

Reading Time: 11 minutes

For some reason I always end up having a pipebomb / rant / explosive word fury around this time of year. Perhaps it's because of the fact that we're almost at the most depressing day of the year, or maybe its because of the fact that we've just gotten ourselves through the hell that is Christmas and New Year, and there's just some pent up anger somewhere.

To begin, I know for a fact that there's been a number of stories and posts made about me in the last 18 months and some of my personal demons. I strongly believe in the Schumacher 'Private is Private' approach to relationships and personal matters, so this isn't the case of me flinging shit in another direction. It is however a time for me to put some matters straight, and detail some of the things that made my 2023 my annus-horribilis.

I currently take 32 pills a day, with the option to take a further 9 depending on circumstances such as pain. This cocktail of medicines is there for my physical and mental health, in some cases now unnecessary and in others part of a partial mis-diagnosis. Most recently after my old GP uming and ahing about it, and my Diabeties nurse at my GP surgery messing about with my blood pressure readings, I've been diagnosed with high blood pressure and anemia. Because of this I now have to take iron tablets every day which to put it bluntly means I have black / green shits when I can actually take one.

I'm lucky to have found a service which will do most of the hard work and put my pills in little sachets which I just tear off 5 times a day. Back in the day ever I or my then wife would have to pop pills and spend almost an hour getting everything in the right place, which is both soul destroying and painful when you have to pop so many pill packets. I honestly have a mini-pharmacy in my house, and it's almost embarrassing when I explain it to other people.

Depression

I have a number of mental health diagnoseses. These include Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder (EUPD), manic depression, anxiety and frequent mood swings. The latter can be for the simplest of things which snowball quickly and painfully. It means that I'm at the point where even day to day life can

become a massive struggle, and all I want to do at these times is pull a cover over my head and sleep, however I can't even do that without further tablets.

On top of the mental health issues, I'm also pre-diagnosed for Autism and ADHD. To be honest I should have been diagnosed as a kid, however my adopted parents were likely too worried about how it would look to them than actually investing in my health. Put all of this together, and I can be a self-destructive, miserable wreck, where I find it almost impossible to get out of the pit of despair.

I've attempted to take my own life on numerous occasions this year, and have more than 150 burn marks on my arms from self harming. The self harm has occurred in two phases this year, and in both times is because of my worries about losing contact / time with my dogs Kora and Valko. These two along with my cats Lola and Amy have often been the reason for me putting my dark thoughts to one side and trying to carry on, and I've actually gotten used to Kora sleeping next to me with her head buried in my arse.

My suicide attempts have been either through overdosing on medication, or trying to drink myself to death. I want to make it very clear that I don't actually enjoy drinking, despite what some others may want you to believe, and I've only had one social drink that I've enjoyed in the past 3 years or so. In the same way bulimics throw up as a form of self harm and attempting to reach some ideal, I drink to put me to sleep and away from it all. Quite often I'm hoping that I don't wake up, so that everything can just stop.

Four times this year I've made it 95% of the way. My heart had stopped in the middle of Central London and I had to have someone conduct CPR on me. I then wrapped a belt around my neck in the disabled toilet of UCL hospital, unclipped the breaks on one of the commodes, and drunk so much that I would eventually fall over. I had security guards monitoring me 24/7 after that, and I spent a couple of weeks in a Mental Health hospital as a consequence.

Later on in 2023 I was put in an induced coma for a couple of days, for fear that I had caused neurological damage to myself. I will never forget the time when I woke up, and it seemed like I was watching a YouTube video on repeat some 30 times. I even started trying to move cups on my bed table around, of course not remembering what I had done and where when the loop started again.

More recently I spent 4 days contemplating jumping into the River Thames after I was

attacked and mugged on a visit to London to try and clear my head. I was sat non stop at the Undercroft in South Bank, listening to the skateboards swirling around me, getting freezing cold at night and making my way to a quiet spot next to Embankment station. At one point I went to St Thomas' Hospital to try and hand myself in for help, but after being told the wait would be over 12 hours, gave up. I then was able to jump a train to Milton Keynes, where I was on the streets for a further week before I could get enough money to get back to Dudley.

It was on the train back to Dudley that I decided I wanted a simpler life. My 20s and 30s have been non-stop, and there's always something which means I can never wind down naturally. To top that off, until 3 years ago I was living in a cramped, studio flat, which I was eventually sharing with my wife. This made things extra difficult when COVID-19 struck, as we both had sensitive work to do, and the kitchen became desk number 2. When everyone else made their return to the office, I had to stay at home as I had a COVID age of 127; the highest in the university where I work. This made things even more lonely and difficult, and started my first major spiral.

After an argument, I woke up at 3:30am to go outside and call the Samaritans. On returning home I got spooked, forgetting that there were two dogs downstairs and feared something else. I panicked, and again went into suicide mode. I was eventually brought into hospital soaking wet, covered in vomit after trying to take my own life by drink again.

What set off this spiral?

I was positive at the start of the 2022/23 academic year. I had been given a set of responsibilities I had craved for years, and was adjusting well to this and my teaching role. Then during Welcome Week I entered into a severe case of Diabetic Ketoacidosis. This is when the keytones in your body grow because of an inability to process sugar due to the lack of insulin / ability to process insulin. A keytone reading above 3 requires immediate hospitalisation, and I was at 4.7. I should have been in a coma, and when I was thrown out of the car into the Urgent Treatment Centre, I couldn't even write my own name.

Without making any excuses, behaviour with DKA can be different to normal. For me, I can't always feel time or the sound of my voice, making me seem erratic and loud. It also makes it almost impossible to concentrate on simple tasks unless I go into Auto-Pilot mode. By Tuesday of Welcome Week, not being able to eat properly, keytones sky high and with pressure on me to deal with lastminute.com esque submissions from academics for

Welcome Week events (Whom were even worse than students), I became a confused mess. I was in hospital for almost 2 weeks, and having had insulin resistance before I asked for my insulin to be changed, which thankfully worked.

Upon returning to work, I was bullied by a member of staff whom to that point I had considered a friend. I was accused of not looking after my diabetes based on third party information, and comments were made about my dress sense and actions, which were completely off-book. To make this clear, I disagree with university academics wearing suits 24/7, as to me it may as well be Harry Potter's invisibility cloak. At the university where I teach most of our students are first in the family to go to university, and deal with a number of socio-environmental issues that impact on their ability to complete their studies. There are some who believe that students should dedicate 100% of their life to their studies, when this is practically impossible. As an example student loans don't cover halls of residence costs, and unlike other universities where the 'Bank of Mom and Dad' can step in, such an approach is next to impossible, and in fact some families need to have their kids stay at home and commute in.

I see wearing a suit as distancing yourself above students, meaning that lectures are no different from sermons in a church. This is the last thing students need when they are already unsure about things such as adapting to university life. I prefer the Steve Jobs approach of attire. This makes the gap between student and academic look less frightening, and over the years this has proven to be a correct hypothesis. Students have commented directly that by being more approachable in how I dress and communicate, they feel more comfortable turning to me in the event of difficulty compared to others. In addition, I feel that not wearing a suit 24/7 makes a statement in that it's what you say and how you act that matters, rather than the clothes you wear (Although wearing PJs for a presentation is too far in the wrong direction!)

I was told that wearing a leather jacket is unprofessional, even though I only wore it when smoking or coming into and out of work. This same person had commented on my hair when I had dreadlocks, and constantly nit-picked my behaviours and mannerisms. I was also given a massive put down on the way I communicated when in DKA, and rather than trying to seek medical attention for me, I was allowed to have my health worsen. I was committed to pushing 24/7 to make Welcome Week a success, and despite my work during clearing and stepping up to cover others, I was made to feel like a piece of shit on a shoe. To top it all off I was in effect told that I was only given the position I had out of near pity,

and the fact no one else applied. I was in effect told that I was pretty much useless and not deemed 'suitable', which was to be honest a massive kick in the face.

Because of all the meds that I take, I've in effect lost the ability to cry. Yet I balled my eyes out on the way home feeling like a useless piece of shit, and drunk to drown my sorrows. Despite raising this with HR and my line manager, nothing appears to have happened, as I had no apology, no mediation, nothing. I know that if and when I return to the university the same thing will happen again, and it reminds me how some are protected at the expense of others. I'm covered by the Equalities Act in so many ways, but if you're at the bottom of the food chain, those above you can seemingly do what they will. This isn't the only academic who has acted in a venomous manner to me, as another uses their research money to get away with treating staff including myself as scum whilst exploiting others.

I love teaching, and heck I even love the admin work, but I despise 'track talk' and people backstabbing and gossiping, which I know for a fact has happened with me. When there's lots of private Whatsapp groups to poke fun at management and gossip about staff, followed by thinly veiled 'I shouldn't say this but...' acts of sharing stuff, it gets demoralising, making the place a cesspool of animosity. Yet putting your head down and trying to be the best teacher you can be doesn't get you anywhere apart from asking why you've not done X, Y, and Z on top of 60 hour weeks.

One thing that didn't help is the one time I confided this bullying to my wife, it was brushed off as if I had shot their cat or something. Yes, this was a family friend, but when you actually want some support from the one you love, and being told it's all on you, makes you question where people's loyalties lie. To be honest, looking back this was to be expected, as I've witnessed a dump and go approach in the past.

Thankfully I have some support now.

It makes me laugh that it takes you literally putting yourself at death's door before getting any support, and I'm so grateful that this has been organised by a team at Russells Hall hospital. At the end of November I attended a Multi Agency meeting about myself, and was finally able to explain things from my perspective.

Over the past year I have been illegally thrown out of my own house, been entrapped in my own home, and had my personal belongings treated one step away from garbage. My birthday present was defacing my mattress, and threat after threat. The goalposts change

every 5 minutes, and I don't know when I wake up in the morning if things will be cordial or venomous. I'm under Dudley's Safeguarding team, have had to report incidents to West Midlands Police who treated me like scum, and have been made to feel homeless on multiple occasions. I have been tracked, have had my electronic devices hacked into, and do not feel safe from potential abuse.

I have an amazing Community Psychiatric Nurse who has been invaluable to me, as well as support from teams at Russells Hall Hospital to help me try and focus on my personal wellbeing. I've been provided with an advocate and have a care package starting soon to help me retain some semblance of a routine. This is all baby steps though, as I'm still incredibly fragile, and am scared of messing up even the most simple of things. This isn't a case of walking on eggshells or even broken glass. My day to day life feels like I'm walking through a minefield with people ready to shoot me down at the drop of a pin.

I've been encouraged to write down as much of my story as I can, which will likely become an autobiography in the next few months. This has proven useful to over a dozen healthcare professionals and others involved in my care as it lifts the surface a little on my trauma and the reasons why I act the way I do. Ironically the one person who isn't supportive of me writing this is probably the person most scared about me revealing their true colours. To that person, worry not, I'm not as fickle as you think.

I'm trying to return back to the things I love, such as Esports, but I've learned already that my problems and ability to deal with others is still very limited. I can still switch at the drop of a hat, even though I know inside I shouldn't, and my mood still swings with the direction of the wind. There's so much I want to do, but it's like fighting against a swarm of Nargles. It never goes away. I don't want the limelight any more, and want to make things better from behind the scenes. Long boring reports, numbers and contracts are what I excel at, and I don't need to enter the world of commentary hell 24/7 again. I still love commentating and want to do it, I just don't want to let the side down or have it cause me more issues back into the cycle.

I'm a shell of a shell of the person I once was. I said to someone a few months ago that I'm at the bottom of the well that sits 100M below the bottom of rock bottom. I always flash back to someone in Esports telling me I should smile more, even though being stone-faced is the best I can do. That same Esports company managed to ruin my mental health back during COVID with more bullying when I was simply doing the job prescribed to me, and shows how in all walks of personal and professional life there will always be backstabbing.

There are very few people I trust in that industry at the moment, and I'm glad that one of them is one of the most rounded and sane people out there (Marko, thank you), along with my friend and decade long business partner Hugo.

I'm broken. I'm an idiot, and I'm sorry to all those who I've hurt. 2023 was my idea of hell, and I'm very lucky that a couple of people picked me up and carried me at points. To say I had given up is an understatement, but I want 2024 to be a slow rebuild. I'm not going to rush into anything, and actually try to listen to the people qualified to give me advice, and frankly ignore all the bullshit that circles at speeds twice as fast as the earth goes around the sun. I value the few people who's looked out for me, and still treat me like a human, and not some alcoholic piece of scum that others have made me out to be. This depression is crippling, but I want to stand up and take baby steps this year, not run into things like I have before.

If you are struggling, feel free to contact me, and I'm happy to have a chat. It's a lonely world out there and I've learned that 99% of people don't understand how hard things can be, especially when so-called help fails to materialise. The number of times support has been pulled at the last minute is huge, and I know what it feels like to fall down a snake after trying to climb up ladders. I highly recommend CALM if you live in the UK. They are amazing people helping people like us.

Thanks for reading. Peace and Love.