taken to the dining room where one of the domestic staff served me a meal. I cannot recall when I last had something to eat and drink. I ate very quickly and on this occasion I was starving. After the meal, I was placed in a very small room by myself. In this tiny room was a wooden bench acting as a bed at night and a seat during the day. A large window provided a view of the hospital grounds. Across the window were security bars and the glass in the window had been replaced with plastic to prevent patients from having a method of harming themselves. In the door was a very small window through which staff were able to check on the patient without opening the door.

The day was drawing to a close. The sun had set and darkness was closing in. I lay on the wooden bench with my legs curled up, my knees under my chin. No mattress, pillow or blanket had been provided. I was still in a state of fear, anxiety and distrust, trembling all over and I had not had a change of clothes or shaved in many days. Tired and exhausted from a very stressful few days, regardless of the discomforts, I soon fell asleep.

After breakfast, the five male patients were led by a male nurse into a courtyard area where we were given a set of tasks to perform. This was in order to assess our mental state. Then we were given lunch, after which a female nurse led us into the spacious grounds of the hospital. We exercised and played a game of rounders. It was while we were exercising that I began to be aware that I was very sick. I and the other patients never acknowledged each other's presence, let alone engage in

conversation, but we were suspicious of each other and I could see myself in these very sick male patients.

After dinner, I was placed back in my room. The other four patients were accommodated in a much larger room together. I got very little sleep that night. The following morning I was driven away in a large black sedan. I was seated at the back throughout the journey and was very agitated. The driver spoke to me, saying, "We are trying to help you." I did not reply as I was still very suspicious. I looked out the window. It was a bright, sunny morning and the glare troubled me. We appeared to be driving along Concord Road and so I reasoned that we must be going towards Strathfield and Bromalan Private Psychiatric Hospital. I started to relax a little for now, as I knew that I was going to a place I knew well. On arrival, I managed to lift myself from the car and shuffle to the front door of the hospital. Then I was inside at last, in a place that was familiar and safe. I had been here four years prior. I knew most of the staff. They were kind, caring and very understanding. I found it a very good place to be when not well. In this environment, my condition improved dramatically, free from all the stresses of the outside world. Eventually I was able to return home, but I would spend six weeks here in hospital.

After my first psychotic episode, I was under the care of Dr Bruce Stephen, but I was now under the care of Dr Herbert Smartt, Dr Stephen having returned to Scotland for family reasons. It can be quite disruptive to a patient's recovery when their doctor has cause to move on. To the patient, it means having to go back and start again. It takes time for a good relationship to develop between a doctor and their patient. This can be quite a setback. But none of this proved to be so on this occasion, for which I was most grateful. This is a reflection of Dr Smartt's good skills.

Soon after admission a series of ECTs were given. I responded favourably to this and the voices ceased as well as the paranoia. At the very first counselling session, Dr Smartt had some good news to tell me: "Donald, we have just the right medication to help you get well. It's called ORAP." I could not have received any more welcoming news, especially considering the previous few days. With these words, Dr Smartt placed a message of hope in my mind.

Dr Smartt had a disability that affected his speech, but this in no way affected his ability to be an outstanding counsellor and psychiatrist. During counselling sessions, he took on board all that was said while also being able to take notes. He displayed empathy and compassion with a simple "sure... sure," words which soon became very familiar and reassuring to me. Dr Smartt always walked briskly, striding out to care for the mentally ill as if on an urgent mission. On arrival at Bromalan he was

always given a very warm welcome by the patients waiting for him in the hospital foyer.

I was just beginning to become aware of and feel the full impact of what it is like to be suffering from a mental illness. In some ways you suffer alone, or that is at least how you feel at times. But the psychiatrists I experienced had great insight and displayed great understanding and kindness, no doubt due to their own natural ability and also what was instilled in them in their training. In effect, my psychiatrist walked beside me during the entire illness, leading me to recovery. I obviously had a great deal yet to learn about the many aspects of mental illness. At that time, every minute of every day was a struggle. My life had totally changed, and not for the better. It had been completely turned upside down. I had to manage it one day at a time – there was no other way. Life was not enjoyable during this time. My speech was affected and I was incapable of carrying out even the simplest of tasks. Yet, Dr Smartt planted the seeds of the hope of recovery in my mind. This, the hope that I would one day be well again, was a most precious gift indeed.

No longer could I remain in a state of denial, especially when reflecting on the recent events in my life. It was not at all easy to come to terms with. During my stay in hospital at Bromalan, my father, with my brother, himself a doctor, visited Dr Smartt. They were told my prognosis for recovery was good and it was after these recent events that my father became very understanding and compassionate.

Dr Smartt was to leave private practice and return to the government hospital system. His absence was greatly felt, along with those understanding, reassuring words of his “sure...sure.” He was warm, friendly and was always giving encouragement. You could not help but both respect and admire this man. His talents were obviously recognised for he was appointed Director of Staff for Psychiatry at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital at Camperdown in Sydney. I was saddened by his departure. Some years later, Dr Smartt had surgery in the U.S.A. but sadly it was not successful and he was to pass away. His passing was a tragic loss, as he was an inspiration to all of us.

Bromalan had several lounge alcoves which residents seemed to favour when they had visitors



The new social and recreational lounge motivated a spirit of sharing among residents

# The Third Episode

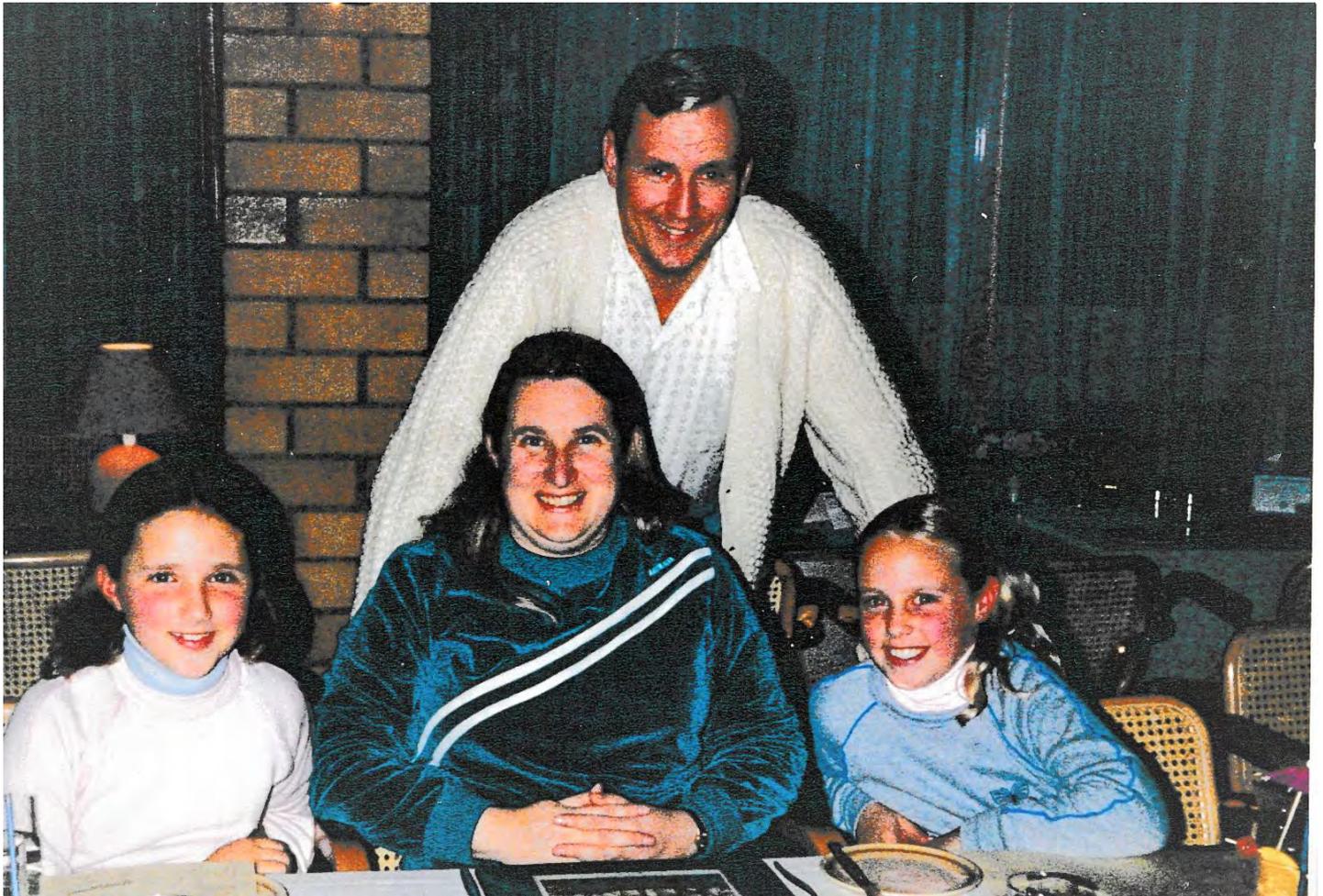
Dr Smartt had left the private practice for about two months when I received some very good news that Dr Stephen had returned from Scotland and would be resuming his practice. I was now married to an English lady named Mary, and it was a very happy marriage in the early stages. It was around 1980 and the family was returning from a holiday north of Sydney. My wife was driving at the time, with our young daughters in the back. I was listening to the car's radio and we had just driven over the Hawkesbury River Bridge with only a short distance left to arrive home at Hornsby Heights. I said to my wife in a very soft voice, "Would you please drive me to Bromalan, I don't feel well." Her immediate response was to put her foot on the accelerator. On arrival at home she phoned my doctor and the doctor phoned the hospital, advising them of my coming. Mary packed my bag and drove me to Bromalan and I was admitted.

From previous experiences, I now knew that the hearing of voices was an indication that I was not well and that I should make contact with my doctor immediately. Soon after admission to Bromalan Hospital, I was put to sleep. This is done to rest the brain in order to help it to recover from the trauma. This procedure would not be repeated, as it was only a one-off. The next thing I can remember was waking up in bed. I was unable to judge how long I had been asleep. During my stay in hospital I was given further shock treatments. It was four years since my previous admission to Bromalan, and it meant having to start all over again in order to get back on my feet. It seemed that no sooner had I recovered from a psychotic episode, I would find myself back in hospital again. This was the third occasion on which I needed to enter Bromalan.

I was to return to work but placed on light duties as I was unable to carry out the simplest of tasks, such as taking the lunch orders. I was met with gruelling anxiety. I was also given the job of obtaining electronic components from the warehouse in the city but on walking the narrow city streets and the tall buildings, I suffered from claustrophobia. It was frightening.

Soon after discharging from the hospital, Dr Stephen had deep concerns for my future, so he wrote to the Overseas Telecommunications Commission, recommending that I be retired on medical grounds. I went before a Medical Officer of the Commonwealth. I can recall it well - I was so nervous. I think the word 'fragile' accurately described my emotional state. He simply read Dr Stephen's letter

and then signed a document granting his approval that I be granted a disability support pension. During the proceedings not a single word was exchanged between us. I then slowly stood up and left, ever so glad that it was all over. To think that my really interesting career had come to this. My stress levels had dropped but this would only be short term.



The family enjoying dinner at a local club in Hornsby in the earlier years

Several years later, in January 2002, the circumstances in my life changed dramatically, and not for the better I am sad to say. Overnight, I had become a sole parent, or that's how it seemed. Mary had simply walked out on all of us to return to her country of origin, England. The entire family was in turmoil. The very first priority in my life was now the welfare of my two daughters. I could not afford to let them down. Both of my daughters and myself were in a state of upheaval. At the time I had made the initial decision to start writing my story, however I was no longer

in the right frame of mind to continue, and it was to be placed on hold for quite some time, years in fact.

Due to the stress of the situation and the feeling of abandonment, Claire was under the care of both a psychiatrist and a psychologist and was admitted to a private psychiatric hospital for the treatment of anxiety and depression. Jane was also devastated and came under the care of her GP and was placed on medication for the treatment of depression. In time, both Claire and Jane were to make good ground leading to recovery. I also encouraged both Claire and Jane to keep in touch with their mother. On one occasion, they both turned up one morning on her front doorstep in England as a surprise.

I was beginning to see myself as a lonely old man, longing for female company. I finally made the decision to return to the writing of my story and so I sought help from the adult education authority. I made contact with a delightful lady and I found her most helpful. We also had talks about our individual careers and our children. We both appeared to enjoy each other's company. However, there was one problem emerging. My emotions were beginning to rapidly run out of control and consequently my behaviour became inappropriate. I was to become infatuated with her and searched for her home address. I finally picked up the courage to arrange for red roses to be delivered by courier to her home, quite some distance from where I lived. I followed this up some days later by travelling early one morning to her home by public transport and placing a romantic card at her front doorstep. It was totally inappropriate. My mind, that is, my perception of events, was the behaviour of a man that is not at all well. I received a phone call from a member of the NSW police force, a woman sergeant. She handled the situation with both tact and sensitivity and was a credit to the police force. She encouraged me to visit a hospital. I did not follow this up, such was the state of my mind.

Upon reflection I felt so embarrassed by it all - I had made an absolute nuisance of myself. It is not a nice feeling to have. You wish you could go backwards in time and apologize for your own inappropriate actions, but this is not possible. You just have to learn to live with it, accepting the fact that you were not well at the time and therefore you could not be held responsible for your actions. You have to continue moving forward, in time, putting it all behind you. The greatest healer of all stressful events in your life comes with the passing of time.



1987  
Some years after my  
third psychotic  
episode but still not  
fully recovered.

# Towards Recovery

The symptoms of Schizophrenia I can recall and shall never forget. During the entire course of my illness, different medications were prescribed. Unfortunately, some of the medications had adverse side effects of their own. At times I was heavily sedated and it was a struggle to remain awake. This added to my inability to function at work. At times, I was 'a vegetable'. My bosses were very understanding except for one. I was to learn that this person had a behavioural problem of his own. It comforted me the fact that others were also his victims.

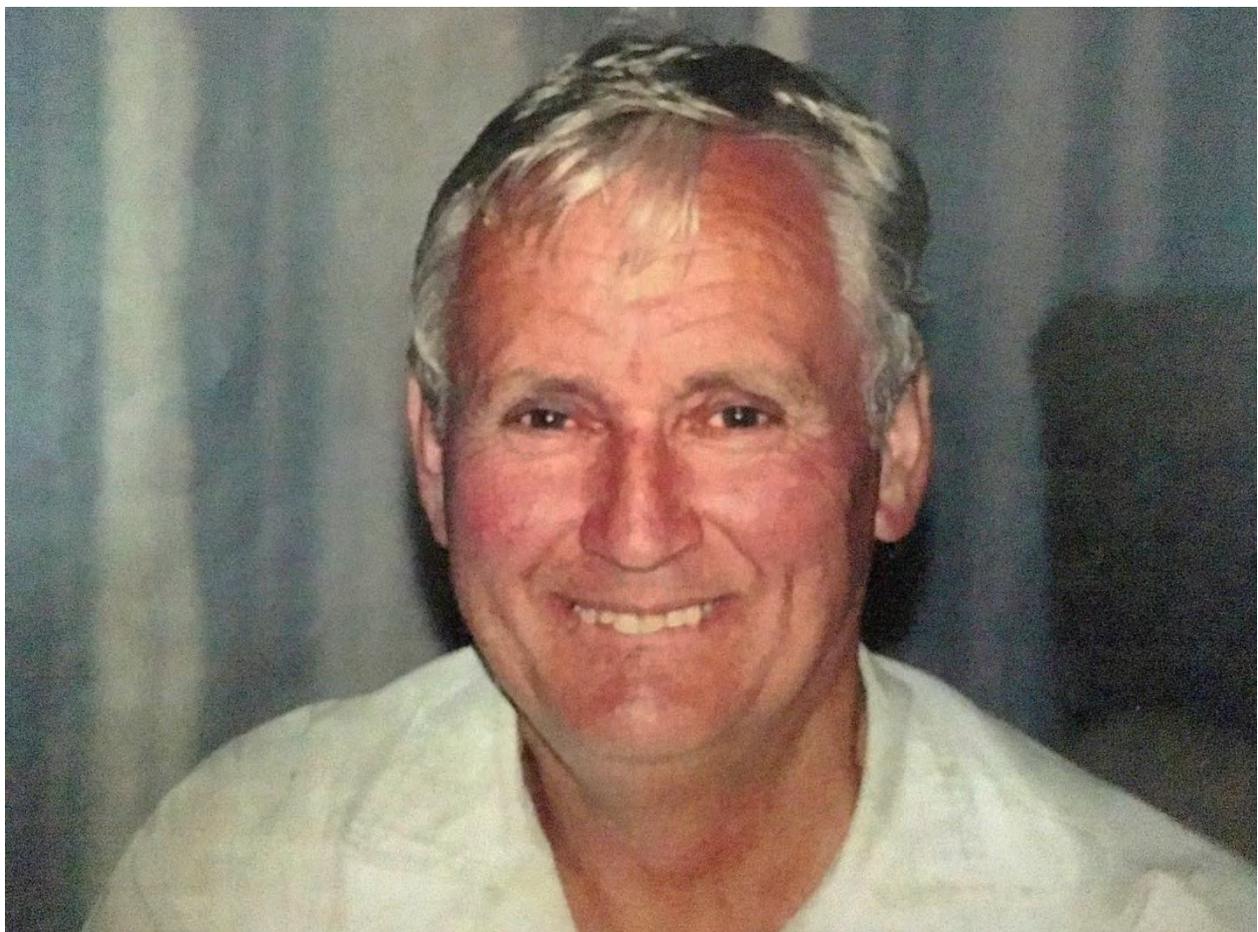
In the early years of my recovery, after each psychotic episode it felt like I was wearing a skin tight mask over my entire face. My hands were tense and my fingertips highly sensitive to touch. Other symptoms were experienced but not all at the same time. It was difficult to express myself and I would talk less, tremble, have a lack of motivation, an inability to concentrate, withdraw from society, have disrupted thinking, blunted emotions, and crippling anxiety leading to panic attacks. When this occurred, I just had to retreat to home and lie on my bed in a darkened room. Even then, the anxiety continued out of control.

I always came away from a visit to my doctor feeling a great deal better with my batteries again fully recharged, thus enabling me to cope in that unprotected environment outside. However, there were occasions when I felt the need to visit my doctor twice in the same week. I kept regular visits at his consulting room in order for him to monitor my progress and to act quickly if I was slipping backwards. He took the opportunity to make any adjustments to my medication if he thought it necessary. My psychiatrist Bruce Stephen applied both his skills as a counsellor and as a psychiatrist. He displayed great wisdom and I was quite impressed. He was a very kind and patient man, knowing what to say and when to say it. In order for it to have its greatest impact, it was a question of good timing. It was as if he was walking beside me at the same time, helping me find my way through the many obstacles encountered during my recovery. When Bruce told me that when I was very sick whilst experiencing a psychotic episode I could not be held responsible for my actions, I immediately experienced peace of mind. Over the years, we talked about many different things- my plans for the future, my goals, my interests, and about family matters. When he was no longer a practising psychiatrist we became good friends.

Recovery can be a very slow and drawn out affair with setbacks along the way. As a sufferer, you long for some relief from it all. Over time, the symptoms became less

intense and less frequent, however it was not possible to avoid them, so you had to learn to tolerate them. You feel like you are trapped and just have to ride them out. At times, you feel you are all alone in your suffering except for when you are able to spend time with your doctor. They have wonderful insight as well as being so supportive and kind and patient. As a result, you can relax in their presence. All of this encouragement to open up and not hold back, to unload all your concerns on a sympathetic listener is a real blessing. All of this contributes to your peace of mind. You begin to feel that you are able to put all of your trust in the doctor. I always found my visits to my doctor were beneficial, and as time went on and my condition improved, I did not feel the need to visit so often. The feeling of hopelessness and despair were beginning to lift. I was gradually learning to stand on my two feet again.

When I turned 60 years of age, my psychiatrist was able to say to me, "Donald, you are so much better. The illness has finally burnt itself out. It's a miracle!" he exclaimed. "Especially when you do stop to consider just how sick you really were, and for so long." It took a while for the full implications of what he had just said to register. My emotions were now a mixture of delight and great relief. A smile had started to appear on my face, causing Bruce to remark, "Donald, you have an engaging smile." This was to be one of the happiest days of my life.



A smile had returned to my face

Bruce Stephen had some very kind words to say to me. He said, "I am really so proud of you Donald, as to how you managed the illness during all those years and then also Mary's departure from Australia to return to England."

Over the years, I attended conferences, forums and workshops about mental health and mental illness held at different locations throughout Australia and New Zealand. They were very interesting and well-presented. You always came away so much better informed. You always felt comfortable in such company, knowing that there are other sufferers just like yourself. It was an opportunity to both make new friends and rekindle old friendships. There would have been those amongst the presenters who were not feeling one hundred percent on the day and yet displayed great courage by standing in front of a live audience to share their experiences. Special mention should be made of Simon Champ, for whenever he spoke at a gathering of people, whether consumers, carers or professionals in mental health, his warm and sincere personality would shine through. He is a sensational speaker. By travelling to these conferences and many different locations, you are able to broaden your horizons in hearing other people's experiences. I learnt a great deal from these people. I also made an application to become a Justice of the Peace. It was supported by the deputy director of Mental Health at Hornsby Kur-ring-gai Hospital. Consumers may feel more comfortable approaching a JP having the same background as themselves. Sadly, and yes it was most disappointing, I found that I was not able to continue in this role due to the deterioration in my vision.

Regrettably in 2013 at the age of 73, I was to suffer a relapse in my mental health. This was after many years of continuous good mental health and many years since my previous admission to hospital suffering from Schizophrenia. On this most recent occasion I was to spend ten and a half weeks in Riverglenn psychiatric hospital at Greenwich. No shock treatment was given on this occasion. Prior to my admission, Claire had been compiling her observations about my behaviour and these were later read by the psychiatrist. At Riverglenn I was treated kindly and I have nothing but praise for the entire staff in helping me to recover. I sincerely thank them all. However, I was both disappointed and devastated with the diagnosis. It really took the shine off what had been considered a remarkable recovery - a really devastating blow for what could have been an inspirational story. However, I would describe this recent psychotic episode as being mild in comparison to those three acute psychotic episodes of previous years. Even so, I felt that I had been robbed of a once in lifetime opportunity, as a result of which I lapsed into a state of denial.

It was not until just recently, in January 2019, when Claire and I were enjoying a conversation, that she approached the subject of my illness in a very sensitive and tactful way. When she told me some of the things I had said and done several years ago, I could not dispute the fact that this was the behaviour of a person suffering from a mental illness, namely Schizophrenia, and I was the person in question. This was undoubtedly the turning point in my thinking about myself. I now accept the fact that I had experienced a psychiatric illness, not an emotional disorder. My thoughts and my beliefs had been so deeply entrenched in my mind, which was the reason this recent state of denial was to last for so long. Claire's actions could be likened to that of a catalyst in a chemical reaction, triggering the change in my beliefs.

Whilst living in the family home at Hornsby Heights, I was to suffer a stroke and was admitted to the San Hospital at Wahroonga. Some days later I was transferred to Mt. Wilga Rehabilitation Hospital. The stroke affected my balance, and I now make use of a walking frame or walking stick. There was no evidence of paralysis I am so glad to report. However, my memory has been affected in that I do now require 'prompts' in order to assist in recall. On discharge from Mt. Wilga, I returned home to Hornsby Heights. Claire had been very busy looking for suitable accommodation for her dad and she eventually came across one that stood out above the rest. She drove me to the place she thought highly of to see what I thought of her choice. After a quick inspection, I said to Claire, "This is the place for me." I was equally impressed. My new home was to be an aged care facility named 'Princess Juliana Lodge', located at North Turrumurra, a northern suburb of Sydney bordering the Kuring-gai Chase National Park. It is owned and operated by HammondCare. The lodge is now my home. I have my own room with furniture from the family home and the contents of my room are a reflection of my wide range of interests. The four walls are adorned with pictures and photographs of family pets, steam trains and treasured artefacts. To overcome my impaired vision, there is a rather large TV fixed to one wall.

I was both concerned and frustrated by the fact that my central vision was deteriorating due to macular degeneration. It can take two forms – for my form there is no cure. You really do miss not being able to do those things that bring you lots of enjoyment and satisfaction. Up until now, I had taken my good eyesight for granted. This additional disability led me again to hospital suffering from depression. But when told later that no further deterioration would occur, the depression lifted, for which I was most grateful. Even though I am not going completely blind, but vision impaired, I have been granted a blind pension in addition to my aged pension. I was determined not to let this eye condition prevent me from achieving my goal of

compiling my story. Vision Australia has brought solutions of which technology has played a major role, including providing me with extra-large print operating instructions and a wall calendar. They are so helpful, and I always look forward to their visits. The future was beginning to look so much brighter again.

It is not until you lose your normal vision that you come to really appreciate the role it has in your daily living. Handicapped with my impaired vision of some twenty-five years and requiring “prompts” to trigger my ability to recall, it can be frustrating. We do tend to take it all for granted. In order to help me combat those feelings of despair and depression, I have in my CD collection a song sung by Peggy Lee entitled, ‘Heart.’ When played, it immediately lifts my spirits. It does wonders to my emotional state and sends my toes a tapping. The song ‘That’s Life,’ by Frank Sinatra also does wonders to lift my spirits.

My journey with Schizophrenia was a long and drawn out affair which made it difficult to function in life as a human being again. To fully recover and to remain well are achievements that more than compensate for those many years of stress and disappointments of the past. Andrew Clemont of Specialist Mental Health Services for Older People made the comment that it is a rare event to recover, and his statement brought home to me just how fortunate I really am. The diagnosis of being in remission was made by Dr Bruce Stephen my psychiatrist of some 40 years. The former manager of the Schizophrenia Fellowship of New South Wales, Sue Sacker, said it is a success story. There were other such comments from others in the mental health circle. When the very same patient is seen by more than one psychiatrist, a different diagnosis can occur. This is because there are no scientific tests such as a brain scan or a blood test available as of yet to confirm the diagnosis. At the present moment, a diagnosis is dependent upon observations of the patient’s behaviour and talking with the patient.

I was invited to join the Mental Health Services for Older People Committee, an advisory committee chaired at the time by Julie Strukovski. The committee was comprised of the psychiatrists and unit managers from psychiatric hospitals from Sydney Harbour through to Gosford. I participated for five years as a former patient and found this very rewarding, being able to give back and contribute towards improving mental health care. The word consumer was introduced in order to effectively do away with the stigma attached to the use of the words “a mental patient.” I was also on a committee representing the consumers themselves, where recommendations were made to the state government on matters concerning mental health.

Research into the causes of Schizophrenia is now progressing around the world. A most welcomed development has been the introduction of consumer advocates, in which they play a very important role in patient recovery and welfare. They come with an appropriate background, namely as former patients in psychiatric hospitals. Part of their role is to look after the interests of the patients whilst in hospital and also provide a supporting role after the patients are discharged from hospital to move back into their community. Also, here in Australia, a Chair of Schizophrenia has been created at Sydney University and a brain bank has been established to assist in research. I, along with others, have donated my brain for medical research. My family have given their full support to my last wish.

At my eldest daughter's wedding reception, I was to give a speech as father of the bride. In the preparation of my speech I was ably assisted by Angie, a visiting volunteer at the lodge. The master of ceremonies read my speech on my behalf due to my impaired vision, and it was well received. To think that I was now capable of such tasks as the compiling of my story, the father of the bride speech, to walk my daughter down the aisle of the church with the aid of a walking stick, and to give her away in the truly traditional way. The productive use of my life had returned, and all were great morale boosters I can assure you.



Claire and George's Wedding Day



The Father of the Bride Speech read on my behalf by the M.C., Leigh Hatcher



Walking my daughter down the aisle

## The Father of the Bride Speech:

I compiled this speech after having recovered from Schizophrenia. Compare this to my struggling effort to write a letter many years ealier when I was not at all well.

You know, there are only two times in a man's life when he can't understand a woman, before marriage and after marriage.

I'd now like to welcome you all to this very special occasion, the wedding of Claire and George. Thank you for being a part of today, sharing with Claire and George their immense happiness and joy. The day has been a great success, starting with the arrival of the bride, just looking absolutely stunning, taking my breath away as well as the groom's I'm sure.

Some of you may have noticed that Claire's mother is not here today. Unfortunately circumstances and age have prevented her from flying to Sydney from England, however I'd like to acknowledge how she's sent the most beautiful card to congratulate this newly-wedded couple.

Before I move on, I do have something to sad to say. George's father passed away 4 years ago and his mother passed away recently in June. However I am glad to say that she got to know Claire and know that her son had met his wife to be so that she could let go in peace. And so, although George's parents are no longer with us, I'm sure this occasion would have given them great happiness and satisfaction.

Now onto Claire. I remember when Claire was just a new arrival and how on the change table she'd look up at me with this beautiful natural smile, which has lasted to this day, and I know will only grow greater with George. In primary school Claire started making friends which were to multiply over the years to come. She's always had this warm, affectionate and kind personality that brought people to her. She adores children and I can see how they love her back. I have no doubt that she'll make a wonderful mother and wife. Claire has a likeable personality, evident even when she was a young girl. She is cool, calm, collected and has always been good natured.

Now, I've always been proud of Claire, but one of my proudest moments was on Speech Night when a special award was given for the first time following the Dux of the school award. As the final award for the night, it was to recognize her great contribution to school life and I truly believe it has continued into her adult life where she works as a tresillian nurse with a team of psychologists for mothers and children. Claire is so hardworking and has persevered through so much. She's a loving daughter who has always been patient, loyal and considerate of others. I'm a very proud dad indeed.

I remember my first meeting with George. George had come to pay me a visit to ask for my permission to marry my daughter. Prior to the meeting, I asked myself, how should I dress for this occasion? The very first thought that came to mind was, I know, I shall wear my birthday suit! But then, may George possibly gain the wrong impression about his future father-in-law? And so I settled for something more appropriate.

The couple arrived dead on time in my room in the lodge. We shook hands and Claire excused herself. George and I sat down, our conversation was brief and to the point. I could not be anything else but impressed about this gentleman of very good manners. I had no hesitation in giving my approval and congratulations. After all, I had been very well informed about him before his arrival that day. We then shook hands to finalize the contract- as they say. And so concluded a very joyous occasion.

George was educated at a private school and he's told Claire he was not an outstanding student academically, but there is no doubt he has qualities which are by far more important. As a human being he is a gentleman, he is kind, polite, courteous, patient, considerate of others, humble and displays those characteristics not so common in more recent generations. It has been evident to me for some time that this couple is ideally suited for one another and I am so happy to welcome George to the Withers family, though we're not related to the withers of a horse, I'd like to point out. His parents must have been so proud of their son, for he truly is the product of good parenting and I feel very honoured to call George my son-in-law.

The couple are an exceptionally good match in so many ways. The first thing that comes to mind is how courageous and open minded they both are for taking a chance and initially meeting through online dating. Then learning and getting to know each other better in person over time. Claire and George are perfect complements of one another, with a deep understanding of good communication and compromising skills. Already I can see how they're like the very best of friends who can talk openly about anything and everything and not hold back. Claire and George contribute so much to each other's lives and I have no doubt of their long lasting happiness and love together.

Now if I may, I have some advice for the newly wedded couple. It's all about compromise and listening to each other with respect. Never let the romance fade and ensure your partner knows how appreciated and loved they are. Aim to achieve a life full of many different interests and don't forget that one of the greatest sources of happiness is to love and be loved. I hope all of this will help to create a happy, fulfilling and lasting marriage.

Before the toast, I have just one more thing I want you to do. Your wedding day is one that seems to fly. It's a day filled with emotion, friends, rings and dances. Many people remember how fleeting their own wedding day was so I want you to take a few seconds now just to look into each other's eyes. Think about the happiness and love that you're feeling in this place, in this moment and really let that feeling register in your heart and mind, to be remembered forever.

I now wish to propose a toast to the newly married couple. May they always support one another and have many years of happiness and joy together, for I hope that all sweethearts become married couples and that all married couples remain sweethearts.

To Claire and George.

# Words of Appreciation

Now for some words of appreciation. Dr Stephen and Dr Smartt were outstanding psychiatrists and counsellors. I have them both to thank for where I am today along with Matron Jean East and her nursing staff at Bromalan Private Hospital, not forgetting the friendly domestic staff. Some years later Bruce Stephen passed away, and I am now most fortunate in having a very good psychiatrist Joanna Wright visit me twice a year. Special thanks for the support from the Schizophrenia Fellowship of NSW (now called One Door Mental Health) and its Chief Executive Officer Rob Ranjan, who was awarded an Order of Australia for his invaluable services.

Finally, to my very close friends and family, I thank you all most sincerely. I am now living in the aged-care facility, Princess Juliana Lodge at North Turrumurra and have been here for several years. My family crisis is now in the background and all three of us have moved on to new endeavours. There were times when I had big concerns as to whether I would accomplish the goal I had set myself long ago of compiling my life story. There was a succession of setbacks and delays, and this was compounded by the fact that I was approaching my 80's. I simply had to persevere and thankfully the situation was to be reversed in the coming months.

The word had got around at the lodge about a resident wishing to write a story about his journey with Schizophrenia and so a member of the staff at the lodge came forward to offer her services. She had a background of helping university students write their resumes. My spirits were lifted enormously by her kind offer. The telling of my story was now beginning to unfold. Regrettably, Alyson was to move on to a new job elsewhere. Angie, a visiting volunteer took over from Alyson and she proved to be a very good replacement. It was good to be back on track and making steady progress once again. To Alyson and Angie, I am truly grateful. Thank you for your never-ending encouragement and support. Both are delightful young ladies and a real pleasure to work with. If it had not been for their efforts, my story would have never surfaced. My inability to spell words correctly left a lot to be desired and it would have given both Alyson and Angie many headaches. Please, accept my sincerest apologies. Angie was to return to her studies at university. I wish her well in her chosen career in Dentistry. I shall miss her. Finally, Lea the Pastoral Care worker at the lodge was to give of her time to continue the good work through to its conclusion. I have been so fortunate to have met up with these three ladies to whom I am most grateful for their contribution.

In April 2019, I purchased from Quantum at Thornleigh a reading machine. The machine scans the printed page, and the spoken words emerges from the transducer. The machine does away with those feelings of frustration and isolation. It has created a new world for me, thanks to the marvels of today's technology.

To the consumers and carers, I hope my story gives some way to lifting your spirits. To others in the community, I hope it shall provide a better insight and understanding as to the true nature of Schizophrenia and the importance of displaying compassion towards those suffering from a mental illness. I hope the final outcome of my story goes someway in providing hope and encouragement to those presently suffering from Schizophrenia. My heart goes out to you all. Hopefully to some, this story may be an inspiration. My story is an Australian story with a positive and happy ending.

THE MAN WHO THINKS HE CAN

If you think you are beaten, you are,  
If you think you dare not, you don't,  
If you would like to win but think you can't,  
If it is almost a cinch that you won't.

If you think you will lose you will lose,  
For out in the world we find,  
Success begins with a fellow's will  
It is all in the state of the mind.

If you think you are out-classed you are,  
You have got to think high to rise,  
You have got to be sure of yourself  
Before you can win the prize.

Life's battles do not always go  
To the strongest or fastest man,  
But sooner or later the man who wins  
Is the MAN WHO THINKS HE CAN !!

These encouraging words were given to me by Dr Bruce Stephen to assist in rebuilding my self-esteem. I have kept this page for all these years and it is greatly treasured.

## Heart, by Peggy Lee

You gotta have heart, all you really need is heart  
When the odds are saying you'll never win  
That's when the grin should start

You gotta have hope, mustn't sit around and mope  
Nothing's half as bad as it may appear  
Wait'll next year and hope

When your luck is battin' zero, get your chin up off the floor  
Mister, you can be a hero, you can open any door  
There's nothing to it, but to do it

You've gotta have heart, miles and miles and miles of heart  
Oh, it's fine to be a genius, of course  
But keep that old horse before the cart  
First, you gotta have heart

We're so happy that we're hummin', That's the hearty thing to do  
'Cause we know our ship will come in  
So it's ten years overdue

So what the heck's the use of cryin, Why should we curse  
Things can only get better, 'cause they can't get worse

And to add to it, we've got heart  
We've got heart, we've got heart

We've got heart, all you really need is heart  
When the odds are sayin' you'll never win  
That's when the grin should start

We're so happy that we're laughing, that's the hearty thing to do  
So we ain't been autographin', 'cept to sign an I.O.U.

We've got heart, miles 'n' miles of heart  
Oh, it's fine to be a genius of course  
But keep that old horse before the cart

Who minds those pop bottles flyin'? The hisses and the boos  
The team has been consistent, yeah we always lose

But we're laughin, 'cause we've got heart  
We've got heart, we've got heart

## That's Life, by Frank Sinatra

That's life (that's life), that's what all the people say  
You're ridin' high in April, shot down in May  
But I know I'm gonna change that tune  
When I'm back on top, back on top in June  
I said that's life (that's life), and as funny as it may seem  
Some people get their kicks stompin' on a dream  
But I don't let it, let it get me down  
'cause this fine old world, it keeps spinnin' around

I've been a puppet, a pauper, a pirate, a poet, a pawn and a king  
I've been up and down and over and out and I know one thing  
Each time I find myself flat on my face  
I pick myself up and get back in the race

That's life (that's life), I tell you I can't deny it  
I thought of quitting, baby, but my heart just ain't gonna buy it  
And if I didn't think it was worth one single try  
I'd jump right on a big bird and then I'd fly

I've been a puppet, a pauper, a pirate, a poet, a pawn and a king  
I've been up and down and over and out and I know one thing  
Each time I find myself layin' flat on my face  
I just pick myself up and get back in the race

That's life (that's life), that's life and I can't deny it  
Many times I thought of cuttin' out but my heart won't buy it  
But if there's nothin' shakin' come this here July  
I'm gonna roll myself up in a big ball and die  
My, my!

# THERE IS ALWAYS HOPE

I hope my story will give hope to those who are experiencing a mental illness and especially for those with schizophrenia. By providing insight and understanding of the true nature of this illness as well as showing compassion towards those who are suffering, may we break down any stigma for those suffering and instead give them hope and a reason to live.

I hope you will enjoy reading my story and that you benefit from this. On completion of the story it was read back to me and as I listened intensely my response was to ask myself "Did I really write this?". Apparently I had! It's amazing what you can achieve when you set your mind to it, I felt a great sense of achievement and satisfaction having finally accomplishing such a goal. The writing of my story provided me with the opportunity to put back in some small measure those many years of support given to me from both the professional bodies and the voluntary organizations that are made up of consumers and carers that all go to make up the mental health network. Because of my impaired vision I have an electric device that reads the printed page and the spoken words are heard with my hearing aids. I am really fortunate in owning such a device. It is only until just recently with the sale of the family home that I was then able to purchase this remarkable electronic device. Sadly, it is priced outside the reach of many.

I would welcome any comments you may wish to make. Please provide me with a print out for my device to read to me. All correspondence can be made with Claire as she will then deliver my mail to me. Her details are...

[claire\\_withers@yahoo.com.au](mailto:claire_withers@yahoo.com.au)

Recovery is often referred to as a journey. Donald reminds us that it is an individual journey intertwined with that of many others. For those who have experienced mental illness, lived or worked with them; this is a story of hope that comes from a life fully lived. All who read will hear a deeply personal story of the pain that may come with mental illness, but also how many play a part in hope and a meaningful life being regained. But there there is always hope.

## **THERE IS ALWAYS HOPE**

Dr Roderick McKay

Director of Psychiatry and Mental Health Programs  
(Mental Health Portfolio)  
Health Education & Training Institute