

It is just ten years since the day that changed our lives for ever, it redefined our thinking and divided all our experiences into before and after.

.In the following days the horror of the emergency and long uncertain days in the intensive care unit gave way to rapturous joy as consciousness returned . Against all odds she survived with full brain function.

Psychiatric assessment is compulsory after a suicide attempt. Within days she was released into our care.

We rented a house by the beach. We were all exhausted, we would rest and recover. We would surround her with loving care and she too would recover.

Of course it wasn't that simple.

She doesn't remember that holiday at all but it did the rest of us a lot of good. It restored us physically and allowed us to recognise that life for us had changed.

At home again we began the rounds of psychiatric appointments and centrelink interviews. We read mountains of articles and books in an effort to understand this depressive illness.

Meanwhile she remained almost catatonic, completely disinterested in everything and unresponsive to drug therapy. We were distressed. She was angry and resentful.

Life was very difficult for us all.

We were very fortunate that our working conditions at this time allowed us to be very flexible, there was one of us at home most of the time. I worked part time, her sister was at a nearby uni and working nights and her dad worked flexitime. Family, friends and workmates were supportive and encouraging. We changed our priorities and let the housework and gardening standards slip, we resolved to be kind to ourselves and each other.

Our nights were disturbed by her restlessness. If she wanted to cook at midnight we didn't complain, at least she wanted to do something so it was a positive sign, we sometimes napped during the day to catch up on missed sleep.

It was really scary when she took the car for a run in the early hours of the morning, I told myself I had to sleep, if she wasn't home by morning I would need to have a clear mind to deal with it then. It was better to have her leave the house at night than not at all.

Meals were a balancing act as her appetite was poor and she didn't have the energy or inclination to prepare food herself.

We were struggling in every possible way.

Work became a place of escape for me. I concentrated on the task in hand and found relief from the constant doubts in my head. My colleagues were brilliant listeners and my clients followed my directions. This was a place where I knew what to do and how to do it and get results.

<http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/media/eventscal/index.cfm>

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In my local park I walked and walked and walked. Walking helped me to sleep better, allowed thinking time and I was often joined by a caring friend.

It was during this phase which lasted almost two years that we realized we, like so many people had no understanding of the depths of despair and absolute suffering experienced in major depression. Before "that day" we too thought that we were depressed if we had a few bad days.

We began to feel that a depressed person's contemplation of suicide was a symptom of the illness in the same way a runny nose is the symptom of a cold.

About this time it was suggested to us that counselling might be helpful as our daughter was distressed by the impact of her illness on her family. Our counsellor was not interested in the details of our daughter's illness. He was interested in practical steps to help us cope.

When counselling began we felt desperate, upset and incompetent. We slowly realized that in our own muddled way we had rearranged our daily tasks and were in fact coping, sometimes better than others but we were hanging on. We grieved for the loss of our dreams for this intelligent and beautiful woman.

We replaced our dreams with unconditional love.

It is a slow and painful experience to work through the stages of grief but I feel we are the richer for it.

Ten years down the track there is a richness that has come into our lives. We have a thirty year old daughter who shares our daily lives. She manages her own illness and her own life. She is unable to sustain a consistent working life but studies when she can and has slowly completed a tafe course between the black dog visits. She does what she can when she is well and retires as she needs to; she has a plan and slowly progresses through its stages. Sometimes she laughs and our hearts rejoice.

We have learned that it is her illness, not ours and she must be trusted to deal with it herself. Her courage and off beat humour are winners, she is funny and fabulous and her presence enriches our lives.

We have slowed the pace of our lives and created a peaceful place. We take time over food and long conversations, lingering over tea and the morning papers. Our dress is more casual and there is an understanding that sometimes the things you planned to do might not happen today.

We have maintained our hobbies and sports but may opt out of some events we used to feel obliged to attend. Taking care of ourselves includes leisurely visits to nurseries, cafes and scenic lookouts, galleries or markets; often our daughter comes along with us.

All of us have benefited from the cognitive behavioural therapy books and an added spiritual dimension. Trips to the psychiatrist are an excuse to spend time in a pleasant suburb with a good bookshop. We find beautiful music and take time to listen to it.

What is it that has carried us through this difficult passage of time?

OVERWHELMINGLY IT IS LOVE

Love for a child, accumulated through the teenage years and brought suddenly and shockingly to a head at age 19

The love of her father who could not contemplate his life without her in it.

Love that enfolds you in your darkest hour and rocks you gently till your sobs have ceased.

Love from family members who quietly filled the fridge and fielded phone calls.

Love from colleagues, swapping shifts and taking the load without complaint.

Love that is sustained through tiredness and grumpiness.

Love and understanding with listening ears.

Love from the sister whose life was interrupted by the events, who informed friends and fielded distressing questions.

Love that shoulders the responsibilities so that respite is gained.

And finally the love of a depressed daughter who no longer doubts that she is loved, who puts an arm around me, pecks my cheek and says “love ya mum”