

The How of HOPE

One family's story of
overcoming mental illness



★ ★ ★
**LEARN THE
TOOLS USED
TO SAVE
A FAMILY**

REBECCA CRAGNOLINI

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One Family's Story of
Overcoming Mental Illness

REBECCA CRAGNOLINI

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Testimonials

During my time working with Rebecca while on her Healthy Minds program, I've been absolutely fascinated to learn just how powerful our minds are. Rebecca is professional and highly skilled in her field and her caring, approachable, respectful, understanding and positively challenging view always shines through. The techniques she shares in her practice and in this book can and will change your beliefs and habits.

Tracie Bailey, Bank Manager

When IT all gets too hard, Rebecca's the person I call. She has a unique way of calling you out on your IT in a direct, empathetic and supportive way. She just gets you and your IT!!

**Michelle McKay,
Chartered Accountant and Business Advisor**

I first met Rebecca as a colleague, and more recently I attended her Healthy Minds sessions. As a result of her program, I now feel far more confident and happier in myself.

In my role within mental health services, I've seen how powerful it is when family-whanau are feeling stuck and someone who has been through a similar situation shares their story.

Rebecca's book is real and discusses those things we don't always talk about. It gives hope that change is possible by providing the reader with tools and strategies they can apply in their own life.

Sometimes we can sit back and wait for changes to happen. What I find most inspiring is how both Andre and Rebecca did the work to help themselves.

Trish Lumb, Coordinating Family Advisor

How wonderful that Rebecca has chosen to share both her personal journey and the knowledge gained from her clinical background and experience as a life coach and mentor in this book. Long before they were fashionable buzzwords, mental health, wellbeing, mindfulness and healthy lifestyles, were the foundation of Rebecca's practice. After experiencing tough times herself, she has now helped countless others find a better pathway forward.

As CEO of Comcare Trust for 14 years I had the opportunity to witness firsthand the results of Rebecca's approach. She guided many families, who were often at odds with each other, to find a solution for an individual whose life had been significantly impacted by mental illness. Her skills in enabling those involved to forget their differences and concentrate on what's important (the person) were as impressive as they were subtle. Those involved left the decision-making table feeling positive, guided by Rebecca's strong ethics and talents in enabling people to see what really matters.

Rebecca's practice has helped many of my staff who I've encouraged to attend. She helps you discover your own personal strengths and push through the things that hold you back – so you can live the life you want and achieve your goals.

I hope this publication allows more people to experience Rebecca's unique talents. I recommend it to anyone looking for an approach to health and wellbeing that is achievable for everyday people, yet doesn't step back from the hard questions. Whether you are on a personal journey or supporting a loved one, this book will help you find strength, direction and your own voice.

Kay Fletcher, Mental Health Consultant

I met Rebecca through work and was immediately impressed by how she applied herself to her role, expanding and defining it into a position that she made her own. She has since gone on to pursue her passion, and through her practice is now making a real difference in people's lives.

It's hard not to admire someone who believes wholeheartedly in something and also has the courage of their convictions to follow it through.

Leroy A Lewis, District Manager

I first met Becs as one of my tutors on the hypnotherapy course I was taking. Friendly, approachable, fun and knowledgeable she was also amazingly good at getting to the root of issues. She would somehow just ask what appeared to be simple questions that led you to where you needed to go to find your own solutions. I was able to discover things about myself and my own thoughts that were holding me back from being the best I could be. She taught us how to use NLP skills to move on from these thoughts and how to use these skills to help others.

Becs is always kind, comfortable and calm, so even when working on difficult things you always feel safe. Today, I still see her for mentoring sessions to help me continue to help others and thrive as a therapist.

Becs is constantly thinking about how she can support her colleagues and enhance the hypnotherapy/NLP community to better serve our clients. Always thinking, always caring and now sharing her story for all.

Barbara Cameron, General Practitioner

Rebecca (Becs) always looks for the good in people and gives her time generously. She has a sharp sense of humour, is quick-witted, has the most infectious laugh and finds fun in most situations. I have learnt working with Becs that no matter what is going on there is something to learn from it. She has taught me to be honest with myself and feel my feelings, and for that I am forever grateful.

Imelda Curtin, Healthy Minds Business Partner

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Dedication

To my gorgeous husband and daughter – thank you for letting me share our life x

Introduction

It was Christmas Eve 2005, that wonderful night of the year when even adults are allowed to believe in magic and fairytales and I was out...

I was in London at the Shephard's Bush Walkabout. Snake bites (cider, beer and raspberry) were flowing, Kiwi and Aussie songs cranking. There was that extra energy which comes when you know the next day is a holiday. I was with my friend Liz who I'd met when working on a psychiatric ward in Christchurch, New Zealand. We'd travelled to England a couple of years ago.

Liz was working the next morning, but I had come over tonight, so we could go out and spend Christmas together. I switched my 'cute guy radar' to autopilot and spotted a rather tall, handsome guy. Details are sketchy, but I did make my way over to introduce myself. Later, my wallet went missing and it did cross my mind, *Has he stolen my wallet and is now buying me drinks with my money?*

I exchanged numbers with this man, an Aussie who had recently arrived in London and was working in the maintenance department of Harrods. I remember being pleased with myself for leaving my phone at home knowing it could have had the same fate as my wallet. It meant Christmas morning I had bonus warm fuzzies when receiving texts from my future husband.

Fast forward three years, and I'm sitting on the toilet, seven and a half months pregnant, hugging my knees, crying so loudly and yet no sound coming out as I was trying to be the strong one. Thinking to myself, *How has this happened? How can the man I love, who is so kind, funny and capable, how can this be happening to him and to us?*

The next day he would try and end his life. Already life felt unbearable and incredibly unreal. This just couldn't be happening. Andre thought he was a terrible person and that everyone knew it, that people were out to get him, maybe to kill him. He believed everyone was in on it – workmates, family, friends. Constant messages from the TV, internet and news all pointed to it as well.

As a mental health professional, I never imagined that I would one day find myself seeking help for someone I love.

This is our story of how we found hope and came out the other side.

PART 1

Out of the Blue

Love in London

A couple of days after meeting, Andre and I caught up again. I was in my flat deciding whether to chill out or get in touch with him, when suddenly I made the text. He was out with his friends, but we agreed to meet at Liverpool St station. I waited, wondering *will I recognise this guy?* As soon as I saw him, I was relieved I did. We hugged, and he took my hand as we walked towards Brick Lane for dinner.

I was surprised given that he was practically a stranger how natural it felt walking hand in hand. We strolled along Brick Lane listening to all the attempts from the staff to get us into their restaurants. I think we went with one that had a free beer with the meal. The conversation flowed most of the time and I liked that he had a shyness as well as confidence. As we left, he picked up my scarf and hat that I would have accidentally left behind, so on our first date, he had been introduced to my tendency to lose things.

We had lots of fun times, music gigs and festivals, Andre was great at finding things to do. He arranged our Valentine's date which sounded as if it would be a lovely thing to do, dinner on a boat in Canary Wharf. The reality was that we were crammed in like sardines with the tiniest gap between tables. It wasn't the most relaxing, romantic time and I was acutely aware that our conversation could easily be heard and vice versa.

The couple next to us were not in a great place, literally or figuratively. I was trying to take my place on the other side of our table, but squeezing through, I accidentally knocked some water on the lady. I felt terrible and apologised profusely. She smiled and said, 'It's fine, don't worry about it. It could have been worse; it could have been red wine'. When I sat down her voice changed from 'it's fine' to really annoyed saying to the guy at her table 'I can't believe she did that!' and kept going on about it. I was literally centimetres away and yet she spoke as if I wasn't even there.

The focus then shifted from me to guy she was with. Everything he was saying annoyed her. He went to the toilet and later she needed to go. She asked him where the toilets were, and he replied 'downstairs'. This would seem a reasonable thing to say, but no, she was furious. 'What do you mean downstairs? Downstairs to the left or downstairs to the right? Oh my god you are so useless.'

It's a line Andre and I still jokingly say to each other when asking for directions to the toilet. The relief we felt when we got out of there was enormous. We walked up Tower Bridge where there were great views and it was there that we had our first photo together. It was a lot less stressful than dinner and a cool thing to do, but what I really enjoyed that night was walking along and talking with him. We stopped off at a pub and chatted for ages.

Going out with Andre was a new, scary business. I really enjoyed and generally felt comfortable in the company of men, as I had spent my teenage years and early twenties hanging out with my brother's friends. Boyfriends though were a different story. I felt I couldn't be myself.

When we first started seeing each other I wasn't thinking far ahead. My flatmates were away, and I was thinking it was a bit of fun and company during the festive season. I really enjoyed his company. He seemed kind, funny, confident, with a touch of shyness, and I loved talking to him. We would talk for hours and about deep stuff too. He was outdoorsy and could also talk about feelings.

I'd found someone I could be myself around. The difficulty was, I wasn't so good at being myself around others with him. After years of being single I didn't want to be the person who as soon as they got a partner ditched their friends. I'm guessing I went to the other extreme.

This all came to a head one night when we met up at a party. I'd been at a pub crawl all day, it was a party where you came dressed as a Tube Stop and everyone had made a great effort. I was Tooting Bec, my friend who'd invited me was a Baker (and throwing flour over people) for Baker Street, her boyfriend was dressed as a Shepherd with foliage attached for Shepherd's Bush, another friend was dressed as a tennis player for Wimbledon, you can imagine what Cockfosters looked like.

I didn't think Andre was going to come, because we'd been partying for about eight hours while he'd been helping a friend shift and then having some drinks when they'd finished. I was excited to hear he was going to make it, but by the time he arrived I felt the conversation I was having was being interrupted. I kept moving to talk to different people and wasn't paying much attention to him. I didn't want to feel responsible for him and felt like I'd lost my freedom, but I also knew I wouldn't have liked it if it had been the other way around. We had agreed that this was a casual thing even though neither of us were seeing anyone else, so I shouldn't have felt guilty, however, the contrary feeling followed us home.

When we got back to my place Andre said he either wanted us to be going out or not and that I couldn't have it both ways. It got my attention and I was impressed, thinking *this guy does have balls after all*. I respected that he knew what he wanted and wasn't going to be mucked around. It made me realise that I didn't want to lose him, and then the words slipped out 'I love you'. It almost felt like it didn't come from me and yet strangely enough I meant it.

I told him how it scared me going out with someone. He asked, 'Do you mean if it doesn't work out?' No, it scared me if it did work out. It seemed a scary thought that this could be the last guy I would be with, it scared me completely not being just me anymore.

I told him how with other guys I had dated, there had been an end date, either I was leaving the country, or they were. After hearing this, Andre agreed that we would put an end date on our relationship and that when the time was up, if we wanted, it could be extended. It worked, and I did feel more comfortable, particularly seeing that he was so understanding. From wanting things on my terms, I started making more of an effort to meet him and his friends. I'm glad I did because they were lovely.

At Easter time Andre suggested going to Italy, as both Andre's parents were born in Italy and had emigrated to Australia when they were young. I was nervous about meeting his family, there was this feeling of are we rushing things? We almost didn't go as I wasn't feeling well and Andre was fine if we didn't go, but it was a short flight and he reassured me as soon as we got there we could pick up the rental car and go straight to the accommodation and rest. That would have been great only it didn't quite happen that way. Some of Andre's family came to the airport to surprise us. I'd learnt a tiny bit of Italian – as in hello, how are you, please, thank you and numbers. His family only

knew a few words in English. Given that Andre was the one who would be driving he went off to get the car and I stood with his family while we smiled at each other. There are only so many times you can say hello, how are you? I'd run out of what to say pretty quickly. I think they were repeating what a good boy Andre is and I think perhaps giving me some compliments, the rest is anyone's guess.

When Andre returned, he explained I wasn't feeling well, and that we'd go straight to the house, however, that wasn't to be. They insisted on going to their house on the way and out came food as well 'medicine' to settle my stomach. I didn't think it was a good idea to be drinking but their powers of persuasion worked. I agreed to 'just a sip' of their homemade red wine, which meant I ended up having more than a sip. Then the homemade grappa appeared – but, they were right, I did feel a lot better.

It was a lovely trip. I was made to feel very welcome, the scenery was stunning, and we also crossed the border into Austria and Slovenia. The food was divine, and one night at dinner with Andre's family I made the mistake of saying yes to seconds. That response seemed to please them with nodding and smiling. I didn't realise there were going to be about 10 other courses. I had to do some deep breathing that evening as I ate so much.

Just before our trip to Italy I'd been with my flatmates on a trip to Mozambique. It was one of the most amazing holidays ever. Relaxing on the beach, exploring the city and then a last-minute trip to Kruger Park to see the wildlife for four days. Honestly, I can't describe how amazing the whole experience was. The first exciting animals we spotted were giraffe casually eating leaves off a tree. We then had to decide whether to drive through a road that was flooded, which we did and saw a crocodile on the other side. Pulling over to the side of the road, we had to keep our fingers crossed that a family of elephants didn't take offence to us. One day we were driving and wondered what was up ahead in the middle of the road. As we got closer, we could see it was a massive lion sunning itself. It was huge, but not in the least bit worried by us driving along. Nearby under a tree was his family.

I was having lots of fun with my flatmates, but there was another part sneaking in saying how I would love to be sharing this with Andre. I looked forward to our morning and evening texts. I was beginning to see a future together.

A year on and we were engaged. We'd been back to Australia and New Zealand to see and meet each other's families. On the way back, we stopped off in San Francisco and on New Year's Eve he proposed. Not long after we moved in together which was quite a shock.

We had thought we were practically living together already and that it wouldn't be much of a change. We'd been shopping, preparing meals, travelling together, spending pretty much every night at each other's place how much of a difference could it be?

Ohhh but it was! We each thought we were pulling our weight more than the other and we were finding we had different ways of doing things. Each one thinking our way was right. The thought did cross both our minds *can we stay together and make this work?* Fortunately, as soon as we talked about it, we could see the other's point of view and things seemed to work themselves out and life was good. This though was the calm before the storm.

What the F#\$K!

Sitting and silently sobbing on the toilet was not something I imagined I would do in this relationship. Neither was visiting the psychiatric emergency clinic, but that is where we had just been. Andre was clearly not well, and we needed help. We had to walk there as it was hard enough to convince Andre to go let alone travel in a taxi. And in some way it felt like walking and some fresh air would be good. However, at the same time the thought *Please don't run out into traffic, please make it to the hospital* kept going around and around in my head. Several times we did stop with Andre saying we should just go home, but fortunately we did make it.

I worked at this hospital as a case manager in the Early Intervention in Psychosis Team. I knew that I'd possibly be seeing some clients and most likely staff I knew, and I remember thinking *this is not the time to be worrying about what other people think*. I'd been preaching about stigma for several years and now it was time to 'walk the walk'. In that moment I decided and said to myself 'I'm proud of who we are'. There was nothing for us to be ashamed about and this just needed sorting so we could get on with our lives.

We saw a nurse and a doctor, who were both kind and we appreciated being able to take our time, speak about what had been happening and discuss options. Andre hadn't slept for nearly four days and was an obvious priority. Given this was the first time it had happened, he was given sleeping tablets and some anti-anxiety tablets to relax him. At this stage, nothing was done to address his mood or paranoid thinking, they hoped that with some sleep, things would improve.

It felt a little like things were coming back to haunt me as Andre was saying in front of the doctor, 'But you always say medication doesn't work'. It's true I'd shared my

frustrations with him about medications. There were times when clients I worked with were distressed and the response seemed to automatically go to a change in medications. My concern was we weren't hearing or empowering the person. I worried by putting such a focus on medication it was giving people the message of 'you're not in control and therefore need a medical response'. But I didn't think that was always the case.

Right now, for us, I did think Andre needed the assistance of medication. Other things had not helped to calm him, and we needed something to break the awake cycle and just get some sleep.

We walked to the pharmacy to fill the prescription. There was quite a wait and I had to convince Andre that we should stay. We were then told the doctor hadn't signed the prescription and we'd have to go back to the hospital, however, eventually they were able to solve it over the phone. This was more ammunition for Andre about the plot and everyone being against him.

The next hurdle was to get Andre to take the medication. He believed that it was poison and would kill him, I was telling him that it wasn't, I loved him and just wanted him to get better. Eventually after a goodbye speech he agreed to take the medications. He thought it was fair enough that he should die, and this was why he took them. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry because in some ways the whole situation seemed comical and completely ridiculous, but in another way, so sad that he should agree to dying. I remember that my biggest feeling was relief, he could finally get some sleep and things could start to come right.

It sounds silly having worked with many people who were prescribed medication to sleep that I'd never had any personal experience with them. I thought once you went off to sleep you were out to it for the night. I'd heard from clients how it's difficult to wake up and how groggy they feel. For this reason, I nearly had a heart attack when Andre spoke to me in the middle of the night. You obviously don't necessarily sleep through.

I hadn't been sleeping particularly well either. When Andre thought there were people in the house coming to kill us there was a little part of me that was trying to figure out if that was the case. Andre was convincing with his stories and he's someone I would trust with my life. There probably were elements of truth to his story, he had probably annoyed some people at work and crazy things do happen in London and yet other parts

of his story just didn't add up. Why would the receptionist at work pushing certain buttons on the phone be a sign that they were annoyed with him? I started hearing noises that would have always been there but suddenly I was listening out for them thinking *is someone there?*

The first day after taking his new medication, I was hopeful that things were improving. Andre still believed everyone was against him. I guess a bit like when you buy a car and have not noticed that make before. Suddenly you start seeing the make of car everywhere. Now that Andre had decided there was a conspiracy, he was spotting the conspiracy everywhere, making normal life relate to it.

Of all the coincidences it was announced that Heath Ledger, the actor, had died. Like Andre, Heath was an Australian, born in 1979, he had a young daughter and Andre was about to become a father. Some of Andre's friends sent a text about it. Andre knew for sure Heath hadn't died and this again was his friends and the world's media reminding him what a terrible person he was.

That afternoon I was hungry. With all that had been happening it was a while since we'd been grocery shopping and being pregnant, I really needed to eat or felt dreadful. Andre didn't want to go out, so I was just going to walk to the end of the road for some milk and bread. I didn't really want to leave him alone, but he seemed okay and I had to get something. There were no goodbye speeches, so it felt safe for me to go. When I came back, Andre was asleep on the couch in a deep slumber. He slept for hours and hours and I couldn't even wake him to come to bed. It didn't seem surprising given he had missed five nights of sleep. He was still sleeping in the morning but eventually woke up and just pottered around. Later, I asked him if he was going to take his meds and he replied that he didn't have any. I said, 'Of course you do they gave you a week's supply'. He again said he didn't have any. I checked the bottles and sure enough all the sleeping tablets and all the anti-anxiety meds were gone.

I was trying not to get hysterical discovering he'd not only taken all of them, he'd taken packets of Panadol as well as other medications in the cupboard. I couldn't believe that he was still alive and that he was sounding so unemotional talking about trying to kill himself. What an idiot I was for going to the shops the day before.

I rang the psychiatric emergency clinic and they said to get him to the accident and emergency department before coming to them to have him medically cleared, and to

check that his heart and other organs were not damaged. I rang a friend of ours as I wanted support in case Andre tried to take off while we were there and for Andre to know our friends cared. I also phoned Andre's parents in Australia.

I was sitting on the sofa as I dialled their number and held back the tears, so I could get the words out. 'Hey Bec, how you doing? How's he doing?' Andre's mum said. My throat constricted, 'Not good' and I managed to get out, 'Andre tried to kill himself'. Now the words were out the floods of tears arrived. I don't remember the words that followed but I do remember the shock and devastated sound in her voice as she relayed what I'd said to his dad. At that moment I really felt for them, they are such loving, caring parents and I can't imagine what they were going through half a world away. Andre looked from across the room staring blankly.

We had only just seen them for New Year's when we all met up in Morocco and I had been in touch with them at least once a day for the past week since Andre hadn't been himself. I had even said a few days earlier that it was fine they didn't need to come over, we were getting on to things. I wasn't trying to keep them away and now felt terrible and questioned my decisions. Andre's mum would get on the first flight she could.

This time Andre and I did take a taxi to the hospital. I think I was in taking charge mode saying, 'I don't care what you say, you've just tried to take your life, we're doing this'. I bumped into my boss who I had been in contact with about having some time off work. I told her what had happened, there was something quite reassuring seeing her shock as this was a completely shocking situation for me. I was very grateful for her kind words and seeing that she cared. She said she would sort everything at work which meant I could just focus on what needed to happen at home.

We waited at the accident and emergency holding hands at times, crying at times just wanting it all to be over. It probably took an hour for blood tests to be done and Andre's heart monitored. Andre was lying on the bed with his shirt off with wires stuck to his chest. The same chest that I loved to snuggle into and feel like I'm in the safest most contented place in the world. In my mind I was thinking *Becs, what's wrong with you. Your fiancée has just tried to kill himself and you're thinking his chest is sexy, how inappropriate.*

It didn't take long to come back to that question that kept appearing now. How can this be happening? Around us life was continuing. A text message to my friend wishing her a happy birthday. It felt strange wishing her a wonderful day while also updating her on the situation. I didn't want to upset her day and genuinely wanted her to be having fun. I guess there's not really a protocol about these things.

Luckily Andre's heart was physically fine, but I knew the road to fixing his broken heart and lost soul was going to take longer.

Seeking Safety

It was off to the psychiatric emergency clinic next. We saw the same doctor as before, who seemed shocked at what had happened. I got the sense she really was feeling for us and what we were going through. Andre still wanted his life to end and I knew I couldn't keep him safe now. I couldn't be awake 24/7 making sure he wasn't going to jump out the apartment window or even know of any other plans he had, so it was agreed he would be admitted to a psychiatric ward.

I had clients who were currently staying on the ward. We were therefore given the option of Andre going to Newham Hospital instead of Homerton and it was still part of the East London & City Trust that I worked for. I know I said earlier I'd made the decision I wasn't going to worry what people thought but a comment from a friend and doctor who had seen me a few days earlier 'you looked like an old Eastern European lady coming in, pale and with the weight of the world on your shoulders' made me rethink.

I didn't believe it would be helpful for clients I was working with to see me falling apart. I also wanted space to just be there for Andre and myself without any distractions. It did mean travelling further, but we took the option of Newham hospital. Andre didn't want to go to hospital but went along with it anyway.

Another taxi ride in silence, holding hands and we were there. We met with the team, where the decision was made to continue with the previous plan of medication for sleeping and relaxing, monitor for safety and I guess hope for the best.

We spent some time in his room, unfortunately there was a person on the ward who every now and then would scream very loudly, which again would start the questions in my mind. *Is this the right place for Andre to get better? Please let this be the right*

thing to be doing, please don't let this make him worse. Please survive long enough to get some sleep and start seeing things differently. See how loved you are, see the good qualities in yourself that others see. Please be alive to meet your child.

We were so excited to be having a baby. Andre was possibly cluckier than I was, when we were on buses he would be smiling at babies. We had decided to try for a few months and if it didn't happen stop until after our wedding. Glastonbury Festival would be the last of the partying and then I would do all the right lifestyle things. We weren't going to get technical about it with fertility cycles just see what happened. It happened straight away. I'd taken a pregnancy test which showed it was negative and I know it was a bit silly, but just a couple of days later I couldn't resist taking another one and couldn't believe it when it was positive. I was bursting with excitement, but we had a friend staying and Andre was out. I had to ring Andre, so he was the first to know because I couldn't act normally around my friend with this news. It was the weekend and he was in Angel buying a ukulele. He'd joined a group where 100 of them would play three songs on the ukulele at Bestival on the Isle of Wight. I had a hairdresser appointment to go to, it was so hard to sit still and act normal. How was I going to last nine months of anticipation and waiting for the baby to come? Our families were really happy, our friends were too. Some were a bit shocked as we were the first to have a baby in our group and most were still in partying mode.

We know a lot of people wait until three months to share their news. We wanted to share it now and if anything did happen, we would share that too. It turns out there would have been no hiding it anyway because around six weeks I started to feel dreadful. Vomiting bile in the morning and nausea through the day and night, exhausted and I couldn't stand certain smells.

It was still exciting, especially the weekly updates on how the baby was developing, getting to hear the heartbeat and see during the scans the baby moving about. Life was quite different, I really wanted it to carry on as normal, but the reality was it was hard when I just wanted to cry from feeling so nauseous all the time. I was still working full-time, walking round Hackney visiting people but it was just about all I could do. If only I could have vomited and the nausea went away but no and very little seemed to help.

I know it can be frustrating being around people who are sick when you are well. There can be that part that thinks *get over it, it can't be that bad*. Andre was very supportive and tried to do the right things. He would stay home when I wanted him to, he tried to

avoid eating garlic which if he did as soon as he entered our apartment I could smell even from down the hallway and around the corner. He arranged for acupuncture, where I felt good during the session and for a few hours after, but it didn't last long.

Of course, it's not possible but what I really wanted was to either have a pause button to have some relief from the nausea or for Andre to experience what I was going through. The one time it was a bit better was when I had a week off work and rested. In hindsight I don't think my body could handle working full-time and growing a baby. At the time I was thinking about saving for our wedding and buying a house. I was prioritising those things over my health. I also loved my job and it was such an important part of my life.

With Andre in hospital I now felt mixed about this baby. I did love it and feel extremely protective of it, but at the same time I felt like it was coming between Andre and I. Literally I couldn't even give that real body hug. I wasn't myself and everything was that bit harder lugging around a baby who was zapping my energy. Logically I knew this little being inside was innocent of the crimes I was attributing to it, but there were a couple of times alone in the apartment when I asked myself if Andre ends his life should I? I didn't want to be bringing this baby into the world alone. Andre felt so much part of my life I couldn't imagine it without him. What if he doesn't want to spend his life with me and this is him feeling trapped and going crazy because of it? I knew if I was going to end my life, it would have to be before the baby was born. I don't think I ever could have done it and all I wanted was for us all to be happy.

Before leaving the hospital, Andre wanted a photo of us and took a selfie on his phone. Another bizarre moment, smiling didn't quite seem right. Do you smile for a psych ward selfie? I was pleased though that he wanted a photo of us.

Andre's mother arrived from Australia the next day and came straight from the airport to the hospital. It was a relief to have someone to share the worry, the conversations and have someone in the apartment with me. Living overseas this was only the third time we had been together so in some ways we were still getting to know each other.

Andre was being observed to keep safe as well as having a sleeping tablet and sometimes medication for anxiety. He started sleeping and looking ever so slightly better, he went from very dark circles around his eyes to slightly lighter circles. He also said he wasn't going to try and kill himself, not because he wanted to live, but because

he thought it was part of the plan of punishing him that he wouldn't succeed and would only hurt himself. It wasn't particularly reassuring, but it was something.

The experience on the ward was okay. Andre would be hassled for cigarettes (not that he had any), and money by some people. The most incredible moment was getting a phone call from the ward saying that £200 had been handed in and they thought it was ours. It turned out it was Andre's, apparently, he'd taken out the money when he thought he would take off and live on the streets. It had been in his pocket and fallen out in the meeting room. I was incredibly grateful that one of the people on the ward had handed it in. It meant so much she had done that for us, but it was hard to know how to show our appreciation. The pot plant and card didn't seem enough, but I hope she knew what she did came at just the right time. It was what I needed – to know there were still good things happening around us. Working in mental health I was familiar with psychiatric wards, but it felt quite different being on the other side of things. Being told off by the security for not signing in or something I didn't realise I'd done wrong.

I didn't want to make things worse for Andre. He had worked in Russia a couple of times, and when he went away, I would make something for him to open every day. A word-find with words to do about us, a silly poem about us, a list of what I loved about him or a funny cartoon. I felt like I wanted to do the same thing; give him something to have with him, so he knew how much he was loved. The dilemma was, if he didn't think it was true would it make him feel worse? In the end I decided either way was risky, so I would just be honest and do what felt right to me. I wrote some notes about what I loved about him and how I knew it was hard but that we'd be alright.

Andre didn't want people to know what was happening. However, I told him that I needed support and people would know something was up. A couple of our friends visited and one of his Australian friends who was living in London visited. He told Andre how his partner had been depressed and in hospital before, but Andre didn't know what to make of that. Was this just a made-up story? I do think it was helpful though, this person is so bubbly, extremely chic, capable and lovely, I think it must have been helpful to hear and gave us hope.

I had two friends who went to visit as well. Andre looked like a shell of a person, he was not very interactive, so I think it was helpful having two people there. It meant they could talk to each other rather than sit in uncomfortable silence. For me, it was a reminder that we weren't alone and that we mattered.

My boss at the time was a clinical psychologist and used to talk about beliefs in percentages. The aim being to up the percentage of the helpful belief. Who knows what was going through Andre's mind. He may have been 99% sure his visitors were there as a message that he was a terrible person, but I think there would have been 1% that on some level, he knew they cared.

It was that small percentage that gave me hope. Eventually he would be able to believe in himself again. Something good had to come of this.

A New Normal

For us it was like the world had stopped. All our time and energy was going into how to make things right, whatever that was. For the rest of the world life was continuing as normal, including Andre's work and we obviously had to tell his employer what was happening. About four days earlier Andre had a meeting with his manager, where he had told him he wasn't coping. From their perspective, they were there to sort the jobs out. Andre was in the meeting for a little while but couldn't handle what was happening. With the lack of sleep, he could not think clearly. Everything was feeling very strange and he had to leave.

In some ways I wanted to avoid the conversation but knew I had to have it. I'd only met his boss once at the work Christmas party. It was good to speak to them though, and I could tell they couldn't believe what had happened. It was useful getting his boss's perspective, that yes, a few mistakes had been made, but that everyone makes mistakes. In terms of thinking that they were annoyed with him, they thought Andre was a good guy and again just couldn't make sense of it. They asked if it had happened before and I said no. If there was anything they could do to let them know. Andre's job was there for him and reassuringly I could hear in his voice that he genuinely cared.

From then on, I talked with one of the receptionist staff to give updates. It was someone I knew Andre got on with and it was good having one contact person. It also wasn't too much pressure to give some updates maybe once a week. They sent flowers and a card which I was appreciative of and I think at some level Andre might have been too.

From Andre's perspective he didn't think he belonged in hospital. He was there voluntarily and left after a week. In the discharge meeting his psychiatrist said he was worried about Andre, that it was a serious situation. There were the positives – that he

was sleeping better, and he didn't want to end his life, but only because he had the belief it wouldn't work. It was part of his punishment that he wouldn't be successful. If he jumped from a building, he would only break his bones, not kill himself, so he wouldn't try. He wasn't on any medication but was going to be seen daily by the home treatment team in Hackney.

Andre wasn't doing a lot at home. We went on some walks, but he didn't want to shower, he looked crumpled and still believed everyone was against him. It was hard to not let that dread and hopelessness spread. I almost needed a protection shield to keep myself in an okay state and not let all the negative vibes get me down. It was so good to hear from friends and family. Kind of them to ask how things were going as well as a break for me to hear what was happening in their lives.

A week later I went back to work, as having Andre's mum with us meant he wasn't on his own. The psychiatrist was visiting the next day and we discussed what should be said. I wanted to make sure Andre didn't say 'I'm fine' but tell him what was going through his mind. I also believed it was time to discuss taking some medications. The night before the visit I nagged Andre into having a shower and change his clothes.

Andre and his mum both discussed the lack of progress and unfortunately, rather than starting medication the psychiatrist discharged him and made a referral to wait a month and then be assessed by the community mental health team. He added insult to the injury by giving some extremely unhelpful comments. 'We see people a lot worse than you,' and 'You'll look back and laugh on this in a few months' time'.

I was livid! I had been warned by one of this psychiatrist's colleagues that he was arrogant and not that great, but I just couldn't believe it. It had been a major effort getting Andre to speak about what he thought and come round to the idea that perhaps he should try some medication.

It wasn't particularly reassuring that the reason he wouldn't kill himself was a paranoid one, believing it wouldn't work because it was all part of the scheme to punish him. We weren't living in squalor and he had showered that day but in terms of life and death it was very touch and go as well as unpredictable. Once you're dead there is no going back. There is no, oops got that wrong let's try again. I didn't want Andre to die to prove the psychiatrist wrong.

I drafted a letter of complaint but never sent it. I do feel bad that others may have had similar experiences and I really am sorry if that has been the case. Looking back this would be the only regret that I have not following through on the complaint about this psychiatrist. Ten years later, I can tell you that we have never looked back and laughed at how close Andre came to dying, and how dreadful he felt.

We were completely focused on getting Andre the help he needed. Rather than trying to get him back to the home treatment team, I focused on getting him seen earlier by the community mental health team. Fortunately, this happened, and he was seen within the week. Anti-psychotic medications were started which completely drained Andre and helped with the sleep and calming things down. A few weeks down the track though, Andre was not that much better, and I really felt he needed something to address his mood.

Looking back, his mood had dropped before all the paranoid ideas. The discussions that now took place were 'If you start another medication you won't know which one is actually working' and 'We would expect people that are psychotic to be depressed'. The psychiatrist also said, 'We take a client-centred approach here, so we will go with what Andre wants'.

Wow this was a learning curve for me. I'd been in situations before when we only make one change at a time, so we knew what was making the difference. I also truly believe in the client-centred approach – empower the person, let them make decisions about their life. The difficulty was Andre didn't believe the person in front of him was a doctor/psychiatrist he also didn't believe the medications were real, so how could he make a truly informed decision?

Being on the other side of it, I didn't care if we never knew which medication helped. My gut was saying we needed to add another medication in to get his mood to a level where we could do other things to help. Letting another week go by would be an incredibly long time to notice change. We were on a time schedule too, because the longer Andre was unwell it seemed the higher the risk of him taking his life. Not to mention we were about to bring a little baby into the world, and I wanted him to be back to himself, so we could have happy memories. I also wanted to have my supportive partner for this exciting yet scary time.

Fortunately, Andre said, 'I'll go with what Becs thinks'. So, he was prescribed an antidepressant and things did start to improve.

Why and What Now?

Now Andre was out of hospital and beginning to improve I wanted us to discuss how we thought this had happened. In part this was me wanting to make sense of the situation and thinking if we know what caused it, we can prevent it from happening again.

As much as it was such a shock for us all, on looking back it wasn't a complete surprise. Almost a year ago we had attended a self-development, transformational course. We had a friend who had completed it with her fiancé and she spoke about how life-changing it had been. This was a person who I had always thought had it all together, she was so confident and generally an amazing person. She talked about how it had really saved their relationship and how she was feeling closer with her family.

Although life was great, there were things that I wanted to be better. For a long time, I'd struggled with my weight and generally being a worrier and would have loved for those things to change. There were things Andre was interested in changing too, so we both went along to an introductory session. We listened to people talk about their experience and could see how much benefit people were getting from it and signed up for the three-day course.

It was a full-on course, starting at 9.00am and finishing at 10.00pm. There was a lot that made sense and made me see things in a different light and that anything was possible if I let go of things that were holding me back. I realised I had a belief that I'd inherited an anxiety gene from my dad. Dad had passed away so wasn't around to talk to about it. It helped me realise I'd been blaming him for the way I was, but I could let go and see what a caring and inspiring man he was.

There were also times when you were to contact and have resolving conversations with people from the past. My poor best friend in New Zealand must have thought I'd gone

mad. I don't even remember exactly what I said. It was something about the fact I'd felt inferior to her, but I knew it was my issue. The problem was I said all this while I was crying. She was asking if I was alright, she was worried about me. I said I was fine and that we were fine.

Despite the emotional roller-coaster on this three-day course it was also quite freeing. I could start to see the big picture and not be so worried. The thing was though, that to be really free you would need to tell everyone how amazing the course was and have them do the course too. Not a marketing strategy that impresses me now.

We continued to go to the evening classes once a week. Not long after though I became pregnant and started having horrendous morning, afternoon and evening sickness, so that was the end of the course for me. We'd already decided to try for a baby before the course. I'm glad we did as I didn't want our daughter's story of how she came into the world to be, 'Mummy and Daddy went on a course and went crazy for a bit and here you are'.

I had stopped the course while Andre carried on and took on a lot of commitments. There was this idea of everything being possible and there are no limits. Andre was taking this on and feeling empowered. He got a promotion, started a master's course, was setting up a community event and volunteering for the organisation.

We were poles apart. I was waking up in the morning vomiting bile, wondering how I would get through the day. He was as high as a kite making things happen. I had a taste of what that had been like. I remember after the weekend course feeling like I was walking on air, really noticing the little things around me and almost feeling invincible. I was happy for him, but at times I was a bit annoyed. I was exhausted growing this little bean that we'd both agreed we wanted to have, but if anything, Andre had been the cluckier one playing peek-a-boo with babies on the bus.

I just wasn't the 'Yummy Mummy to Be' that I'd envisaged. Lunchtime at work I had to push chairs together to have a sleep. Normal things began to smell, our washing machine smelled like a load of cauliflower had gone through it and I wasn't enjoying not being me. I was unreliable – I'd arrange to meet my friends and have to cancel which meant at times friends that didn't know each other were at events or on holidays without me.

Things had started going wrong for Andre before Christmas which was a month before being admitted to hospital. From everything running smoothly and feeling invincible there were things starting to happen and he was feeling the pressure. The Christmas break perhaps put things on pause and was a time to refresh a bit but when we arrived back all the issues were there. The responsibility of organising lots of jobs and a staff member, as well as juggling the other commitments to do with the course.

He had a 'buddy' from the course, and they were to support each other. His advice to what Andre was experiencing was to leave me. I think Andre told me this a few days into him not sleeping. It's a little discerning to hear someone that barely knows a person giving out this advice. Looking back, I'm surprised I didn't get angrier hearing this. I just thought if Andre really wants to leave me that's fine, but there's a more pressing issue of he needs to get better. He's not coping and needs help.

When he went into hospital, I rang a supervisor within the organisation to let them know what was happening. I let her know what the buddy had been saying and how I didn't think it was their place. She got in touch later to say she had spoken to the person to say that wasn't their role. She was apologetic and if there was anything they could do let them know.

Andre and I didn't have any more involvement with the organisation. I don't think either of us would say it was the reason Andre got unwell but we both agree it probably sped up the process. In years to come Andre would do some work of letting go of unhelpful beliefs such as 'people don't like me'. It was these beliefs that were really amplified during this time. He realised these were picked up even before he went to school.

Generally, the discussions that we were having with our family and friends was 'I think you took on too much, it's all got on top of you'. If we focus on the basics of sleep, exercise and being out in nature things will get back to normal. Sometimes Andre seemed to be in slight agreement with this explanation other times he would disagree by shaking his head 'no' or say, 'It's not that'.

Baby Onboard

Looking back, I'm not sure how Andre did it but two weeks after being discharged from hospital he started back at work. A different role where he wasn't managing lots of projects, a maintenance role and initially part-time. Still feeling people were against him, he also had the difficulty of dragging himself out of bed from the sedating effects of the medication, but he was functioning. He was paranoid whether he was at home or working so we figured he may as well be earning money. Hopefully by getting back to normality, things would continue to improve.

Work were great at letting him go to appointments. He had started working with a brief intervention worker doing some cognitive behavioural work (understanding how your thinking affects the way you feel) and it did help a bit. If it wasn't for me working in the Early Intervention in Psychosis Team, Andre would have been with this team. I was aware I didn't want to get into a role of being a health professional with Andre, but at the same time I had thoughts and ideas that I believed would help the situation.

Initially I did keep an eye on the medication. I didn't want him to overdose on it and yet I also wanted him to know I trusted him. He was an adult and I had to get my head around the fact that if he wanted to kill himself, he would.

We would go for walks and to restaurants. One great thing about Andre's job was that he got to travel around Greater London so he knew of nice places to go. Life was getting back to some sort of normality and we even saw some friends.

I went on maternity leave four weeks before our due date as I was getting exhausted. Andre's mum was visiting a friend in Norway when the action started. Not being familiar with this whole birthing thing, I didn't realise at first that my waters had broken. Eventually I thought perhaps I should ring the midwife who said to go to

hospital to be examined. From that we learnt that it was a 'slow leak' and had to go home and try to bring on contractions.

After walking up and down stairs, using acupuncture points and other recommended ways the contractions finally came. I was so proud of myself as I had been told being induced was painful. So, we turned up at seven a.m. to Homerton Hospital to announce that contractions had started and were five minutes apart. After being monitored it was agreed the contractions were not strong enough and I would need to be induced after all. I was dismayed – these contractions felt pretty strong to me.

We were sent to a ward to spend time walking around, sitting or lying down while waiting. This was fine to start with but after hours it took its toll on both of us. By five p.m. I was in a lot of pain and was getting to the stage of not being able to handle it. We were taken to the birthing suite and just managed to transfer from the wheelchair to the bed. I had always thought I had a high pain tolerance, but this was unbearable and through it all, Andre was just quietly there.

I have never been so grateful as when I had an epidural. From thinking I may actually die to feeling nothing was indescribable. I had perked up but over on my left, sitting in a chair Andre was shrinking away. When I looked over, staring back were these sad eyes, filled with suspicion. From the recent weeks if I was to guess what he was thinking it would have been, *What's going on? I know this is to show me what a terrible person I am.*

Hours went past. The initial relief of the epidural turned to discomfort, not being able to move about, it's a strange feeling not being able to control your legs. I'd find myself having to slide down the bed and needed help to move my legs. I would have done anything for a massage even though I wouldn't feel it. Even to have my hand held would have been great but Andre wouldn't touch me. I'd quietly asked a couple of times and each time he shook his head no. It was heart wrenching and slightly embarrassing. I was so grateful that he was there and yet it wasn't him.

I wanted to fall apart, but there was a baby to push out. I was also worried what the health professionals were going to make of this father-to-be. I knew that all children who live with people who have mental health issues are supposed to be reported to Social Services. I'd been in meetings where staff made comments that weren't particularly sensitive or helpful. The risk of having to undo flippant comments made me

want to avoid that if possible. This wasn't about wanting to put my head in the sand, it was thinking we'll definitely access the support we need while remaining as normal as possible and hopefully happy.

Without much happening, except seriously believing I could die with the pain again, eventually I was drugged up and taken off to theatre to have either a forceps delivery or a caesarean. Pain free and feeling things were in the hands of others now, I was feeling a bit better.

Whenever I recall what happened next, it always floods me with emotion. Our little bouncing bean, Isabella arrived, and staff were happily chatting. She was briefly taken away and then they gave her to Andre (and here arrive the tears as I write this). He looked so proud, like the old Andre was back with us. He was asking me if I could see her but by this stage I was shaking uncontrollably, thinking I was going to vomit from the side effect of the medications. I felt physically dreadful, but I was ecstatic. Andre's reaction was such a relief and I was wheeled to the recovery room thinking *things will be okay*.

I have often thought this was a turning point. Like almost in a moment Andre made the decision 'I'm a responsible parent now' and that's what would guide him through tough times. Of course, she was here to just be her, she didn't need the pressure of saving us and yet it was like she was this little knowing, healing being. To be clear I'm not recommending the answer is to have a baby but maybe the right thing that you need can come along.

Andre was a natural he looked so comfortable holding her, bathing her, changing her and playing with her. His Mum arrived back, and we were both so proud to introduce her. His sister came on her way back from a trip through Europe before returning to Australia and my Mum and sister arrived. We went on a few day trips to Windsor and enjoyed showing off where we lived.

Of course, eventually everybody had to go home, but the good thing about living on the other side of the world is when you are up feeding in the middle of the night there are people awake that you can talk to. I was feeling a little lonely, because after not sleeping much in those first days, Andre was now sleeping a lot.

There were nights where I had fed her and was going off to sleep. Then I would wake up realising I was dreaming, and she was actually crying, needing a feed. Despite thinking I couldn't physically rouse myself to get up, somehow, I would. As I did, I'd look across at Andre who wouldn't have woken if a truck came through the building and wish he didn't have to take medication and was able to help at night. I knew I should be grateful he was alive, and I was. And yes, it would be fair to say a part of me did think *what a martyr I am keeping it all together*.

Life got back to some sort of normality. When Isabella was five months old, I went back to work, and Andre looked after her. It was stressful particularly the first week of being back, I was teary leaving the first few days. When I went on maternity leave my clients had gone to other workers. I was going to leave in about three months' time, so my role now was assessing new people and covering staff that were on leave which meant dealing with emergencies. When I was out, I would see mother's groups out having coffees, and I'd be thinking *that should be me*. A couple of times I met Andre and Isabella for lunch which was a treat getting cuddles during the day. A lot of the time Andre spent sleeping, he'd wake when Isabella needed him, and the rest of the time he was asleep.

We were spending time with friends and going for walks. We had a trip to Italy to see Andre's family and a camping trip to Cornwall. I'd had such fond memories the first summer I'd arrived in England when there was a heatwave and it was so picturesque with the thatched roofs. I thought it would be lovely for us to go there for a little holiday before we went to live in New Zealand.

Turns out it was quite a different experience camping with gale force winds, rain and a crying baby throughout the night. It was the closest I've come to shaking a baby. Instead I shook and shook Andre to finally wake him from his medication slumber, saying 'I can't handle it I'm going to kill her'.

Being responsible and trying to hold things together I was about to crack. I didn't want to shake Isabella a little I wanted to shake her a lot until I had let out all the pent-up anger I had inside. I knew it wasn't her fault. She would stop crying when fed but as soon as she was off, she would start crying again. I was so tired I didn't trust myself not to fall asleep and roll on her and yet I desperately wanted sleep. Andre sleeping through it all added to the brewing anger. He could see I was serious and did manage to wake

up for a bit to take her away from me. It didn't last long him being awake, but it was enough to feel that I wasn't doing it alone and feel I could be there for her again.

The next morning, we arranged to be in a campervan which lead to some much-needed sleep and things looked brighter. Like most of our time these days there were times of stress while also moments of joy. The sun did come out for a moment on St Ives Beach and there was enough heat in the sun to feel it radiating in and warming us. Andre went for a swim, Isabella played in the sand. Life was good.

It was similar when we went to Barcelona for my birthday, there was the stress of Isabella not sleeping and then the joy of the architecture, food and going for walks. Being somewhere different allowed us to break some of the habits we were in, like both of us spending too much time in our minds – me worrying if Andre was okay and would we be alright and Andre feeling like he was a bad person and people didn't like him. In Barcelona we could focus on what was happening in front of us. I would go between feeling trapped when resorting to having baths with Isabella to calm and relax her, to other times being out walking and feeling free.

As I was writing this I said to Andre, 'Remember how we had all those baths in Barcelona to calm Isabella down?' He replied, 'Vaguely. I do remember looking after Isabella because you were too hungover from the night before that we almost didn't make the trip'.

Oh dear, I wasn't planning on writing about that and yet I wanted this to be a true reflection on life so here goes. It was a shared leaving work do and this was the workplace that I absolutely loved and that meant so much to me. I had already finished work the day before and I told Andre I'd catch the bus down at five p.m. and stay for an hour or so. It was so nice being in their company, the team was changing, not just staff leaving but the structure of it. I was the third person to join the team so had been there since pretty much the beginning when we were figuring out getting access to computers, chairs and getting our first clients.

It did feel like a big celebration of the time together. Most of all it felt like I was normal – going out drinking, chatting and laughing, I felt free. Then drunken logic tells you that it's better to stay out all night when you've got to catch a plane in the early hours of the morning and you toast to the great idea. I think I got home at three a.m. and we were to

catch a bus to the airport at four a.m. The only way I would make it was if I made myself sick and got the alcohol out.

When we arrived in Barcelona, I couldn't believe the cafes weren't open yet and there was nowhere to get food. My stomach was empty, and I was desperate for something to fill it. The only thing we had was baby food, it was disgusting and bland and only slightly better than not having anything. As I was eating it, I remember feeling mixed emotions. It had been such a nice night and exactly what I needed while also realising things are different now you have a child, you'll need to accept this.

Almost a year on from Andre being in hospital we had our stag's and hen's parties in London. I never thought I would be so excited to get a drunken phone call from Andre. He was on his way home; however, he'd caught a cab, so I couldn't understand why he was walking. In drunken confusion he'd got off at the bus stop instead of our house! I just thought *Aww bless, thank God he had a good time*. He could have come in and been ill everywhere and I wouldn't have cared (I'm glad he didn't though). I was pleased for any signs of normality and that he was enjoying spending time with his friends was massive. He had seen them but had felt things were a bit strange for him. Tonight, he'd had fun and I was happy to take this win.

We were going back to New Zealand to get married. We had thought we were going to stay in London at least until the Olympics in 2012 but life had changed, and it seemed to make sense to move back to New Zealand now. Being near family in New Zealand and Australia was important. Our life in England was different now – it involved carrying a pushchair up and down three flights of stairs. We were no longer really getting to experience all the positive reasons of living in a vibrant city.

Fun and Fear

I suppose it was going to be a fresh start. Back to New Zealand where life was going to be easier. Even things like less traffic, loads more parking, getting groceries into the house, and having space. I imagined we'd be spending more time outdoors, have the support of family and friends and things would keep getting better.

We'd both had successful job interviews for New Zealand while in England and were excited about the jobs. We'd be coming before Christmas and into summertime. It meant we would be able to settle in, catch up with people, get married and have some time before starting work. Happy days.

It was stressful packing up life in London. We had a lot to take with us, so we went back via the United States which allowed a greater luggage allowance. We still had in mind we didn't want a baby to get in the way of life. Naturally we thought it would be a good idea to go to Vegas so that's what we did, in one of those monstrous vehicles only slightly smaller than our flat in London.

Unfortunately, Andre got really unwell physically and the advice of the hotel doctor was to go to the emergency department. With a \$8000 NZD bill for being examined and given some fluids we arrived in New Zealand with months of insurance headaches. Seriously America.

Andre wasn't in great form when we arrived back in New Zealand, but we visited friends up in Kerikeri who had also been living in England. Andre knew them but not well, and while it was exciting to see them and introduce Isabella, I could also feel it wasn't the same as before. We were walking along the beach and I remember thinking again how I couldn't wait for things to get back to normal.

Isabella's first Christmas wasn't how I imagined it to be. For one thing the weather was quite cool not like the sunny warm days I associated with Christmas. Andre's mood reflected the weather, it was like a cloud hanging over us. Rather than being easy and relaxed it felt like an effort being around family. He was polite and there were some smiles, but it just wasn't him. I felt bad for him being in that state and being around my family. When I'm sick there are people who I don't have to care about how I look, I can say I don't want to talk or ask them to do things for me. Then there are others that I would feel like I have to pull myself together for. I suspected that Andre was doing that and that it was an effort.

So, the discussions began, was the wedding going ahead? It was in a fortnight and about half the guests were travelling from England, Australia and around New Zealand. There was the thought going through my mind *Does Andre not want to marry me? Is this what he's really depressed about – he doesn't want to be with me, he feels trapped, but now we have a daughter he can't tell me?*

There was another part that didn't think that was the case. That we really did make a good team and we loved each other. But there was a nagging voice that was saying, *If you were slimmer and more outgoing things would be better.*

Andre was definitely the outgoing adventurous one. He did skydiving and BASE-jumping and was up for trying things. He could confidently walk across cliffs, never really worried about money and always thought things would be okay. I on the other hand would get nervous on the third step of a ladder! Having said that, I have mustered up some bravery for a skydive and a bungee jump. I do love adventures and doing things outside my comfort zone, but I need to feel it's going to be okay before I go for something. It usually means being with someone I trust.

Not long before I was pregnant, I went over to do some work in Uganda when they were keen to extend their community mental health services. Andre joined me at the end and we had an amazing trip to see the chimpanzees and gorillas. It was definitely out of my comfort zone – especially as we'd been watching *The Last King of Scotland* and *Hotel Rwanda*. There were still child soldiers in the north, and we knew tourists had been killed where we were going. There were a few times when we felt a little uneasy but really it was an incredible experience.

We both have a sense of adventure, but I was beginning to feel like I was the boring, nagging, sensible one. Andre used to get frustrated at how long it would take me to leave the house. He'd be waiting in the car while I was gathering up all that we needed for the trip now we had a baby. I wasn't impressed that I was the one having to think of all that we needed.

I kept asking Andre did he want to get married. I can't remember how it came out but there was a theme beginning to emerge. Not only did Andre think he was a bad person he was feeling guilty for finding other women attractive. I tried to reassure him that although I wasn't finding guys attractive like I used to, I could still appreciate if I thought someone was good looking. I didn't want it rubbed in my face but completely understood that he would find others attractive. He had gone to a Catholic School and even though he wasn't religious and was quite rebellious in many ways it seemed like some Catholic guilt had got in. They had been taught that even thinking about it was a sin.

I told him how I thought that, like anything, the more you don't want to think about something the more you do. Don't try and stop finding other women attractive just know it's fine. What did make me feel bad was seeing him looking so depressed. That would be when my insecurities would come up wondering if he really wanted to be with me.

In the days before our wedding I had a dream about a guy I went out with when I was at school. I wouldn't have normally said anything, but I thought I had better tell Andre. I certainly wasn't having cold feet about marrying him, we'd already made the biggest commitment by having a baby. Perhaps in some ways it was bringing up commitment issues for me. I wanted Andre to share what he was experiencing so I felt I better to be doing the same. I was the one that had the commitment issues at the start of our relationship. Was this karma coming back to bite me?

For Andre to get unwell once, I guess I'd hoped it was something that happened due to lots of stressful circumstances colliding. We've learnt from it and still have things to learn but let's move on. The second time I started to wonder *Is this what life is going to be like?* Loads of other thoughts went through my mind. *Did Andre feel trapped and want the freedom of being single?* *Does he really not love me and not being able to tell me is driving him crazy?*

A few weeks later we had our wedding. We had people come from England, Australia and around New Zealand. You could tell it was taking its toll on Andre, he was hardly speaking to even his really good friends. It was heartbreaking to see, because usually he would be looking so excited, grinning and chatting. There were also friends of mine who were meeting him for the first time and there was that part of me that was worrying about what they would think.

We continued to talk about calling the wedding off and I would have done it if that's what Andre wanted. It was such a mixed time because I was really excited about the wedding. There were going to be people who hadn't met Isabella and friends and family from different parts of the world getting to meet each other. I loved Andre and knew I wanted to spend my life with him.

On the day Andre was definite he wanted to go ahead. It was meant to rain but the sun was shining. I remember my sister driving me to the hairdressers and the U2 song came on *It's a Beautiful Day* and I began to relax thinking *yes it is* while getting a feeling it's going to be a good one.

We had our photos before the wedding, so we could hang out together as well as not wanting to miss out on the party once it started. Isabella was with Andre at the front while he waited and alongside him was his dad who was best man and his other groomsmen. My mum walked me down the aisle and I suddenly felt really self-conscious and couldn't wait to hold hands with Andre. I would say I had another moment of feeling everything is going to be okay when Andre looked really happy to see me. It felt like just the two of us and everything was right in the world.

He wasn't his bubbliest self, but he was talking to people, smiling, laughing and made a speech. We loved going to Ceilidhs (Scottish dances where you have a caller telling you the dance moves) when we were in the UK and were really pleased we could have one at our wedding. We had a friend look after Isabella which meant she could be part of it all as well as go off for sleeps.

Perhaps it was 11 p.m. when I could see that look on Andre's face that said, *What is happening? People are taking the piss because they know how terrible I am.* He had had enough and wanted to get out of there. We had accommodation at the venue so probably had an hour of saying goodbyes before getting back to our room. He didn't

really want to talk about it, but the general feeling was everyone came to the wedding to show him what a terrible person he was.

When we went back to our room, we opened some of the cards and presents. It meant so much that people had even come to the wedding and in the cards there were such lovely words written about us and people had been very generous with their gifts. For me I was thinking how lucky we were, but for Andre the generosity was people showing him what a selfish person he was. He was still able to laugh at the note left by one of the bridesmaids offering a threesome. There was that sinking, lonely feeling of this is not how this night was meant to end.

A lot of guests had stayed as well, which meant we saw a lot of people at breakfast. Again, it was quite surreal everyone chatting away happily and loudly and Andre barely saying a word, standing away from people. Me putting on a brave face while inside my heart sinking because this was meant to be the day after the happiest day of our lives and there is Andre looking like the saddest person on the planet. I was thinking don't cry just get through this, we'll be home soon and can figure out what to do then.

Not Again

We had conversations with Andre's family about what was happening. It was nice for me to hear their perspective. Andre was speaking with his family apologising for how he'd been as a kid, for smoking dope, for being mean to his sister. They all said it really didn't matter that it was part of growing up, that he is a wonderful son and brother, please let these things go and be happy, enjoy the life you have. It's hard to say if any of it went in for Andre. For me it helped feeling like I wasn't the only one thinking and saying those things.

I hoped now the wedding was over things would improve but they didn't.

People that Andre normally felt very comfortable with he didn't really want to be around. UK friends came to say goodbye and you would think we were at a funeral the mood was so depressing. Honestly it was so zapping of energy being around someone so sad and suspicious looking.

I rang the psychiatric emergency clinic for advice and we were told a time to come in. One of the nurses was especially kind. She spoke to Isabella and she told me, 'I know it mustn't seem like it at the moment, but things will get better'. It was exactly what I needed to hear, I needed that hope and I'm so glad she saw that. She got what we were going through and cared.

When we spoke to the doctor, we explained that Andre was due to start work in a couple of weeks. The dilemma was whether to change medications and stay home or go to hospital where the medication changes could be made faster. There was also the fact that last time things had deteriorated so quickly, and I was also finding it hard being around Andre. Isabella was teething and waking in the night and I felt like I wanted to get away and have a break from the negativity and sadness that seemed to radiate from

Andre. I felt it was too risky not to be with him and although my mother had offered to be in the house if I wanted to go out, Andre didn't want that. The doctor was very patient while we went around in circles several times before deciding the best option was to go to hospital.

He was admitted to hospital and his nurse was young and seemed really cheerful, which made me feel better about him being there. When we attended the planning meeting, I really appreciated the doctor's down to earth approach. He said things like, 'Rebecca doesn't strike me as a person who would marry a loser'. Rather than telling him it would be unrealistic to start work in two weeks he was saying, 'Right we need to get on to it'. I was so grateful that they had hope.

When the junior doctor spoke, his approach was a bit different. He used more medical language and seemed to be talking about a 'patient' rather than my husband and our story. It was a surreal experience again being on the other side. When we were just talking about our story and what had been happening the words flowed, however, when asked about psychotic symptoms being displayed at what time it was so much harder for me to answer. I knew all the medical jargon and yet I couldn't believe how much harder it was for me to speak in this very full room of health professionals.

It was very exposing and was definitely pushing my buttons of being judged and wondering what people will think. When we were talking about our drug history it was going through my mind please put this into context. We had used cocaine and ecstasy when clubbing and at festivals in the UK and Andre had smoked a fair amount of pot in his youth. I'd stopped when we wanted to try for a baby and Andre had one last session at a festival. When he had gotten unwell, he hadn't used anything for some time and hasn't used anything since.

I'd been in meetings where people would be taking a history and there would be this look from clinicians when a person would mention their drug use or that there was a history of mental illness in the family. It was like, *Ah mystery solved, that's why this is happening*. I just hoped that the people who were working with Andre had an understanding of all that was influencing the situation and be able to help with all aspects that were needed.

Maybe Andre does have a chemical imbalance, but it doesn't take away from the fact these thoughts and beliefs he had about himself were impacting him massively. I didn't

think a change in chemicals would necessarily be enough to change them.

I pushed for Andre to go into the Early Intervention in Psychosis Team as I thought he would be more likely to get the support he needed there when he left hospital. This would have been the team he would have been with in London if it wasn't for me working in them. The idea of the team is to work with people intensively, so they don't have a career in mental health services. Often it is for two to three years. Seeing it was only a year since Andre first became unwell, I asked if he could.

We were told that wouldn't happen and then we were in a meeting where a case manager from Totara (Early Intervention in Psychosis) was there and he said he would be working with Andre. I was so pleased that his case manager was a social worker and seemed lovely. I was pleased it was a guy and hoped that he would be able to access some psychology sessions too which did happen.

Andre was in hospital for about a week. I was jealous of my friends who were going out having fun with other friends. I know Andre wasn't particularly impressed and there was a part that felt a bit guilty but one night I did go out into town with some friends that were still in Christchurch. My mum looked after Isabella and I could go out and forget about what was happening. I needed it and it did give me the strength to keep being positive.

It did take effort visiting the ward. I was used to visiting wards with work and yet it was quite a different story being on the other side of things. To start with even getting on the ward was a process. It seemed like each time I was told something different about having a toddler on the ward. First, I was told ring ahead before coming in and we'll tell you what the atmosphere is like and whether you can bring her. I did that and was told you need to ring the doorbell when you arrive. I rang the doorbell, waited (it seemed like forever) and the person seemed annoyed and asked, 'Why didn't you just come in the doors are open'. Next time I went straight in and was told you can't, you need to ring the doorbell.

Another hard time was waiting to speak to a nurse. I completely get how busy they are and yet standing waiting, trying to get their attention behind the glass office, being seen by staff and then having them look away took me back to primary school. The days when kids would decide who they were going to pick on for a week which meant no-one to talk to or play with. The 'I don't belong here/I'm not important' feeling came flooding

back. I can't tell you how good it felt when staff and patients said 'Hello' or 'Can I help you?' – any little comment or acknowledgement was very much appreciated.

I was worried about our finances and it certainly went through my mind was Andre going to attempt to end his life again. The old, *What will people think?* kept rearing its head. Andre had asked if I'd bring in some photos of us but because our possessions hadn't arrived from the UK yet and the only photos we had were of the wedding. I was wondering if the staff would think I shouldn't bring in wedding photos because what if it's being married to me that's stressing him out and these photos are making it worse? I wondered if they thought I was really pushy, and it was my idea to bring these in.

By some miracle Andre did start improving, and he went on leave visiting home for a few hours. It was always a bizarre feeling dropping him off again, that little voice in my mind telling me, *You've just dropped your husband off at the psychiatric hospital for the night.*

I remember Andre phoning his future boss to tell him he was in hospital and was planning on still starting work as arranged but giving him a heads up of what was happening. A big thumbs up to his boss. I'm sure it can't have been a call he was expecting but he wished him well and said keep us updated. Again, I had such admiration for Andre thinking you've got guts, I'm so proud of you. And he did, he started work as planned.

The course that we had done over a year ago that I thought had contributed to Andre getting unwell was about sorting things from the past by getting in contact and being open with people and Andre felt he needed to do this. He had had conversations with his family but felt there were others he needed to talk to as well. While on a few hours leave from hospital he phoned an ex-girlfriend, which must have been a bit of surprise for her.

We were living in a small flat and Andre phoned her in the same room that I was in, so I got to hear the conversation. While hearing him speak I thought there can be such a thing as too much honesty. I don't know if anyone really wants to hear 'I was embarrassed of you' but it seemed like the conversation went well. He had a little laugh when saying he had been admitted to a psychiatric ward and just wanted to apologise for how he had been.

I think there was relief from both of us following the conversation. From Andre that he had been a bad person and was starting to put things right and from me hoping that we could now move on. There were others that Andre did think about contacting but I talked with him about how it must be for others being on the receiving end of these conversations. I thought it was best to just be the person you want to be now.

Temporary Calm

Things were looking up. Andre enjoyed his work and they were a social bunch with Friday night drinks as well as other events throughout the year. It was tough going given Andre's medication would make him drowsy. He would come home and sleep, and the weekends were filled with sleep too. I was so relieved he could still drive, because if he couldn't he wouldn't have been able to do his job. With travelling to different job sites, he was getting to know Christchurch and pretty soon probably knew it better than me.

He'd started psychology sessions where they were doing cognitive behavioural work, looking at his thinking and how he could have his thinking working for him. He went to some physio sessions to learn some breathing and relaxation techniques which he also found helpful.

Life wasn't always easy, but I was so appreciative of the happy times. We went to see the band Midnight Youth. Standing there seeing Andre smiling and moving to the music, I had this rush of 'this is normal, we're both happy'.

After six months of being back in New Zealand we bought a house. It felt like the universe was looking out for us. We would have never considered to look at it but the agents (a lovely married couple) showed it to us. Andre's parents were visiting, and we were super excited to trick them pretending that we were going for a viewing when really, we'd just taken possession of it. We had a Halloween house-warming as well as BBQs.

It still seemed like an important part of staying well to get out in nature and go for walks. A way of letting go of the day's stress. We tried different activities like crackerjack bowls and salsa dancing lessons.

Midway through the year I got another job working as a family advisor. The saying 'careful what you wish for' came to mind. When I was in London working in the Early Intervention in Psychosis Team, I had thought a number of times I would love a job one day where I could teach family work in mental health. This job wasn't a teaching position however it was working with staff to increase family/ whanau involvement in services. In order to be in this role you had to have a family member who had used mental health services. Before Andre was unwell I wouldn't have qualified: now I did.

I remember reading about Steve Jobs when he'd dropped out of university doing a calligraphy course. It was doing that course which led to us having all different fonts on our computer today. It made me think how things do have a funny way of working out. If I hadn't been working in that mental health team in London, I imagine Andre being unwell would have been quite a different experience for all of us.

I felt like I had learnt so much from working in mental health services in London and now our personal experience and wanted that to help clients, their families and mental health staff to bring about positive changes.

When I left school and before I trained as an occupational therapist, I worked in Christchurch at what was then called Sunnyside Hospital. This was on a ward for elderly with psychiatric conditions and I found it incredible working with those who were psychotic. One lady would stand up and go outside to receive messages from car antennae, another who was in her eighties believed she was pregnant. It all seemed random and I had more of a view that it was genetics and that medications were what helped. Since working in London my views had broadened considerably and I wanted to be able to, along with current research, share what I had learnt.

Lessons from the Past

We were very fortunate when we were setting up the Early Intervention in Psychosis Team in London. We were given a lot of time to research and visit other services, and rather than reinventing the wheel we could find out what was working and what wasn't.

What wasn't working was inviting families along to sessions at the services as most didn't turn up. There were some gains made by psycho-education (educating on mental health) and the trainee clinical psychologist brought a new model to the team.

The first day she arrived at the team I was thinking (judging) how on earth our clients would relate to her. Hackney was one of the poorest borough's in London. She had the poshest accent to the point I didn't understand what she was talking about when she first said the name of the hospital we worked at. Not that I should judge, a lot of people struggled to understand my Kiwi accent.

I couldn't have been more wrong though. All the clients related really well to her and she was extremely down-to-earth. She would have been a couple of years older than me and yet seemed so much older and wiser. No matter what situation she was in she'd know what to do. She was very driven in terms of empowering people and yet had a very relaxed confidence. She loved the work she was doing and one day dreamed of taking robes as a Buddhist Nun. That blew my mind. I could not imagine people our age becoming nuns and yet I didn't really know much about it.

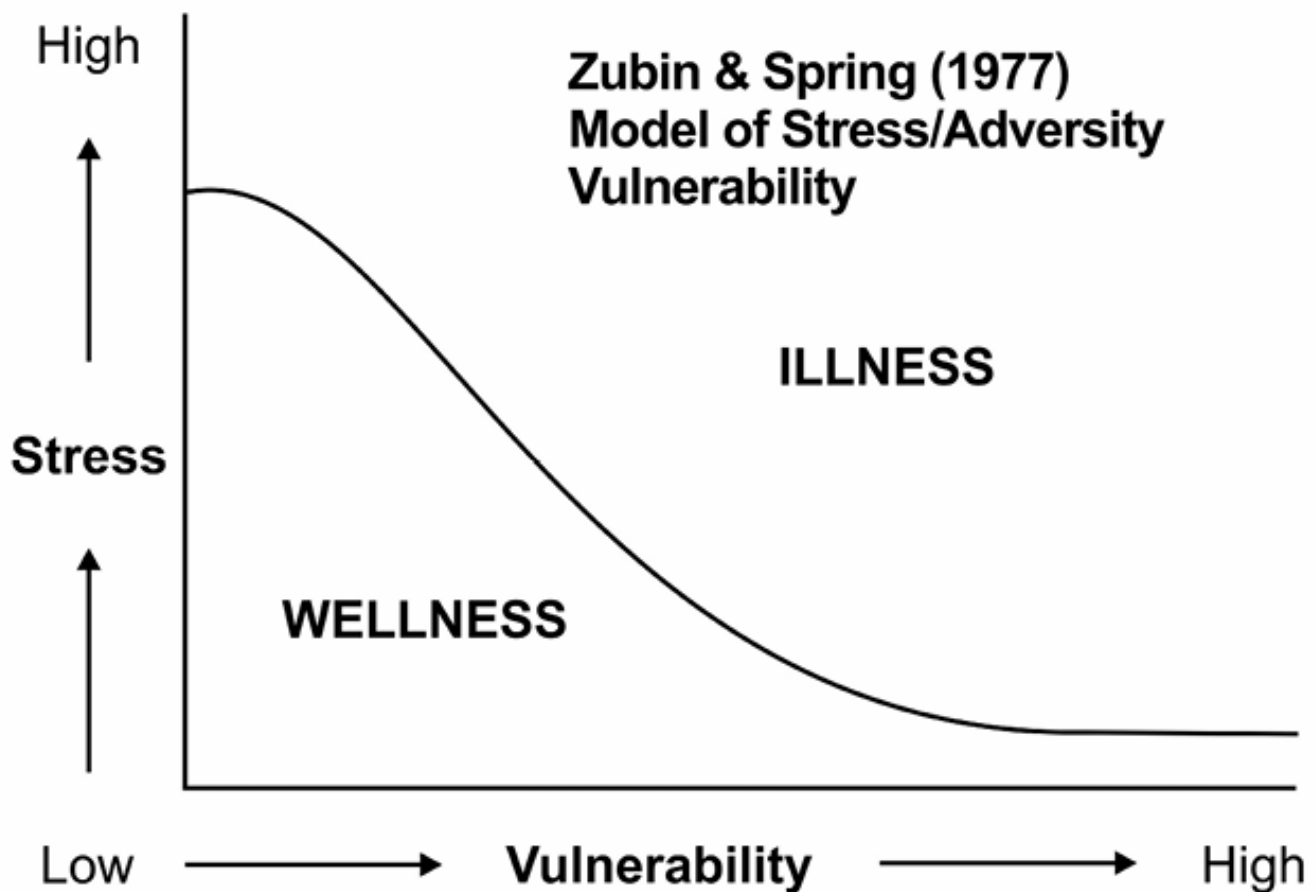
She created our family work model. We'd visit families in their homes, have three sessions and at the end would write a letter summarising what we'd discussed. This included what their understanding was of what was happening for them, what their hopes as a family and as individuals were, what issues they were facing and working on together and what we'd been struck by.

The ideas behind it were:

- People are the experts on themselves – they have the answers within. Ask the right questions and people will come up with the solution for themselves.
- Language/stories are powerful. That is what creates our world. We take on thoughts like they are facts rather than ideas. By asking questions about their stories we/they can create new, more helpful stories to bring about change.
- As humans we are all part of a system. It's the system that influences what's happening rather than a person with the diagnosis/symptoms having 'the problem'. By understanding the system and the influences within you, you can bring about change.

In terms of understanding mental health we took a stress vulnerability approach. The idea being that anyone under stressful circumstances would become unwell. For example, if you were deprived of sleep or water for days, or if you were stressing your body through drugs you may well start hallucinating, feeling paranoid, lose hope, etc.

The vulnerable part was saying perhaps you have some factors that mean you have a vulnerability to these experiences – maybe genetic or people you've grown up with having mental health issues, or perhaps experienced trauma early on in life.



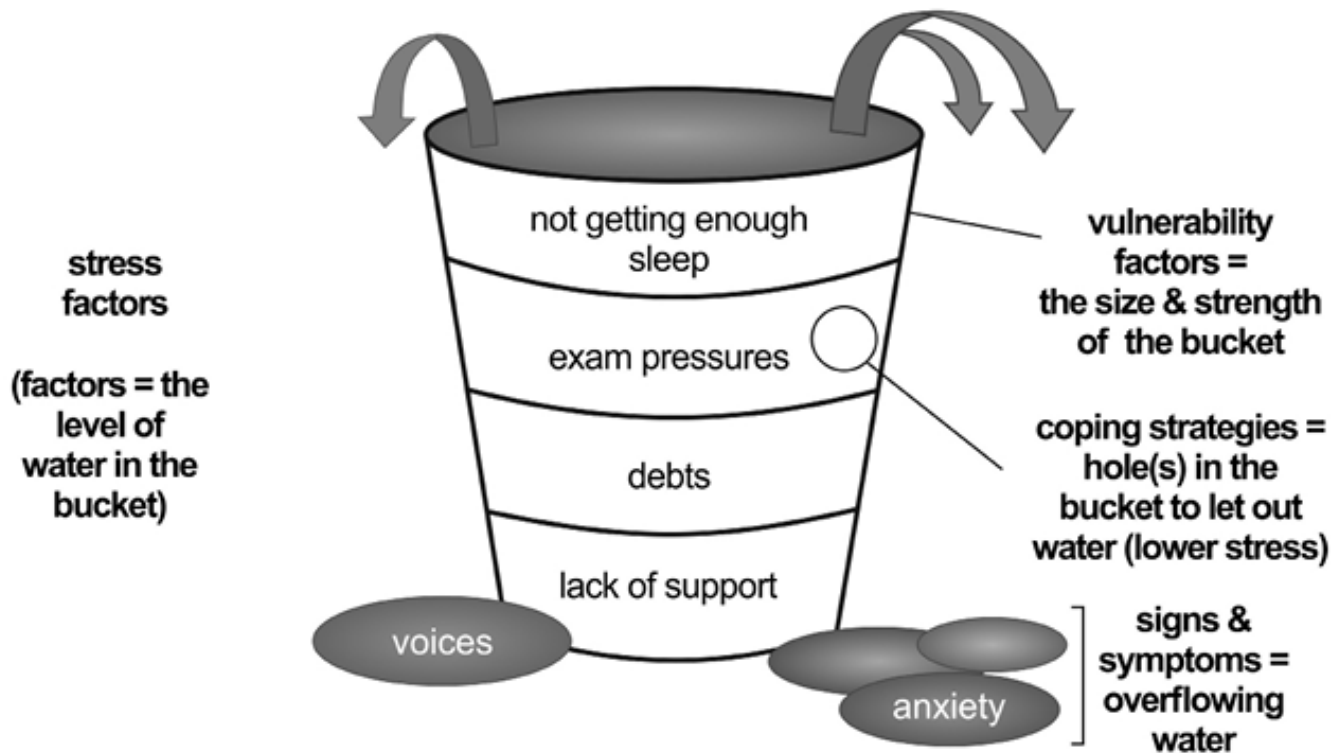
The higher the vulnerability, the less stress it takes to go from coping or doing well to being unwell. The lower the vulnerability the more stress it would take to get unwell.

We also described it being like a bucket – that as stresses happen eventually if you weren't addressing the stress, things would start to overflow (being unwell). If you have a vulnerability that would mean you started off with a bit more in your bucket.

The good news was that those stresses were things that you could do something about. When you did that it would be like taking some of the water out of the bucket, so it didn't overflow. If you were not sleeping well, finding it hard to relax, finding it difficult to communicate your needs, finding it hard to switch off or not feeling great about yourself, these were all things you could do something about, and this was where our work came in.

using an analogy: the stress bucket

(based upon: Brabban & Turkington 2002)



The model itself was empowering as it gave people hope. When mental health issues come out of nowhere it's very scary because you can think there's nothing much you can do about it. When you have a story that explains these are all things that contributed to it happening and I'm doing something about it, you feel more in control and a lot more likely to do the things that help.

We learnt to ask powerful questions like:

- When is it NOT a problem?
- Where did that idea come from?
- What would it take for you to leave this session thinking it was worthwhile?
- Who in the family are you most likely to go to when you have a practical problem?
- Who in the family would you most likely go to when you need a laugh?

It was incredibly powerful. Most of the families we were working with were stressed and seemed to be stuck. There was an element of the person with the diagnosis being the

one with the problem to sort rather than the bigger picture of what was happening even before the person was unwell.

The sessions allowed an opportunity to step back from the situation and take a look at it. It also meant people could be heard, their individuality and strengths acknowledged. This was a really good starting point for them to then decide what they wanted and to work together to bring it about.

It was incredible the changes that happened. I'm not saying it was always easy, sometimes it took many rearranged appointments to even see the family. They wouldn't answer the door and then when we left, we'd see them. One person told us for two years that his mother was in another country before we found out she'd been there the whole time. One I thought we'd never get to, many, many appointments cancelled, or not being home, one time we turned up and the police were already there in relation to a gun being held to the mother's head. Another, they were dealing with a fire – the lengths people went to avoid us! We were persistent because we knew what a difference it could make.

The very first family I worked with I was the case manager for the client. He was on the ward and I was sitting with him waiting for a discharge planning meeting. I was concerned when we were ready for the meeting that his dad hadn't arrived yet. It turned out he'd been there the whole time, sitting across the room rather than with his son. This is how bad things had got between them they weren't even speaking to each other. His dad had been locking him inside the house and beating him in an attempt to make him behave and not become unwell.

I had no idea how our first session was going to be. The mother had been working night shift and fell asleep in the meeting however it didn't seem to matter, the dad was very welcoming and obviously houseproud. We explained how we generally have three sessions and that the first session is most important to hear from them what's happening and what they would like to see happen. He seemed a bit puzzled as he thought we were coming to tell him what to do.

He did say several times 'I thought you were going to tell me what to do'. Once he realised that wouldn't be happening today, he started to open up. What was his understanding of what causes mental health issues, what were his concerns, what was

his aims, what they do for fun as a family, hearing about what's important to them within their culture, within their family, what was it like for them moving to the UK?

He spoke about the first time his son got unwell everyone had been very supportive and worried. The next time too, but the third time he felt like it was an embarrassment for the family. It was particularly difficult because this was his eldest son, the one who was meant to be a role model and responsible. The other siblings were meant to look up to him, instead they were scared of their brother. Particularly when he thought there were people in the house coming to kill him and he had a knife to protect himself.

The dad didn't really know what caused mental illness but thought it was due to smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol.

We asked if he wanted to hear what we noticed working in mental health. He did and so we discussed the stress vulnerability model. We gave special attention to trauma being a vulnerability – knowing they had come as refugees from a country at war. This was dismissed by him saying, 'No, he (the son) was fine when they first came'. We didn't want to argue, but rather plant a seed that this could have contributed. We mentioned how sometimes people don't experience things straight away sometimes it can come out years later as nightmares or panic attacks. When we said nightmares, it was like we'd got his attention and suspected he'd experienced some himself.

Session two was more about what was important to them, what are they aiming for, what will it look like when they've achieved it and how will they use each other's strengths to bring that about? Session three was hearing how things are going, recognising the changes and more of what will be helpful to keep up that direction they're heading in.

In session three with the family it was astonishing to hear all the changes that had been made. Even though the mother hadn't attended the second session or been awake in the first she was very much part of the plan and changes.

It was agreed that the son would move out. He and his mother had been going out finding items that he would need for his flat. She had been teaching him how to cook a few meals and they had attended church together as a family which they all seemed to enjoy. The father and son had had a conversation about what it had been like when they had to leave their home country. The siblings were no longer scared of their big brother

and it was agreed when the son moved out of home he would come and visit each Sunday for a meal.

I was amazed at how things could change in such a short time. As well as how we didn't really need to do much work. It was learning to ask questions, being genuinely interested in the answers and having the belief that they knew what was best and would get there.

I loved witnessing the light-bulb moments. For one mother she seemed very agitated, like she didn't want to meet with us because she didn't believe we could help. She told us she knew that she was to blame. She'd really not been there for him as a child as she was a single mum dealing with her own depression and eating disorder. Her child looked like his father and it had been a messy separation. She knew that when her eating disorder was at its worst, she was irrational. She told us, 'Don't try and tell me it's not my fault, cos I know it is'.

We didn't disagree with her. Instead we acknowledged that it might have had an influence and how had she learnt to parent? That question looked to have floored her. 'What do you mean?' We said of course babies aren't born with a manual – how did she learn to parent?

The energy completely shifted to this calmer state where she began to talk about her childhood where she didn't feel particularly loved or wanted. She'd been kicked out of home at a young age and had to fend for herself. The story started to shift from, 'I'm to blame for everything' to 'I did the best I could. I do love my kids and I'm sorting my health. I'm here for them now, I'll always be here for them'.

We talked about how parents are an influence in their child's life but there are other influences – other family, friends, teachers. Again, the story starts getting a bit more balanced and real about the way life is.

By acknowledging the negatives, it created room to start seeing the positives of what she was role modelling – that you can turn your life around, having a job that she loves, being there for her children in tough times.

By freeing her up from total blame, we created space to have a conversation about the future.

It was far from a perfect, happy ending and yet some positive changes had happened. One of the son's fears was, 'If I tell you what I really think you'll kick me out of home'. She agreed and actually signed a letter saying she wouldn't. He did get off his chest how he felt about her. It wasn't pretty, there was yelling and tears, she left the room several times but did keep to her word. He stayed living with her until his accommodation became available.

The difficulty was that when he was unwell and scared, this was the only time he would let his mum be there for him. As soon as he didn't need her anymore, he went back to the things that would push her buttons – you're stupid, you're a failure. He was so angry with her that he was stuck. One of the big barriers to getting on with his life – getting a job and enjoying life – he felt she didn't deserve that. But if he was happy, it would be different and he would let her off the hook for all that she had done.

It was the same with us, if he made progress, he didn't want us to congratulate ourselves for our involvement. This wasn't just a psycho-babble theory our team come up with. One day when he was annoyed, he said this to me.

So, like I say it was not a fairytale ending when I left. He had moved out of home, had been ignoring his mother's phone calls. He wasn't doing much with his life and yet wasn't distressed as such. I had written a letter outlining the things I'd been impressed about him. As well, I outlined the challenges including the dilemma that on the one hand you want to study, get a job and have a social life, but on the other hand, if life improves your mum will be pleased and you feel she doesn't deserve to be happy. As well, getting better can be scary as it does mean putting yourself out there. I wished him all the best for the future. My hope was that one day something would click, and he'd be ready to move on.

His mum was a lot calmer about the situation now. She'd written to him saying she wanted to be part of his life if he'd let her. She knew there wasn't much more she could do except get on with her life.

So, from these amazing experiences I thought, 'Man I wish everyone knew about these techniques. I'd love a job where I was encouraging/teaching mental health staff these ways of working with families'.

It was from these learnings and working in the team, that I was telling Andre I don't think getting unwell came from nowhere. I think there have been a number of stresses and we can do something about these. That definitely gave me hope rather than relying on medication and health professionals to do the work for us. It also stopped me from forcing my ideas onto him that he was being paranoid and instead, asking where has the idea come from to get more useful answers. It helped me have conversations with him about how mixed I was feeling. That I was hopeful about our future and yet was scared and needed support too.

Medication – To Be or Not to Be?

This experience had made us both stop and look at our life. For me I thought I had been too focused on getting ahead financially. Andre believed that he had been a bad person, so we looked at how we wanted to be 'better people'. Having a young child and working we didn't feel in a position to be doing volunteer work, so we started giving to charities and looking at ways we could be more environmentally friendly or help others.

Life continued on in Christchurch. We went to Australia and it was very special when Andre's grandmothers got to meet Isabella. Being in the age group we were, several our friends were getting married. I enjoyed all the weddings, and yet it really did affect me seeing the type of state Andre was in. A few he left early, in part to take Isabella home and yet usually it was because he was not in such a great space. When he did enjoy conversations with people, I would be relieved and excited, when he didn't, I could feel my heart sinking. When he was really enjoying himself, I'd have hope that things could keep on improving and be back to the way it was before this ever happened.

The usual theme to Andre's mood not being great was thinking people didn't like him or were against him in a way. That made home feel like a safe haven.

A lot of the happy times were simple things like hanging out with family. Isabella was such a joy for us both. Things she would say, and we'd look at each other sharing in her gorgeousness. We felt really proud of how happy she was.

We started filling out a book of all the funny things she would say. Things like when she was nervous about Santa visiting reassuring herself and others, 'Farmer Chemist (Father Christmas) can't come inside, he not got a key'. When she was at the medical centre saying to the nurse, 'Isabella would like a pink doctor please'.

The medication was exhausting him. Andre would come home tired and once he had taken the evening meds he was out for the count. On the weekends, he also slept a lot. This meant most of looking after Isabella at night fell to me – the night-time stories, the teething, nightmares, wet beds.

I was so pleased Andre was taking the medication. I really did think he was incredible how he would get up and go to work when he looked like a zombie. As well it still felt like a bonus having him alive. When photos were taken there were times I would think *at least Isabella has a photo of her and her dad looking proud of her*. As she got older, I would think if something happens now at least she will remember him.

There was another part of me that felt sorry for myself. I remember painting the house on the weekends and getting into the martyr mode, telling myself how amazing I was, doing this while he slept even though I'd been woken up several times in the night. I knew it needed to happen (taking the medication) and yet I resented it.

Another aspect of the medication that seemed unfair was the weight gain, he just couldn't feel satisfied. Having said that even when taking the medication and his mood dropped it was extraordinary how the weight could drop off him. He could lose 10–15 kilos in a couple of weeks.

Things had been going pretty well for about 18 months, so we discussed with his case manager and psychiatrist trialling stopping the antipsychotic medication. To start with that was fine and it was great because he had more energy to do things. It did however turn to mania, literally climbing trees because he had so much energy. I thought it's actually easier when you're depressed as you still seem like yourself. This high Andre seemed like someone else, even his laugh was different. When his mood was low, I could feel for him – in this state, he generally irritated me.

Thank god he didn't go ahead but he had a tattoo designed that he loved. I was in shock – he was so excited that he had a surprise to show me, so I thought it was going to be something good. I couldn't believe it, to me it was very tacky. I was annoyed how much the design cost but more worried that I would have to look at that awful image the rest of my life. I found it hard to believe that Andre would normally like this design either.

I discovered parts of our washing machine in our bathtub, our BBQ was spotless. I do think of Andre as an energetic, ideas man but this was to another level. Although there

were some advantages (like a very clean house) I was getting annoyed as well because I was feeling like the boring one.

Then came the crash, Andre feeling like he had annoyed people, no-one liked him and pretty soon he was off work. His manager came to visit us at home which I very much appreciated. He was keen to understand what was happening to him and hear his story. He was saying how people had thought we'd won lotto – being so high and then suddenly off work. I could see why, but it couldn't have been further from what was happening.

Of course, I wanted Andre to be feeling better, but our financial situation was also on my mind. Andre was the main earner. I enjoyed working part-time and looking after Isabella.

Andre started back on the antipsychotic medication which immediately helped with his sleep. His mood slowly picked up. He was being seen by his case manager and did find their conversations helpful although looking back Andre felt he wasn't really in a space to take on all the suggestions. Sometimes it was simple things like when he was depressed it was hard for him to make decisions or to do anything. He was advised to write a list and cross off as he did the tasks which he did. My mum was looking after our daughter on the days that I was working. Even though Andre was off work she would still visit and the three of them would do things like feed the ducks, or she would keep an eye on Isabella while he made a meal.

Andre returned to work after about three weeks. Not a lot was said by his work mates, but he was welcomed back, and life went on.

The Power of Our Story

I continued working part-time in the role of family advisor which was frustrating at times. We did focus groups and surveys to understand the needs and experiences of family/whanau. We'd then do trainings, so staff knew what the DHB policy and legal obligations of involving family were. We'd also present research and initiatives to support family/whanau involvement.

I understood the issues of mental health staff. They would say things such as, 'We barely have enough time to work with clients let alone their families' and 'What about when the family are the problem?'.

For some they didn't see working with families as their role – perhaps that was what psychologists could do. As well it seemed like there was a lot of risk adversity.

It seemed okay to look at sleep, hygiene, smoking cessation, drug education, getting a job, sorting finances, what are the symptoms, maybe some relaxation techniques and medication. The reasons of what was driving the behaviour seemed a bit too risky – like it would be opening a can of worms. Even going through simple cognitive behavioural techniques (how our thinking affects our feeling), the staff seemed unsure of.

We did projects like looking at reviewing documentation and educating staff on how the language they use does make a difference. Even simple things like rather than saying judgemental statements such as 'non-compliant with medication' write the facts 'took medication for one week and stopped' (and if they give a reason include that).

The question was how to get across the message of the importance of involving families. In the trainings I was presenting, there were staff who were keen to implement ways of working more with families. Telling them they legally needed to, wasn't very

inspiring. The most effective way of getting points across seemed to be when sharing a story.

I asked Andre how he would feel if I shared our story as part of the training. I had decided that I would like to present what the 'recovery model' meant from a family perspective. Everyone will have a different understanding of mental health and mental illness. There is a medical model explanation that you have a chemical imbalance, medication can alter that to relieve symptoms. I thought hearing how the recovery model applied in real life from a family's perspective may give staff some ideas of what they can be doing to make a difference.

The aspect I debated the most was, whether I should include how the medication had affected our sex life. Was Andre really okay with me talking about it? I knew once I shared that with staff, I could be bumping into these people for years to come. Is that what I wanted them to associate with me? Andre seemed to genuinely not be bothered, if I thought it might help others go for it. In the end the very thought that people might feel uncomfortable about it is the reason I decided to include it. If I as a health professional who knew this was probably a side effect of the medication still felt a bit rejected when Andre wasn't up for sex, then it probably needed to be talked about.

Speaking about this was another chance for me to not be bothered about what people thought. Do what I think is right. I wanted staff to be aware this can be an issue and why wouldn't you discuss this with your clients rather than the clients or family having to bring it up. It is an important part of life. What's the point in getting rid of symptoms if life isn't pleasurable?

PART 2

Mindset Shift

The Recovery Model

Taking a recovery model approach is what seemed to make a difference for Andre and me.

It is defined by Wikipedia below:

Recovery is generally seen in this approach as a personal journey rather than a set outcome, and one that may involve developing hope, a secure base and sense of self, supportive relationships, empowerment, social inclusion, coping skills and meaning.

I put together a presentation going through each principle and what it meant for us.

Empowerment

I spoke about the difference I would notice when health professionals with kind intentions would tell Andre it wasn't his fault. Explaining that this is an illness like diabetes, you can't change your genetics but can treat the chemical imbalance with medication. The trouble with that was that Andre was taking his medication when he got unwell the second time. When I saw Andre being given this explanation you could visibly see him shrinking, deflating into himself.

When he was told the stress vulnerability model of right you might have a vulnerability to these experiences but there are many things that impact your mental health so let's get on to these. Yes, let's change your medications, let's also have you learning how to relax your body, making sure you're sleeping well. Your thinking is definitely impacting your mood, so let's have you learning techniques to address that.

When people took this approach Andre's body didn't shrink. I could almost see the thoughts going through Andre's mind – some scepticism – *I don't think this will work* as well as *sounds good, I'll give it a try*. He would sit up straighter and looked to have more energy in him.

Hope

I talked about how much it meant to me those times when people gave me hope – like at the emergency clinic in Christchurch. The staff member took the time to sit with me. It was gutting to be going through it again and the doubts were there – is this how life is going to be now? As well there was the element that still felt like with me working in mental health we shouldn't be in this position.

At one point I think she had her arm on my shoulder as she was reassuring. She talked about seeing people who worked in mental health coming through the service for themselves or family members. She knew it could feel like the end of the world but that things do get better. These were things I knew but I really needed to hear them and was so grateful to her. It meant a lot that she cared. It gave me strength and I needed that if I was going to be of use to Andre.

It gave us hope when the doctor said – right we need to get on to it, so you can start your job in 12 days. I appreciated that someone else could have been in the meeting and just looking at the state Andre was in taken the approach that it's unrealistic that he starts a job so soon which would put extra stress on him. That doctor thinking it was possible gave us all something to aim for – and it happened.

Even the first time when we were at the emergency clinic in London. We saw the same doctor that we'd seen a few days earlier. She looked genuinely surprised and upset at what had happened. This, in a strange way, gave me hope – if people care things will improve.

Support

I suppose one of the first things about support is, in order to get it, you have to let people know what's happening. Andre to start with didn't want people to know. When

things got really frightening though I told him it wasn't just his decision and that I needed support. I talked with his family, my family and friends.

When it came to his friends in London, I said I really thought they'd want to know. If it was the other way around, I knew he'd want to be there for his friends. He reluctantly agreed for some to know.

The main support from friends and family was emotional support. To know people cared and to just get out what was happening seemed to help. Sometimes hearing their take on it stopped the feelings of, *Am I going crazy here?* It was reassuring to hear from those that knew him, 'How could Andre think he was hated? He's such a kind, caring person'.

There were times though when practical support such as meals, running errands or babysitting to give me time out made a difference. It meant I had more energy, and everything seemed that bit brighter or doable when I did.

I also realised I needed support from Andre. He was the person I was sharing my life with and we were meant to be there for each other. I didn't want to put pressure on him, but at the same time I also wanted him to know I needed him to hold me and tell me it would be okay.

What was most helpful was talking with him about how I was feeling mixed:

- I worried about the future vs I feel hopeful about the future
- I don't want to put pressure on you vs I want you to feel trusted and responsible
- I feel rejected (re: initiating sex) vs I'm so glad you're taking medication
- I desperately want to understand what you're thinking vs I understand you need space and privacy.

Just saying these things out loud took the stress out of the situation for me. Sometimes bringing them up led to discussions and solutions. Sometimes just talking about it was all that was needed for me to feel better.

A big way he could give support was to get better and be open to the support on offer.

These discussions led to practical changes too. I remember not really wanting to bring it up with Andre how I'd felt rejected by him not wanting sex like before. I didn't want

him to feel bad and yet I still wanted us to talk about what was on our minds, to share and support each other. I was pleased I did because we did come up with some solutions. Andre said just keep harassing me it's good once we get started. This was a new role for me being the initiator, but it did give me the reassurance I needed, because there was still part of me thinking it was because he didn't find me attractive.

Having discussed it ourselves we then brought it up with his psychiatrist and case manager. Their response was great, and his medication was changed to one that didn't have that side effect. I handed the initiating baton back to Andre. Now when I'm not in the mood, I remind myself of how I felt when the shoe was on the other foot.

I didn't mention this in the presentation but as we're talking about support, I really wanted to acknowledge our family and friends.

Andre's family have been amazing. I know there can be jokes about in-laws, but I really feel I've hit the jackpot with mine. They are caring, very supportive and yet give us space to be ourselves and make our mistakes.

Sometimes clients I see say, 'I wish I had something traumatic happen, then I would have a reason for being like this'. Andre and I would be in the same boat in that we both have very loving, supportive families and yet still have our own issues.

Andre's dad has this ability to be so reassuring and encouraging. He has this way of saying 'beeeeeeautiful' which makes you feel like the most special, clever person. Whether he's teaching us to make pastry or if he's commenting on my parallel parking. If you need a dad joke – he's your man!

Andre's mum has so many qualities I admire. She's very strong and capable. She's got the best laugh and what I love most is that she's always looking out for a new adventure. His sister is very thoughtful always thinking of others. If I had to pick her superpower, I would say it's her ability to love her family.

I'm so grateful to my family too. The person I was most concerned about was my brother. Unlike my sister and I who would be polite, Rob wouldn't feel the need to be. If he thought someone was an idiot, he wouldn't be rude. He also wouldn't make an effort to get on with them, a quality that I do sometimes admire. I didn't know what he'd make of Andre, particularly when he was high.

There was a time when he was over, and Andre was pretty 'energetic'. It was good for the state of our house. This was when the BBQ was shining as well as the washing machine dismantled to be scrubbed. For some reason Andre climbed the tree and was up there grinning away. To me it was a little bit funny, but I was also getting irritated. I was thinking will Rob think he's a nutter? But he just laughed and seeing he loves his photography took some photos of Andre up there.

Whatever Andre is up to they take it in their stride. We joke about Andre being the favourite in my family. I say we joke about it but really it is true. I'm the bossy one and he's just lovely Andre.

That day my brother was over from Sydney we had a BBQ and some other friends over. I was speaking to a friend later on that night. Not really knowing Andre well, I didn't know what he would make of him being really quite manic. It surprised me when he said he saw himself in Andre. He was the calmest, most easygoing person I knew. The type who in a group of people wouldn't say a lot, but when he did speak, people took note. He said how he might be quiet but how his mind would be constantly going, thinking of ideas and hard to switch off. Over the years sharing Andre's experience has meant we've also learnt a lot about what others are experiencing too.

Meaning

Right from the start I had in mind that something good would come of this. When I was silently sobbing on the toilet, I was imagining having a conversation saying, *It was horrendous, but we're are so much better off for it.*

For Andre finding meaning from this took longer or perhaps he was in overdrive of meaning. Perhaps this was a crisis of meaning. What he was coming up with was, I'm a bad person and I need to change.

Now he would tell you how it helped him be so much more patient and understanding and relaxed. Before he couldn't understand why people just didn't get on with things. He'd get frustrated if people had different views, not necessarily to their face more bottling it up inside.

Both of us had been focused on more. More money, more experiences. Mine was being driven from a fear of not having security and Andre's more from a fear of missing out.

One of the hardest things I think in life can be sitting with yourself. In those quiet moments when there are no distractions like TV, people to talk to, work to do, social media to look at. It's in these moments where those cheeky beliefs that we have about ourselves, those uncomfortable feelings that we didn't even realise we were trying to block out start bubbling up. It can be a massive task to sit and be. Resist the need to get up and do something drink something, eat something, and listen to what our body is telling us. And yet how else can we know how we're doing in life, if we're not able to stop and listen to what our body and mind is telling us?

It really made me face those fears that would have been there well before I met Andre. While Andre happens to be the one with the diagnosis, all the learnings that have come from having this experience have been for both of us.

Well before Andre and I met I would have had those insecurities – am I not exciting, adventurous, pretty enough? I really did worry about things.

I didn't know whether Andre would leave me either through killing himself or not wanting to be with me and finally it being realised. I did worry about the future. Financially would I be okay? Would anyone else want me? Food had been a coping strategy for years – would I eat myself to death? I did worry and knew it wasn't productive or helpful, but it didn't stop me.

One day though, I had a light-bulb moment – I could live to 90 and we could still be happily married, and I could have ruined decades through worrying. I'd rather enjoy life and imagine that it will be fine. If anything happens deal with it then.

Really, I guess this was the moment of deciding to take a mindfulness approach. To be in the moment, because in the moment generally everything is okay. There are simple things to enjoy the beauty of, to laugh about, to be grateful for and why not focus on them?

This was the start of letting other worries go too. I had in my mind that I was probably going to die at a young age like my dad of bowel cancer. It was going to be a relief as I wouldn't have to worry anymore. I would also lose some weight. Another bonus was knowing I was going to die would give others the opportunity to tell me how much I was

loved and say nice things about me. It wasn't what I really wanted of course, but sometimes life seemed hard. I was always worrying that I was upsetting people and often felt out of control of worrying.

Letting go of anxiety was beginning to free me to live a long, happy life.

We both realised that even though in many ways we did communicate and trust each other, there were things on our mind that we weren't sharing. Andre being unwell in a way had put us in a life or death situation. This did allow us to see what's important and realise there is almost nothing to lose. By sharing things that had been difficult to say, we now trusted each other more. I think we also built trust in our own intuition.

The Shake-up

Quite a hard one to describe being shaken awake in the middle of the night. I hadn't clicked to what was happening and thought our house was being bulldozed. I had bolted upright and I guess my brain started to process that this was an earthquake. I had never experienced the ground moving and our house and other objects that are meant to be solid and grounded being thrown about.

I couldn't believe Andre was still lying down asleep. I said to him, 'Andre it's an earthquake' and he calmly replied, 'I know'. I tried to get to Isabella's room but the force of it meant it was very hard to stand and move. As well there were rather heavy objects, cupboard doors and dressers, flinging about. He said, 'Wait until it's finished'. I have never felt my heart pounding that loudly. The noise of the ground moving, the house shaking and household items smashing. Something that didn't seem possible happening.

Isabella was woken up but not too upset. I just remember thinking you're meant to get into doorways, and I tried to bring our really heavy dining room table to the doorway. Andre said, 'What are you doing?' and I then realised that it wasn't physically possible to get our massive dining room table into a narrow doorway. Given that it wouldn't work I asked Andre, 'What are we supposed to do?' By then there was another big aftershock. The electricity was out, and the mobile network was down, but I did get hold of my mum and sister on the landline and heard they were both okay. We turned on the radio and started to hear reports of where the earthquake was. We had Isabella in bed with us as the aftershocks continued.

When daylight came, we were able to see what damage there was. Plenty of smashed glasses, cups, cracks in the wall but nothing too much. It was incredible to see the

massive cracks in the earth at the fault line as well. The stories were coming out about the near misses, people in bed and the house falling away, it was such a miracle that no-one was killed. Talk of, thankfully it was in the night, if it had been during the day when people were out and about there would most likely have been deaths.

There was no water. Andre was amazing, he dug a hole for our temporary new 'facilities' and went to get fresh water. We went for a drive which meant we saw some of the damage and at the end of the road at the local shops was the most bizarre image. On the second floor the wall had fallen away and all you could see in the room was the toilet. It stayed like that for quite some time and every time I drove past, I would think to myself, *imagine being on that toilet when it happened.*

When the Christchurch earthquake hit in February 2011 Andre was not in a great space. He felt people were against him and he didn't want to be at work. We were both at work the day it happened, it was summertime and yet it was a cold day. Andre was driving back from a job just out of town and I was in the staff room on the fourth floor about to have lunch. The noise came first and very quickly the building began to really shake. It was shaking to the point it was very difficult to stand up, my lunch had fallen on the ground. Once the shaking stopped, we all got out of the building. The aftershocks were big, and it was hard to stand up.

We were all in a state of shock. The bottom level of our building was a mental health inpatient ward and we were chatting with some of the clients there. Everyone seemed shocked but okay. After about an hour, non-essential staff were told to go home. We were starting to get an idea from news reports of the devastation that was happening in the central city and that this time there would be deaths. Traffic was horrendous, roads blocked, people trapped in buildings, and liquefaction flooding, we just needed to get to our loved ones and assess what to do.

It was a relief to get home. Mum was looking after Isabella and I knew they were safe, but I just wanted to hold Isabella. The house looked like we'd been robbed, stuff everywhere and this time our chimneys were damaged, and we didn't want them falling on us. As Andre was driving home, he saw the glass panes of windows in buildings bend backwards and forwards.

With the September earthquake there had been an excitement to it. It really is a pretty unique and exhilarating experience – all this energy being released from the ground.

This time it was different though. By morning we got our electricity back so were beginning to see the images of what was happening. It was very disorientating to look at the images – the city was unrecognisable. There were two buildings where people were still trapped, with one building on fire. This time sadly we learnt that people had died.

Christchurch looked like a war zone and it sounded like one too with constant helicopters flying over. I do remember being very grateful that it was a natural disaster and not a war. All the support and people caring.

I was off work a few days and when we went back it was at emergency centres where people could come if they had no accommodation, needed financial support or needed access to medications. Andre went back to work and was finding it really hard. He'd describe it as people being funny (in a strange way, not in the ha ha sense) and that he wasn't wanted there.

Things had been going well and we'd talked with Andre's psychiatrist and case manager about reducing the meds. He'd stopped the antipsychotic medication and was still taking the antidepressant. The antipsychotic was quite sedating. When he stopped taking it initially seemed great as he had a lot more energy. I was quite happy for him to be doing more around the house and he seemed upbeat. Things were going well at work in fact he was feeling confident and it was like things couldn't go wrong. Until they did. A few mistakes at work and Andre's mood came crashing down, he thought he'd been annoying people. In fairness, maybe he had a little, but nothing like he was feeling.

The previous time Andre was off work he'd gone downhill so quickly that a few of his colleagues thought perhaps we'd won lotto. They'd seen him a bit high and then off work. You could see why they thought that, but it just couldn't have been further from what was happening. Rather than rolling in money I was worrying how were we going to cope with Andre off work.

This time Andre still went to work, and it was very obvious that he wasn't himself. There were a good few weeks of him looking very depressed, and he lost a lot of weight quickly.

I can't tell you how grateful I was that two of his managers visited us at home. One had brought some self-help books that he'd found useful. They wanted to hear what was happening and what they could they do. They also talked a bit about times that had been

challenging for them. It was very reassuring to me that they cared and wanted to understand. It also helped me understand from their perspective what was happening at work and what was needed in future.

They wanted him to do whatever was needed and come back when he really was better, because at this stage he was also exhausted. He could initially return four days a week for a little while and this would allow him to attend some appointments with mental health professionals.

Given the state Andre was in it wasn't like he was jumping for joy about the visits. Now he'd say that was good of them to come and he agrees it did show they cared, but It just took quite some time to feel like that.

A Shift in Focus

I began looking for ways to take care of myself. I read the book *The Secret* and it made a lot of sense to me. I realised the times when things had been going great, I was putting my focus on what I wanted rather than focusing on what I didn't want. For example:

- Finding our home: I realised I had been visualising the house – we walked past it, imagined that it was going to be ours and thought about how we could decorate it
- Finding a great job: I spent time imagining the perfect job in London
- Finding a nice man: I had the idea as a teenager that I didn't want to have a serious boyfriend until my late 20's and would meet a wonderful guy who would be supportive. A bit like a friend of mine whose husband we called the Italian Stallion, he was lovely. I also thought my boyfriend would be a bit like my dad and Andre does have the qualities of the Italian Stallion and even some mannerisms of Dad.

I realised the same was true for things I didn't want. I had in mind that I'd probably have morning sickness throughout the pregnancy like Mum had for us. I also thought childbirth would be horrendous and with that mindset it was.

I decided to put my attention on what I wanted rather than what I didn't. This was when we started doing our 'gratefals'. When we sat down for dinner, we would say what we were grateful for and we've been doing this for over seven years now. Coming home in the evening, rushing to make dinner and doing whatever else was needed, 'gratefals' are a way of calming down as well as a chance to relive good things that had happened that day. We got to share and learn something about each other's day that otherwise we mightn't have heard. You could see our energy change from frantic to relaxed.

Every now and then my grateful was accidentally sarcastic like, 'I'm grateful you finally did.....'. I would make sure I would then say a genuine one and again could just feel the energy change within me.

Isabella of course had some pretty funny 'gratefals'. We did insist that we all had to come up with one. If at the very least she wasn't grateful for having some dinner to eat we would say she couldn't have it. I think, 'I'm not grateful for anything' was only said a few times, before begrudgingly, she was grateful for dinner. These days she'll often ask, 'Who's going first with gratefals?'.

When I read *The Secret*, Andre still wasn't in a great space, but I was beginning to feel very excited. I normally drove to and from work but for some reason I was catching the bus. While I was waiting for it to arrive, I was watching the most stunning sunset. The sky was all these different shades of pink and it was an experience I'd never had before. I felt alive, like I was really getting to absorb this beauty and in this moment everything was fine. It was like a sign everything was going to be fine in the future too, just for us to keep focused on what brings joy.

The next day I bought a bath mat. I think the old mat had mould on it that kept coming back. When I was looking at them, I could have chosen the cheapest one. There was this other one that was about \$10 more. It had little raised bubbles and was this nice transparent blue colour. I had been in the frame of mind of needing to save in case things went wrong. It's a small thing, but it meant a lot to go for the nicer one. It was like a subtle message that we don't have to worry, things will be fine, and we deserve to enjoy nice things.

I told Andre about this bath mat and why I was so happy with it, but he did not look impressed or at least wasn't sharing my excitement. He wasn't at work as he wasn't well, so it was a chance for me to test out – it doesn't matter how he is I can choose to feel good. I told him I understood he wasn't excited about it and yet I thought he would grow to love it. That it would be like a mini massage for his feet and I just let it go.

About a week later he said, 'You're right it is like a little massage'. I wasn't expecting to hear those words come from him. I would take these moments as little signs that all would be well.

Andre began to improve. He started doing more around the house and showering more. After six weeks off, he returned to work. I suppose it was a good thing because we needed Andre's income, as we couldn't have survived on my job working three days a week. There was a need to get things sorted so he could get back to work and so he started back on the antipsychotic medication.

Each time Andre went back to work I felt like a parent on the first day of school. I knew he was nervous about how people would be and how would it go, and I really admired him. When he came home, I wanted to hear all about his day. The relief that came from hearing one of his colleague's gave him some insults that in bloke language meant, 'It's good to have you back'.

We did like to focus on things that made us smile. Listening to music or having things around us that were nice or reminded us to be grateful, like our pig of happiness tea towel.

Andre had found a horoscope site that he enjoyed. We share the same star sign so for several years almost every day, he would read it out. It did always seem fitting and inspiring and it was a nice start to the day.

Towards the end of the year a new job opportunity became available for me. At the time I thought Andre might have been heading for another period of time off work as he kept thinking that people didn't like him and there were aspects of work he wasn't enjoying. This made me really mixed about whether to apply for it. On the one hand I wanted to remain part-time and still be spending time with Isabella as well as getting the household chores done during the week. On the other hand, I was tired of worrying about our finances. The reason I worried so much when Andre wasn't in a good space was because he was the main earner. We couldn't pay the bills on my income alone.

The job would be a challenge and would certainly extend me. At the same time, it was a way of doing what I was passionate about. It was coordinating people who had mental health issues and required a higher level of care either through residential support services or higher support services in their home. What I was excited about was the focus on how we can all work together to meet the client's needs and keep progressing. This included the client, family/whanau, mental health case managers and community mental health staff, etc.

To make the decision I used a technique which literally gets you to place each option in hand and notice what each option gives. In the end it seemed an easy choice, I wanted to take responsibility and I felt it would be rewarding and things would fall into place.

When I started the job, it was full on and I didn't really have much time to think about Andre. There was so much going on I remember being stressed not having enough time to learn how to operate my new smartphone. It wasn't a conscious decision (not paying as much attention to Andre) it was just the way it worked out.

Andre would bring up that he wasn't happy with work. My response was, 'I care and I want you to be happy, but I don't know what you want me to do. If you really want to leave your job do it'. Now that I was full-time and in a better paid position we could have survived on my wage. I just didn't have the energy to get involved in a conversation that went around in circles.

The strange thing was that Andre seemed to get on with the situation. I realised when I had more time, I was wanting to hear from him what was happening, I wanted to be helpful and find solutions. But all it was really doing was having him focus on what he didn't want and probably bringing him down. From a mindset perspective that's exactly what we'd say – what you focus on expands. We all have a reticular activating system – what you focus on your mind starts looking for more of. When Andre was focused on the negative, he would see more negative things. I needed him to take more responsibility around the house and that was what happened. The more he did the more he could see other things that needed doing without me asking (happy days).

Initially there was so much work that I was often late home. Things did settle down though and there were times when I would work later because I didn't want to arrive home if Andre was feeling down. As embarrassing as it sounds, I think there was an element of me thinking working late meant that I was doing something important. I was getting paid more, I felt it was a meaningful role and arriving home late was a way of me reassuring myself I was important.

I was thinking that Andre would at some stage stop working and yet he carried on. We were now in a position where we actually had some extra money. My friend that I was out with when I first met Andre met her husband a week later (New Year's Eve). Coincidentally we also got married on the same day – our friends in South Africa and us in New Zealand. They were arranging a trip to Bali and invited us, so Mum looked after

Isabella and we went to Bali. It was such a treat to be able to really relax, no responsibilities and spend some us time together.

We'd talked about how we always seemed to be yin and yang. When Andre was up, I was the one struggling, when Andre was down, I was the one upbeat. It seemed like when Andre was going through a patch of not being great, I would be stressed but keeping it together. When Andre started improving, he would be the one looking healthy – he was sleeping well, had lost weight and was usually focusing on his fitness. During that time, I was often finding even more comfort in food and doing a lot of stress eating.

Other times when he was down but more an underlying not happy, I would decide I just had to focus on me and do things I wanted. One time I went on a diet. I was just so sick of feeling bad about myself, not being able to wear the clothes that I wanted, feeling like I had to cover up. This was something I could do and then I would feel happy. It was a lot of money and yet it felt like I really wanted to do it. Andre didn't really worry about money like I did, and he's always been supportive of what I wanted to do. I was about a week into it when the 2011 earthquake hit. My lunch of mushrooms fell on the floor but before evacuating the building I picked them off the ground. I had to eat I was starving.

Everything had to be weighed for this diet and our kitchen scales had broken. I had only bought them the week before from Briscoes for full price! Everyone in New Zealand knows that Briscoes always has a sale on, you never buy anything at full price. This was how determined I was that I would sort my weight once and for all – I'd bought something from Briscoes full price!

The weight did come off, 27kg. The only downside being that I didn't have the energy to do any exercise. A walk to the end of the street was tiring. I missed the padding on my butt and it would hurt to sit down. I couldn't believe that I could finally fit into clothes that I'd only ever dreamed of before, but my family who I can always count on to be honest said I looked gaunt.

It was so restrictive that even when I reached the goal weight it wasn't sustainable. All my thoughts of I will never put the weight on didn't work and sure enough it went back on. But, I did learn a couple of valuable lessons through it. For one thing I had in my mind that it just wasn't possible for me to be slimmer, which I knew was no longer true. I remember having the teensy tiniest taste of tomato sauce when I was on this diet and it

was like a taste explosion in my mouth. When I wasn't stuffing food in my face and really paying attention to flavours it could be incredible and satisfying.

Perhaps the most important lesson was that life was still pretty much the same. There was a little bit of confidence and it was great being able to wear clothes I loved. Otherwise it wasn't some amazing transformation on the inside. Despite having a slimmer body my mind was still worrying, doubting and being frustrated at myself and then as I said, of course the weight went back on.

Another issue I had since I was in my late teens was irritable bowel syndrome. I'd always suspected that it had to do with being stressed and anxious and yet what was I supposed to do? I'd accepted stress was just a part of life and how exactly can you control something like your digestive system that's part of your autonomic system and therefore out of your control. I'd tried things over the years, exclusion diets to see what foods might be aggravating it, psyllium husks and medications. I didn't have enough points to qualify for a colonoscopy and I didn't fancy paying over \$1000 for what I suspected wouldn't show anything and wouldn't get rid of the problem. It was getting worse though, I could go for days without going to the toilet and then with very little notice be in agony with diarrhoea. Most annoyingly I could be stuck on the loo for up to an hour.

Andre had been wanting me to go to his acupuncturist for some time and it's hard to say why but I had been resisting. I appreciated that Andre cared but there was also a part of me that was annoyed thinking you just want this to go away because it's inconvenient to you. I also thought the acupuncturist might have been someone else he'd found attractive and felt guilty about.

He bought me a voucher and I finally got around to using it, she was great. As we spoke about what would be helpful it was like she really got what I needed. I'd had acupuncture before when I was pregnant, and it was fine but for some reason I couldn't face having needles in me now. She said I could have the tuning forks on acupuncture points instead of needles and she also did massage (now we're talking) and some heating treatment.

I felt really relaxed, I trusted her and was open for more treatments. The trouble was I felt so good during the sessions but not much was changing in terms of the bowel situation. After five sessions she said she'd been expecting to see changes by now. She

told me if we didn't see any in the next session, she would suggest we stop, and I appreciated her honesty. She also said she'd done neurolinguistic programming (NLP) training and did I want to try a technique?

My dad had seen an NLP practitioner when he had cancer. I knew it had helped him manage his pain and he seemed a lot more relaxed and lighter like he'd let something go following the sessions. I said, I'd give it a go. The first thing we did was a body test. I held out my hand, she'd ask a question and I would answer. She would push on my hand to test the strength.

She asked did I want the IBS to go. When I answered yes there was absolutely no strength in my arm, I could hardly keep it up. When asking did I want it to stay it was really strong. I tell you I had never experienced anything like it. Of course, I logically didn't want it and yet here was this strong signal in my body saying I did – craziness!

The next step was to try and figure out what purpose the IBS was serving. The idea being if my body wanted it on some level it must have been meeting a need. On one hand I wanted good health on the other hand something got in the way. The technique we used was called parts integrated and to begin, I had to visualise an image to each part and imagine holding them in each hand. I had the good health as bright warm sunshine and the part getting in the way was a brown, heavy lump. Even imagining the brown heavy lump my hand dropped as it felt really heavy.

I then had to ask each part what it was giving me. With every answer she followed up with 'What's that giving you?' or 'What is the positive intention of that?'. I can't remember exactly what I said but it was something like this:

- Brown heavy lump – pain, feeling out of control, upset, more pain, stuck in the toilet, time out, not sure if I can do my job, more stress, more pain, time out, a break, can relax, not having to put myself out there, safety, stability, can relax, stability. (Once the same positive words keep coming up, you move to the other hand.)
- Warm sunshine – have energy, feel proud, have confidence, can relax, stability.

I tell you, Oprah talks about aha moments and this was a big one for me. These parts felt like such complete opposites and yet they both had the same ultimate wish for me – to RELAX and have STABILITY.

My hands were still out holding the imaginary conflicting parts but suddenly it felt like they had magnets in them that wanted to come together. I had never felt anything like it, in that moment it was such a relief because I just knew something had changed. Suddenly years of feeling like I was in a losing battle with my body was over. I know it sounds bizarre, but I knew things would improve now.

I knew it would improve and it did – in a few days' time what do we have here... normal poos! There was a little bit more to the technique that allowed my mind to focus on bringing about relaxation and stability using my mind, I just couldn't believe it was that easy. I continued to go to acupuncture/massage/NLP sessions. After a while I would go for a monthly boost as well, I really enjoy the time reflecting and learning other techniques.

I was getting a lot from the sessions – the acupuncture and massage felt great. I was really enjoying all the mindset work too. I would fill out sheets with questions such as:

- In what ways do I nourish myself? How can I nourish myself more? How do I support others? What is the balance like?
- What is my capacity to manifest abundance for myself? What would an abundant life look like?
- How do I stay centred and grounded? What practices help to anchor me in my day-to-day reality?
- What thoughts constantly turn over in my mind? How does this reflect where I am stuck in my life? What do I need to do to transform this situation? What are the conclusions I have drawn from my old story? Imagine if you could rewrite a new story with a different conclusion what would it be?

I started using my imagination as a tool. Asking myself when life is the way I want it to be what will I see, hear, feel, taste and smell?

I was becoming really interested in NLP. If this could change something that I felt for sure I didn't have control over what else could it help with... The other BIG thing I felt out of control of... my weight.

I got a book on NLP and weight loss and started using the techniques. I made some recordings to listen to and the weight started coming off easily and I wasn't dieting. I remember as a kid dreaming of finding a treasure chest, this was way more exciting than

treasure – I'd discovered how to use my mind to bring about what I wanted. Seven kilograms come off quickly and easily. I was learning to listen to my body and be more accepting of what it was telling me. You know how when you can't think of a word or a song or a person's name and when you're not thinking about it, it pops into your mind. This is the part of my mind I was learning to use more.

I was so pleased with my weight going, but when it stopped, I wanted to understand why. It wasn't like I was doing much different. What popped up was, 'Forget about weight, you need to exercise – you know if you were slimmer you wouldn't exercise like you should. Come back to me when you've really got into the habit of being active'.

I know it was coming from me, but it was like having a conversation with a very wise person who knew me better than I knew myself. It's true if I was slimmer, I probably wouldn't have exercised and that wouldn't be great for my overall health, stress levels or confidence.

Each time in order to lose weight it was like I had to make sure I'd learnt the lesson. There were different themes – stay humble, let go of worrying what people think, love yourself unconditionally. It was not just logically getting these lessons, but really feeling it.

Still to this day my stomach and weight are like a warning signal. Like a red warning light on the dashboard of the car saying there is something you need to address here. Whereas before I would have got so frustrated and annoyed at the light, now I say thanks for the warning I'll look at that (and sooner rather than putting it off for several years/decades).

Once I'd discovered these techniques, I wanted to learn more, so I bought books. My dear friend Gillian rang me at 11 p.m. one night to say there was an online NLP course on one of those two-day deal sites and it was going to close in an hour. I took her ringing at the time as a sign that I needed to buy it.

I couldn't get enough and knew I wanted to learn more. Friends and colleagues were doing studies and I had a thought I should be doing some study, but nothing had really excited me – this did. When I was looking up NLP courses, I came across one that was in Christchurch and it was part of a Hypnotherapy Diploma.

I had never thought of doing hypnotherapy but the more I looked into it, the more it made sense. I had been to a couple of fundraising events which had been very entertaining, one time a friend was on stage and she really was taking on the suggestions and I knew she wouldn't have just been pretending. They left out pamphlets of how you could go and see the person for sessions, and I had thought about going to see them for weight loss, but it never happened.

Understanding the role of the unconscious mind was like the missing link to the question I'd been asking about my clients, myself and Andre. Why is it when you really want to change or for something to be different, it's so hard? Why do you sabotage yourself?

Most importantly how do you apply those learnings to bring about the changes you want?

I loved that NLP wasn't about studying people with problems and how can we try and reduce symptoms – this was about looking to succeed. What is it about the people who are succeeding? What is it that they are doing? What kind of a mindset/thoughts do they have?

I wanted to study in a real classroom rather than online. Somewhere I could put the learning into practice straight away. So, I decided to commit to doing the diploma in Hypnotherapy.

I was putting the techniques into practice in daily life and noticed how things were getting easier. I would occasionally practise a few techniques with Andre.

When he was preparing for the Coast to Coast one of the required skills was getting yourself up if your kayak turned over and you were under water. Obviously, it's a physical act to flip yourself back up but it's also a mindset one, avoiding the panic of being stuck under water and using the technique to get yourself out of the water while still in the kayak. It's the simplest of techniques but I would get Andre to imagine the perfect roll beforehand and it did make a difference.

In the end they had a three-man team and Andre did the cycling part. The race was a two-day event, from the West Coast to the East Coast of the South Island in New Zealand. I was so proud of him and it was a reminder of how mentally strong he is. He also used it as an opportunity to raise money for the Mental Health Foundation.

Any time he was doing something social and enjoying it, it made me feel pleased. We are lucky in that we do still see quite a bit of Andre's family even though they are in Australia. I was aware that we were living in my home town, and that a lot of Andre's friends/social group are through me. This is what made it special that he was doing the race with a friend from Brisbane and his sister was the support crew.

I started reading lots of books, articles, watching TED talks – anything to do with mindset. It was beginning to feel like it really didn't matter how Andre was I could choose to feel fine. In fact, more than fine.

I guess I felt like I had so much more control over my life. I started to teach a few people techniques outside of my job. Even though I was seeing the changes in myself it was hard to believe how the changes worked in others. For example, a friend had cancelled a dentist appointment because she hated getting injections. We did two short sessions and she went along to the dentist, felt a lot more relaxed and hardly felt the needle. The biggest thing for her was normally the injection site would hurt for at least a day after – this time it didn't hurt at all.

It helped me at work to see people more from a needs point of view. If I was frustrated, I would think about what my needs were and what the other person's needs were. One day I was annoyed with Isabella wriggling round while I was wanting to change her. I stopped and thought what were my needs? It was to relax. What were her needs? I figured it was to have fun. I chose to stop and have fun with her. I realised I felt good and we got the job done quickly.

Too Good Not to Share

It was a scary decision going from a decent regular income and back to Andre being the main earner, but I just knew I had to leave my current job and set up a business where I was passing on these techniques. Two people that I loved and respected passed away in the same week, and it was a wake-up call that none of us know what is around the corner. It really made me feel like I have to do what I'm passionate about. I'm so grateful that I'm learning these mindset techniques and want others to have the same experiences.

Andre, as always, was happy for me to do what I wanted. I gave three months' notice which gave me time to get my head around setting up a business. People said things like, 'Well if it doesn't work out you can always come back'. However, I knew that once I was gone that would be it. I had to fully commit to it, because it felt too important not to.

In quite a few of my previous jobs I had facilitated groups which I loved. I therefore decided to not just see clients individually, but also offer a weight loss group. As I guess happens at the start, half the group were family and friends being supportive of me. They did want to lose weight, but I think their main purpose was helping me out.

As well as making up the numbers it also helped me get over the idea of 'What will people think if it's obvious I've got family and friends coming?'. Andre was there as one of the supporters, and in session three we were teaching a technique that helps you understand the positive intention behind the eating habit and/or your current weight. Andre shared with the group that what was coming up for him was 'not wanting to miss out' as he remembering as a kid, he would vacuum down his food, so he could go out and play.

This was great, and the next step was having your mind coming up with a way of 'not missing out and having the weight you wanted'. Others in the group seemed to be appreciating what he was saying. As the facilitator I was acknowledging how good that was and continued on. In my mind I was like, *How did I not see this before... Of course... it's so obvious.*

We really did get on very well and make a good team. Any time we were falling out, it would generally be about things like me feeling Andre was spending too much money or committing to too many things. It made complete sense these were things driven by not wanting to miss out or wanting to belong. Here was me with my 'I need stability' and Andre with his 'I don't want to miss out'.

Once we understood this it really did help our relationship. When making decisions or getting annoyed with each other we'd realise each other's needs and look for a win/win, a way for both needs to be met. There were other techniques that he found useful. Whereas before he might have logically known it wasn't helpful believing something, he now had the tools needed to let the things go. Not just think it but really feel it.

He did lose weight and so did my sister, although she later admitted she had only attended to support me. She is a research scientist so was very much, 'Where's the evidence to support this?' and 'What does the research say?'. She gave the techniques a go though and couldn't believe it. She lost 16kg but really what she couldn't get over was how much more confident and relaxed she was.

It happened before the weight came off too, so it wasn't simply because of that. She was also a worrier and was now able to confidently share her opinion. Things that she used to go over and over in her mind she was now able to let go. She was interested in what research was out there and helped get hold of studies that supported the work I was doing.

It was a boost for me. If the business didn't take off at least this was making a difference for people I loved.

The group would be the last time I would work with Andre. Soon, a business partner would appear who he would have sessions with when need be.

Attending the group was great in that Andre had more of an idea of what I was doing. It also opened up conversations too. One night when we were lying in bed, I don't even

remember how it came up, but Andre said how when I was giving birth, he thought I wasn't pregnant. I was shocked. Partly because I thought *how did I not realise that?* As well as being shocked I felt like I'd just been given the most amazing gift ever. It felt like a treat getting an insight into what he'd thought. He'd believed that I wasn't in pain, that it wasn't a hospital, that they weren't real doctors and nurses. It was all just part of showing him what a jerk he was.

This has always been the most emotional memory for me. Being in so much pain physically and not having the real Andre there supporting me. It felt like a stab in the heart and my throat restricting when I'd reached for his hand and him shaking his head that he wouldn't take it. Thinking what on earth are we bringing this baby into?

I knew we were so lucky that things had worked out well. In many ways I had moved on and yet I also had the feeling I needed to let this go. The fact that Andre was sharing this seemed like a positive sign. It helped me understand more of what he was going through and admire him more for being there given that was what he had thought.

This whole letting go, moving on process seems to take a lot more time and have a lot of different levels to it.

About a year into having set up this mindset business I met Imelda who is now my wonderful business partner. I had started teaching at the New Zealand School of Hypnotherapy and she was finishing the diploma course there. Like me she had done a trillion diets over the years. She had been using these mindset techniques to lose a lot of weight. Like me, she couldn't believe that it could be easy and didn't have to involve diet food and counting calories. And, best of all, unlike dieting the weight stayed off.

Imelda's husband is a painter/decorator, so they came over from Ireland for the rebuild of Christchurch following the earthquake. Her plan was to set up a weight loss service using mindset techniques, so I invited her along to the group I was running. A 10-minute conversation following the group and both of us thought we wanted to go into business together. I've probably spent more time deciding which chocolate to buy but this felt right. I wanted a like-minded person to bounce ideas off and support to grow the business.

Neither of us had any idea about marketing or business plans and yet we muddled through.

Life was going pretty well and we had some financial space for Andre to have a go at working for himself. He is quite an outdoorsy person who likes being physically active, and so being a gardener seemed like an ideal job. He completed a long-distance horticultural course and gave it a go. Andre is really caring and friendly and a lot of the customers were elderly and enjoyed chatting to him. He was also helping with technical support to do with our business, however, he felt bad that he had this opportunity and that others didn't.

Imelda was still working in another job so she would see clients in the evening and weekends. We were both loving working with our clients and they were getting results. A lot more than just the weight coming off – people were talking about how much closer they felt to their family, how they were so much more confident, and how they felt like they had a voice. Where before they had just been going through the motions of life, they were now stopping to smell the roses and actually see the world around them.

We had achieved quite a lot. We'd set up as a company, had a website and developed a comprehensive online course. This was all great and yet financially we weren't doing too well. So we approached Business Mentors NZ, a service where you are matched with a person who volunteers their time to support you in the area you've requested. We identified we needed mentoring in marketing.

We were extremely lucky to have the lovely Kate and will never forget the first meeting. Imelda and I both thought we had done a pretty good job and perhaps there was some fine tuning to do. Ahh no, it wasn't quite like being on Dragon's Den and yet every question that Kate asked helped us realise how little we knew and how much work we had to do.

One question was, 'What are your company values?'. Our reply was, 'Hmmm they are written somewhere, couldn't tell you what they are'.

Next question: 'When you market tested your company name what was the feedback'. Our reply was along the lines of, 'We've got no feedback, seeing we had no idea you were meant to market test it let alone how to go about doing that'.

It was actually a relief to hear our marketing wasn't any good. At least there was lots we could do about it. The other relief was that Kate was also surprised. She had come

into the meeting thinking – why are they going into one of the most competitive markets? But after meeting with us, she did believe there was a market for what we had to offer.

The reason I'm mentioning our mentor is because even though it was to do with the business a lot of personal learning came out of it. This helped me and indirectly helped Andre too, mainly because of the happy wife, happy life concept. I was happier when it felt like the business was progressing.

Business can't be anything else but personal. It is people running a business and it is people purchasing your service. Andre was very much part of all the learning and discussions we were having which led to personal development for all of us.

One of our first steps was coming up with our company values. Kate had given us some ways of figuring these out, so they weren't just blah, blah ones and they really meant something to us. It took a month and it was so worth it. These really excited us and do guide our business. Now if someone was to ask us them, we could very quickly tell you they are:

- Having a laugh
- Keep it simple
- Being down-to-earth
- Individual strengths
- Keep on learning.

These now guide us in all we do. Whenever a problem pops up, we'll ask ourselves – is the problem that we're not having fun or a laugh? Are we keeping it simple? Is this our individual strength – or do we need someone else whose strength this is? What do we need to learn here?

Also, if we're creating a social media post – we'll have at least some of these in mind. Does it show our value of being down to earth? Are we keeping it simple? Does it put across our value of having a laugh?

We also apply these to family life too. Asking those questions are we having enough fun today? Are we doing too much, or do we just need to keep it simple today? How can we keep learning?

Imelda and I always left our meetings with Kate with plenty to think about and do. What I really liked was that she never made us feel stupid although she certainly challenged us.

I really hadn't had much to do with business when I was growing up. A lot of the people I knew worked for the government. My first memory of businesspeople would have been hearing about 'yuppies' who were arrogant and ran around with large brick cell-phones. Perhaps because of this I had felt intimidated by businesspeople. It was a good learning for me to see that a successful business owner is a human being with feelings and can most definitely be caring.

There were light-bulb moments going off with the work that we were doing with Kate – some of the work was more marketing orientated. Other aspects were understanding yourself more. One very helpful personality test Kate showed us was doing an enneagram. I'd done other personality tests before, but this really helped me understand more about my strengths and how to build on them. It also showed me what it can mean about me when I'm at my worst and what to do about that as well.

The results give your top three personality types. The biggest learning for me was from my second most dominant one. It explained to me why I can feel so mixed. That I can be cautious but also have a rebellious side. The biggest challenge for this group is to face their insecurities so they can have an inner peace within themselves despite the uncertainties of life.

I took the advice and focused on dealing with my anxieties and emotional insecurities in a variety of ways. It was true the reward for doing this is that sense of inner peace. This helped me go from being anxious about the future to a 'it is what it is' approach where I looked for the learning with a sense everything will work out.

Light-bulb moments were continuing to happen at work with Imelda. We had sessions where one of us was the therapist and the other the client to support each other. The beauty with a lot of the techniques was not needing to know what the other person was talking about in order to take them through the process of change. We could have done the work on ourselves, but it was a lot easier having someone else, so we weren't having to be the therapist and the client at the same time.

Andre was having sessions with Imelda too. Whereas before I might have been keen to know what they were discussing I wasn't bothered. So long as he was finding it useful that was all I cared about. He was usually so impressed that he would tell me about it or ask had I experienced what he had, and it was lovely us sharing together.

Financial Rock Bottom

Life was going along pretty smoothly. It was nice that Andre was spending more time with Isabella and that now we were both self-employed, we could take turns doing the school drop off and pick up. What wasn't going so well though was our finances.

A pattern of the right person turning up at the right time was occurring. This happened again when we were at a point of having to decide if we were going to have to sell our house. Andre and I both being self-employed wasn't financially sustainable. We weren't far from having to sell the house, but the problem was even doing that if we carried on the way we were going, we'd still not be able to pay bills.

At a networking meeting I attended I was impressed by a guy who helped build businesses, Sridhar. He was also very much about mindset work and had an interesting story of having been homeless and how he had turned his life around. I got the feeling it would be good if Andre and I met with him, but with our current financial troubles it didn't seem like the best time to spend money we hadn't planned on. In the end we did it, and it turned out to be a really good investment.

It all came to a head because Andre had injured his finger and was in hospital for a week then on intravenous antibiotics for another month. Given he nearly lost his finger to an infection it was quite some time before he would be able to work again. His application had been turned down by Accident Compensation Corporation (New Zealand's government insurance in relation to accidents) so it suddenly sped up our financial woes.

It did bring us some gifts:

- The gift of urgency

- The gift of having a voice
- The gift of being patient and trusting
- The gift of letting go of more things from the past
- The gift of sorting out our finances.

One evening I got so annoyed, I was about to go to sleep when Andre said he'd been applying for a job. I can't even remember what it was but for some reason I felt really stressed. It was bringing up feelings of – this is not going to solve our problems, just create the same problems.

So many things were going through my mind, disappointment was one. I had really hoped Andre having the gardening business meant he'd be happy; he did love being physically active and he was enjoying learning about horticulture. He particularly liked the satisfaction of before and afters. He was so good at getting in and ripping things out and it meant that he was meeting people in the neighbourhood. Andre really is a sweetie and I would hear how people enjoyed his company. He would also learn what was happening in their lives – going for surgery, family visiting, etc.

There were several problems though. For one there were set rates for the elderly clients which wasn't much. He didn't like to keep going out selling his service and the weather impacted on his ability to work. He was also too fast. He would get jobs done so much faster than people expected and was charging at an hourly rate rather than for the job done. Another issue was that he felt bad and it was hard for him to really relax and enjoy what he was doing. He kept thinking, *why should I get to do a job I love and finish up in the early afternoon when others are working long hours?*

For myself I was disappointed that in our business I wasn't earning much to contribute. We had been working such long hours. We seemed to be mainly working to pay other people and it was draining. It was always exciting and rewarding the results the clients were getting but I knew that we wouldn't be able help any clients if we went out of business.

We did have loads of mindset techniques of our own that had got us a long way. However, it was now time to have someone help us sort ourselves out and take us along the next part of the journey.

One of the sessions with Sridhar was to understand and change my response. Obviously, me being annoyed at Andre wasn't the ideal state to be in. Sridhar took me through a dissolving beliefs exercise.

The first part was to identify in that moment (when I was feeling like I was going to explode) what was the thought (that was driving the near explosion). It took a little bit to get to the underlying thought, but I eventually discovered that it was: 'Andre is bailing on me'.

I won't go through the full process – just present the highlights!

In that moment what was the evidence that the thought is true (that Andre was bailing on me).

This was hard because I obviously had in mind all these reasons he was. As we went through each reason, I had to ask myself if it was an absolute fact. For example, is Andre looking for a job an absolute fact that he's bailing on me? It took a while for my body to relax and truly take on board there were no facts at all that it was true.

Is this the first time you've had this thought?

No, certainly me giving birth was another time I'd had the thought 'Andre is bailing on me'.

When you are having this thought how are you feeling?

My body tenses all over and I feel my throat constricting.

We went back to the giving birth scenario and I couldn't find any facts that he was bailing on me.

'So', Sridhar said, 'You've been carrying around this thought that makes you feel tense, like your throat is constricting you are saying now there is no fact that it is true?' 'Yes, that would be fair to say' I agreed. 'Are you up for spending a few minutes searching for evidence that the opposite might be true?' Of course I was.

Then came the turnaround questions

In that moment what was the evidence that he wasn't bailing on me.

- Despite thinking there was a conspiracy he was still there beside me
- Despite how horrible he must have been feeling he was still there
- At any stage he could have left and yet he was still there
- He was doing things I'd asked like attending appointments and taking medication.

Well I didn't know the next question was coming...

What was the evidence in that moment that I was bailing on Andre? (and I had to come up with some answers!!!)

- I was expecting him to be a certain way rather than letting him be
- I was thinking poor me rather than acknowledging what he must be going through.

Then there was deciding on reflection

Which thought seems most likely?

I answered, 'Andre's not bailing on me'. Or in other words, 'Andre is there for me'.

Which thought brings the most stress?

Andre is bailing on me.

Which thought brings the most peace or useful energy?

Andre is not bailing on me – Andre is there for me.

We then returned to the more recent scenario. Same thing, I could see there was plenty of evidence that Andre wasn't bailing on me.

Yet, there was evidence I was bailing on him – my thoughts weren't solution-focused they were all fear-based. I wasn't believing in him and his ability to grow and change

In some ways I already knew some of this and yet it was powerful. It was like I got it on a deeper level. As well there was a letting go element and really beginning to trust Andre and myself.

By this stage Imelda and I were doing some work with Sridhar. It came up in one of the sessions that I was feeling overwhelmed in relation to our company finances. The task

was going back to an earlier time of thinking and feeling this. It was incredible how my mind took me exactly back to where we needed to go. I was back in London and Andre coming home from work telling me that his workmates were doing things to get to him.

This was perhaps day two or three of him not having any sleep. I asked him what they were doing. He said something about the way admin push certain buttons on the telephone. Andre's story just didn't make sense to me and I was feeling really overwhelmed. We went through the same questions

In that moment what were you thinking?

I was thinking Andre's paranoid.

It took a lot of time to come up with that just because he was saying these things didn't make it a fact that he was paranoid. All my mental health training of identifying symptoms was screaming THIS IS BEING PARANOID!!!

What is the evidence that Andre isn't paranoid?

- I can't 100% know whether his workmates are doing things to get to him
- Maybe he's just overwhelmed and needs some sleep.

Oh boy and then the....

In that moment what was the evidence that I was paranoid?

Because all that happened was Andre expressing a thought and I had jumped to imagining that our life was ruined, we'd have financial troubles that I couldn't rely on him, that everything was going wrong.

This memory brought to mind an earlier time of feeling this way when I was four years old and me being paranoid. My kindergarten teacher had said to me, 'A little birdie told me you don't want to be here'. I remember being really freaked thinking, *Do birds really go around reading your mind and telling adults?*

I thought I was the sane, strong one and yet it turns out I certainly experienced paranoia. This was making me more aware of my thinking, how it was affecting me and others. Most importantly how to choose thoughts/beliefs that served me well.

An important part is imagining in that moment if it wasn't possible to have that thought – how would you be. Suddenly I could see the possibilities of being a lot calmer and thinking of solutions. I guess I thought by facing the truth, we could deal with it. In fact, the opposite was true. When I didn't have that thought I could think a lot more clearly.

It was a turning point realising how many times I must have thought Andre is paranoid and how draining and a waste of time it was for me and how much it must have affected Andre me thinking he's paranoid, he can't be relied on. I know we are energetic beings and you can pick up on the energy of others. You can walk into a room and cut the atmosphere with a knife or walk into a room and pick up on great vibes. I'm sure every time I had that thought, Andre must have picked up on that energy.

I came home and just gave him such a long hug saying, 'I don't know how you put up with me'. It made me realise what an even stronger person he must be to keep on going given how I would think about him at times. He was reassuring that I was supportive, he understood that I had been worried and was happy for me that I'd let go of that one and was feeling a lot better.

It was a relief. I had thought I was responsible for everyone but this whole trusting thing freed up my time and energy. We all seemed happier and things that would have once got to me no longer were. There were a few times when Andre or Isabella had said, 'Mummy won't be happy' and I truly wasn't bothered. It made me realise how it must have been before! And to think I thought I was in some ways quite chilled and easygoing!

A New Perspective

Imelda and I did the Helen Mitas' Ultimate Hypnotherapist System (UHS) training on releasing negative emotions and limiting beliefs which was fantastic. The idea being that we hold on to emotion (and it certainly can come out in all sorts of ways – headaches, pain, injury, illnesses, poor sleep) and with everything we experience there are learnings.

When we store a memory of an event, we store the emotion along with the learning. We want to take the learnings with us, so we also keep the emotion. It's true from the most horrendous things that have happened there is also something to learn. It was another technique that didn't require you to relive experiences in order to take the learnings, allowing you to move on and feel differently.

Imelda took Andre through this process and he gained a lot of learnings. Perhaps most importantly, he was not just thinking them but truly believing them and noticed how much calmer and confident he felt.

Here are Andre's main learnings:

- People do like me
- I don't take offence to what others say
- I need to slow down
- I am realistic of my capabilities
- I can trust people
- I don't need to panic
- I need to remember to breathe slowly
- It will be okay, none of my fears have been realised

- There was nothing to fear
- People want success for me
- I don't need to avoid people
- I need to communicate what is important
- It was no-one's fault
- Accidents happen
- I don't take life so seriously
- Life isn't perfect
- Stand up for what I believe in
- If I have upset someone, I will apologise
- I am a good person
- I'm not my past
- I don't hold onto the past
- Life changes
- I recognise who my close friends are
- I respect good friendships
- I let go
- Things happen for a reason
- I'm not perfect, nobody is perfect
- It's okay to make mistakes
- I own my mistakes.
- To be compassionate and respect family
- I don't need to get angry
- I believe that my parents love me
- I forgive myself
- Anything that I want to do is possible
- It's okay to fail
- No point in beating yourself up
- Being realistic of what effort is involved in achieving certain goals
- Celebrate the success
- I can dream big
- I can have realistic expectations
- Everything happens for a reason
- Life isn't out to get you
- It's okay to feel love

- I like who I am.

There were several limiting beliefs that made a significant difference for Andre to let go of. He followed it back to the first time he picked up the thought:

I don't want your help: This was picked up as a kid when he went downhill on his bike and ended up in the mangroves in Brisbane River and a jogger got him out. As a kid he didn't want this guy, he wanted his dad (who wasn't far behind but still catching up after Andre took off). He was annoyed with his dad because he needed to go home to get cleaned up and didn't get to go to McDonalds.

Obviously as an adult you can completely understand the situation. Part of this technique was to not only take the learnings but forgive his dad.

People don't like me: This went back to a time when friends came around to his house, got ice-blocks and ran off.

It might sound like these are just things that happen, get over it. But these techniques really did allow him to let go of things that he didn't realise were causing issues.

I think it's one of the most challenging things when you're told to 'just be yourself'. How on earth do you do that? How do you be you? How else could you be anything else but you? These techniques were thankfully helping us both be more ourselves.

Another time that this dissolving belief business really helped was when I was about to do a presentation at the Chamber of Commerce. It was a competition called 10 in 2. You have two minutes to present your business, with 10 PowerPoint slides that change every 12.5 seconds. So not only do you have to get across what your business is about you have to make sure your timing is right and ideally in an entertaining and unique way.

It was bringing up several not so useful beliefs for me the number one being, 'People will judge you (negatively)'.

In this situation, how could I have evidence that people will judge me? Most I'd never even met before and I don't have mindreading skills.

I was able to come up with the following evidence that they weren't judging me:

- They hadn't met me yet so how could they be judging me
- When I present they might find it interesting
- They are more likely thinking I've got guts getting up and doing it
- When I present, they may well be thinking about their life and not even paying attention to me.

Ekkk... then on to the evidence I was judging people. Yes, there was plenty of evidence of this:

- I hadn't even met these people and already I was judging them – that they wouldn't understand or care
- I was judging a certain type of person (middle-aged male in a suit).

I have thankfully let go of these judgements now – it's safe for middle-aged men to have a conversation free from my judgements.

I left the session feeling so much lighter. My stomach had been churning and it had settled. It was such good timing, an hour later I was at the event feeling relaxed and mingling.

Without the thoughts, I was able to really enjoy watching the others present. Normally I would have been too tied up going through what I had to say to be able to listen to the others. I enjoyed presenting because it was no longer about my performance – my goal was to enjoy the experience.

If nothing else the presentation made me laugh (yes, I do have a tendency to have a good laugh at my own jokes). If it resonated with anyone there that would be a bonus. I no longer felt the need to 'do well' and yet it was nice when the clap-o-meter (audience clapping) did cheer loudly for the presentation.

For all the tools I was picking up this was not to be the case one night. Isabella had woken up having a bad dream. I went to stroke her hair and talk to her about the dream. I explained how it was her imagining the bad things that made her feel scared and asked her what she could imagine that would make her feel better. I can't quite remember her answer something about unicorns and rainbows I think. She seemed happier, so I left the room thinking I was pretty clever – possibly a nominee for parent of the year.

She then came to our room again. 'Will you sleep with me?' I won't I replied but I'll come to your room while you settle. I was not so impressed but still calm, same thing telling her she could do this. She seemed okay, so I left the room. Few minutes later she was back. It was the middle of the night and I was going to be teaching all weekend and needed my wits about me so was beginning to get annoyed. All the while Andre slept soundly through. Isabella and I had slept together in the same room during the earthquakes when she was much younger and that was fine. She was a lot older now about seven or eight years old and I knew sleeping in her bed would mean I didn't have a good sleep. As well I really wanted her to be able to soothe herself. I felt if I'd stayed in her room it would have been giving her a message 'there is something to be frightened about, so I'll stay with you' or 'you can't handle it'.

By this stage a very whiney voice had appeared, and she was crying, meanwhile, I was getting angry. I just wanted to sleep, my voice was raised, and I was telling her to leave. It was about 20 minutes but felt like two hours and then Andre woke up. 'What are you doing?' he asked like I was the baddy.

'Daddy, I'm scared will you sleep in my bed?' 'Yes' he said. 'Whaaat you're just going to completely undermine me? I was furious. Apart from desperately wanting to get to sleep I could see what the future held. I did not want her getting in the habit of wanting us to sleep with her and I knew it would be me waking up not Andre. She would know if she cried enough, eventually, she'd get her way. I also wanted her to feel she had the ability to handle a bad dream (mind you that was no longer top of my list).

I lost it. I screamed at them. 'I fucken hate you both!' I think possibly years of emotions came spilling out and I went to the couch and bawled and bawled until I fell into a very deep sleep. When I woke up in the morning, they weren't there. I did think that I had been out of order and I can't blame him if he's left and taken her. They arrived home before I went to teaching, Andre thought I might need some space and wondered if I really meant it.

It must have been a few weeks before Mother's Day as Andre later told me Isabella had said 'Even though Mummy hates us I still think we should give her the Mother's Day present we got her'. Talk about pulling on your heart strings.

When they got back, I apologised and said how I didn't mean it and I wanted to talk about it. I said I thought it would be helpful to think about what each person had needed

last night. I needed peace and rest, Isabella had needed to feel safe, Andre needed harmony. I asked Isabella how she thought we could all have our needs met. The whole win/win.

I can't even remember her answer, but I do remember the shift. I had been thinking I had to be responsible for everything and it was a relief to not be.

We were all listening and seeing each other's point of view. I was saying how I really did want her to be able to feel okay without us, particularly if she was keen to have sleepovers. Rather than being against each other it felt like we were a team.

I'm not suggesting screaming and swearing as a strategy. It did however bring attention that something needed to happen and lead to a good outcome. Like I say it did feel like we were more together as a team. Isabella will occasionally talk about a bad dream she's had but doesn't seem bothered.

She went off on her first school camp. The other three in her cabin were crying in the night missing their parents. She told us I didn't miss you, but I decided to think of Felix (her grandmother's cat who had passed away) so I could make myself cry too. She is a funny bunny, perhaps she'll have an acting career if she can cry on demand like that.

The Next Teacher Shows Up

Imelda had met this woman, Grace, who was a psychic/spiritual healer. She said, ‘you should go and meet her for a coffee, she’s keen to meet you’. I would call myself a spiritual person and quite open but at the same time there would be a limit. I couldn’t imagine going on a silent retreat or somewhere where you are ommmming.

Grace was lovely and there was something quite angelic about her. She seemed very kind and down to earth and had a beautiful Irish accent. We spoke for a couple of hours and hearing her described as a psychic I did want to know how good she was! Imelda and I had this fold away counter that had gone missing, it wasn’t cheap, so we were keen to find it, because it was such a mystery. Imelda thought I had it, I thought she did, and we had looked everywhere for it. Grace said, ‘A female has picked it up, it was an accident they didn’t mean to take it from you. It’s in a garage, be patient it will come back to you’.

Grace headed back to Ireland, and about five months later I got a phone call from Imelda. ‘Guess what has turned up?’ Her son was moving out of his flat and was taking things out of the garage and found our counter. It turns out her other son’s girlfriend had taken it out of the car thinking it was part of the cooking stall equipment.

Grace was spot on! When she was back in New Zealand, I heard what amazing healing experiences people were having with her. She was someone I felt comfortable with, so I thought I’ll go along and have a session with her. I didn’t have anything particular in mind – more just wanted to check it out.

When I arrived, she took me through a short meditation. A little bit different to what I had ever done but it felt fine. From a book I ran my fingers along the edge to pick a

page, which I sat and read. I then lay down and rested quietly while she did the healing and got what information she needed.

Afterwards she spoke about the messages that came through. To start with it was:

- It's time to let go of the past
- Do not be afraid
- Trust what you know
- You've got large volumes of questions in your mind
- You've got the vision and the plan – you are stopping you.

So, all things that I did relate to, but also pretty general statements that could have applied to many people.

Then things got a lot more specific, with her mentioning things I had definitely not spoken about.

- Your husband is part of the blockage on your path. You worry about him, but you need to know he is well able to do his own work on himself. You see the little boy within him, what about the little girl in you?
- You are grounded so be secure in knowing that.
- You are not too far away from being on a large stage in front of a large audience.
- You can lean on other people for support.
- Stop being hard on yourself.
- You have carried burdens but not all of them are your own.
- Your bowels – there is a fear element, nervousness and self-esteem, stagnant, little balls – you need more roughage. You need to rub your tummy and to love yourself.

Now I most certainly had not mentioned the state of my bowels to her. Although they had improved so much since discovering the NLP techniques, if they change it's a sign that something in my life is off. She was spot on with the description of what was happening there. She went on:

- Isabella is 10 years old – (I mentioned I had a daughter but hadn't said her name or age) she is a bundle of joy, enjoy her. See you in her. You are a great mother, wife, friend, daughter.

- Write that book naturally – again hadn't mentioned anything about writing a book even though it had been on my mind for about 10 years.
- You need to protect your own energy. Say, 'Archangel Michael – protect my energy from all negative toxic low vibrational energies. I do not allow them into my space. I allow the love and light into my space. Thanks, Trust, Amen'.
- You took on your dad's energy. Healing is needed to send him on with love and light. Say a prayer to Archangel Rafael 'I ask now that my Dad be at peace. I send him love, light, forgiveness and blessings. I love you and release you to the love and light. Thanks, Trust, Amen'.

Again, I hadn't mentioned anything about Dad and that he had passed away. It was very true Dad had been anxious and I did take on his energy. At one point I thought I had picked up the anxiety gene from him and had blamed him for my anxiety. It had annoyed me growing up that he didn't like conflict – sometimes it was bottled up and then he would explode and be shaking with rage. Other times rather than talking directly with us kids he would go through Mum.

I also really felt for him. He was loving and caring. He was the most incredible person whose ideas and knowledge did get overlooked because he wasn't great at standing up for himself.

She gave me some other mantra/prayers to say. It's hard to put into words but I felt so lucky to have had this session, I could keep asking as many questions as I had. The answers made so much sense that I felt like I was being given guidance and reassurance. Every time I progress in life there is usually a stage of feeling stressed, stuck or confused. I had been feeling low in energy and I left feeling very reassured and confident. Grace had written down all the messages that came through as well as the tasks for me to do.

Dad had passed away 15 years ago; following the session with Grace he kept popping into my mind. I had dropped Isabella at her sewing class and was driving home when I had this message, *turn left*. I decided to go with it which led me to the tennis courts where I had played as a kid 30 years before. I felt Dad ask me, 'Am I forgiven for that?'. Dad was quite into hygiene, perhaps a bit germophobic. He had a thing about not stepping in dog poo (I don't think anyone purposely aims to). He picked my brother and I up from tennis one day and to get to the car we had to walk through a park. He was out waving his arms around trying to direct us away from dog poo.

This was the most mortifying thing for me. I already had some older girls not being very nice about the clothes I wore and now I was praying no-one saw. It wasn't a one-off either.

Driving along 30 years later I was able to laugh about it and tell him, 'Yes you are forgiven for caring about us'. There were tears of release I guess as well. When I got to the next intersection, I did this very jerky take off, it was almost like I was going to stall even though I was driving an automatic. I got another question from Dad, 'Am I forgiven for that too?'.

Dad had been teaching me to drive when I stalled in the middle of this busy intersection, I was stuck in the middle of the road not knowing what to do. Dad was waving his hands around and some incoherent words were coming out and I felt really bad. I needed some calm instructions to get us safely out of the situation. Clearly something must have happened as I'm not still in the middle of that road but from then on, I paid for a driving instructor.

In answer to Dad's question there were more tears and laughter from me, 'Yes I forgive you for being freaked out when I had us stuck in the middle of the road'.

Over the next few weeks I felt Dad around quite a lot – I followed the 'I release you with love and light' several times and it feels like it's resolved. Now, when I catch a look at the photo of Dad in our lounge, I just have a little smile to myself. I couldn't even tell you why I smile all I know is that it's a nice feeling.

I always had used my intuition when working with clients and yet it felt like this was dialled up now. There would have been times when stories and techniques would pop into my mind and I would not have told them. Now I would just share them, when clients were on my mind, I would get in touch with them earlier.

I told Andre about what I'd experienced with Grace and he was interested in going himself. It was about two months later that he went, and he came home really uplifted. She'd given him advice about meditating more, spending time in nature. The biggest thing he got was more direction in life and ideas of what he might like to do – music, dance, working with teenagers.

When Andre started a new job, he met a guy who was quite musical. This led to Andre becoming part of a band and getting bass guitar lessons. He thinks hearing that from

Grace made me be more open to the opportunities when they presented themselves. We've had guitars in the house that have only been played once or twice and I'd genuinely forgotten that Andre could play and that they weren't just there for decoration.

I love putting on music and dancing round the house but that is the extent of my musical talents. It's so nice that Andre's found these awesome guys to play with.

But Wait There's More...

I really do believe we just keep learning and growing. As I go through this process myself, it's like there are different themes to things. I went through a stage of decluttering – objects around the house but also in my mind. There was a theme of trusting Andre more. It seemed to come from different directions.

When Imelda did sessions with Andre, he would quote what I would say. She would bring him back, saying, 'I didn't ask what Bees says, I'm asking what you want'. It had caused trouble when Andre was making decisions without me. Sometimes financial ones, sometimes committing to things that did impact on me. I guess there was also a stage where he didn't know what to think and did rely on me to make decisions.

I got the impression that Imelda thought Andre needed to stand up to me. I remember having a conversation with her saying I know he's so sweet and kind but he's also not a pushover. If he does or doesn't want to do something, he can be stubborn. I could also see what she was saying – perhaps I did get my way quite a lot. Perhaps I did need to make sure Andre was making decisions.

It had also come up in another session with Grace saying, 'You need to let him be a man'. I found it a bit hard to know what that meant. I thought I was doing well at relaxing and trusting, but when a similar theme comes from more than one person, I usually start to pay attention.

Most of our friends were through people I knew. Now that Andre was making new friends it did mean more coordinating; they'd formed a band and practice was at our place. The first time people came around, I remember thinking, *It's Saturday night, I*

was wanting to watch TV and blob, I can't properly relax. If I'm tired, I'll still have to be polite. Then I realised they were not there to see if I'm wearing scruffy clothes and looking a mess, so I said to myself, *Let that one go Becs – enjoy how cool it is that they're doing something fun, they're Andre's guests he can feed and sort whatever they need.* The reality is I don't see much of them they're all lovely guys who smile and wave as they head out to the garage and it's quite nice. As well I feel lucky to hear the music – they are talented.

It's not uncommon to hear people say you need to look after yourself. Sometimes quoting the airline staff, who tell you to put your oxygen mask on before helping others. I was starting to hear from several different people – you need to send yourself love.

I had been to a session with Grace a couple of weeks before and usually she is the gentlest, most softly spoken person I know, but during this session she had been quite firm with me. A week ago, we'd had to call the ambulance for Mum. Her heart goes into an irregular heartbeat for no apparent reason and this was the first time she was having difficulty breathing and was going blue around her mouth. It had gone back into rhythm and she was fine, but it was a wake-up call for me that she wouldn't be around for ever.

Grace asked me, 'Does Andre love you?'. I ummed and ahed in an overthinking manner. 'Right stop,' she said. 'You need to know he adores you. Your answer needed to be he loves me 110%.'

'You need to sort this not trusting yourself, not loving yourself business before your mum passes away.' I was a little bit shocked because I do get that I'm loved, and I can see why. I could also see how there was part of me that didn't, the part that still felt like this little kid who wasn't good enough. Mum is the absolute rock in our family, who loves us unconditionally. I could see if I didn't have that unconditional love for myself her dying would be devastating.

There were instructions from Grace, and she recommended reading a book *The Universe Has Your Back* by Gabby Bernstein.

There were also some techniques from an authentic leadership trainer, whose course Imelda and I had recently been on.

I felt part of this self-love was really listening to what I needed. I started including the following in my daily routine:

- Yoga – I would tell myself *I'm doing this cos I love you*
- Working on my positive learnings on releasing emotions and limiting beliefs
- Practise daily gratitude
- Listen to meditations
- Spend at least 10 minutes in nature
- Finishing this book also felt like a form of self-love.

More than a Decade Later

January 2018 marked the 10th anniversary of Health Ledger passing away. It's therefore over a decade since Andre became unwell for the first time. By all measures, life has been good. There are plenty of laughs in this household, we've got wonderful friends and family, we've also got a roof over our head.

There were times over the years where the worry clouds of 'will this happen again' have hung around low and dark. A lot of the time it's just been life, but every now and then something happens which takes us back to those times. For example, several times when we've looked into different insurances, we've been told that if Andre was in a car accident and it's not his fault, we should be aware that they might not pay out and say it was suicide.

Another little reminder was when Andre started having urinary incontinence due to one of his medications. What 30-year-old wants to experience that! Things could be worse, but it was horrendous. However, we sought help and it has been resolved.

A dilemma that comes up is when Andre has started new jobs whether to disclose his diagnosis? I truly believe his experience makes him an even better employee. He's sorted lots of issues, is calm, understanding, resilient and grateful yet knowing there is still stigma out there. I was speaking to a friend whose company was going to employ a person. The person then disclosed having been depressed in the past and was not employed. Ironically the person they did take on didn't work out.

When we've been at work Christmas parties my heart has almost burst with pride when bosses and workmates come up and tell me what a great guy he is, what a good worker. One employer said what a lovely nature he has and a calming effect on others around him.

Andre has got back to being social. He organised a big semi-surprise 40th birthday for me and he's always on the lookout for music gigs or interesting talks for us to attend or holidays with friends and family.

Not long after meeting Andre we had talked about one day wanting to foster children. We felt we were really lucky and wanted to support a child having a tough time. We don't now feel in a position to do this, however, Andre has found something along those lines – he is a Big Brother to a boy who would benefit from a male role model. Once a week they catch up with the main objective of having fun as well the boy having someone else in his life who he can trust and be listened to.

Obviously, Big Brothers Big Sisters have a thorough screening, training and matching process. It was a relief that they viewed Andre's experiences as something that would enrich rather than rule out.

I asked Andre why he wanted to be a Big Brother. He said, 'I always say I don't like the way things are in the world. It was time I put my money where my mouth is. It's for me too – the reward of seeing him smile and have fun'.

We've just attended a vow renewal of friends James and Jacqui. They were married 20 years earlier at the Chateau on the Park, the same place Andre and I were married 10 years earlier. James was one of the managers that had visited us when Andre was off work and Jacqui has very kindly helped with editing this book.

Being back in the place we were married and being part of the obvious love surrounding these two seemed super special. The duo providing the musical entertainment were people Andre had been playing with too. We were catching up with old workmates of Andre's and having great conversations. Later in the night I was talking to one of Andre's old workmates because it had come up how Jacqui was editing this book. He was saying he really wasn't aware of all that Andre had experienced. All he remembered thinking was Andre's such a good guy and shouldn't doubt himself so much. Andre and I later talked about how funny it was that at the time it was such a big deal for us. We thought what was happening was so obvious and to others what was happening barely registered.

His Perspective

What helped?

Family: My family didn't give much advice but just them coming to see us made it clear and gave the knowledge that they were on board to give whatever help was needed. Just by being there was enough.

Friends: I didn't talk much to friends about what was happening but just doing normal stuff, socialising was good, even though I did get anxious. It was definitely easier, organising Becs' 40th birthday. It was fun, thinking how cool things would be and it was good seeing people impressed with what I'd put together. Before I would have been out of control with the worry of organising it all, but it was fine, and I wasn't concerned about being anxious.

Rebecca's Group: I gained an awareness that I don't want to miss out and an understanding that I don't have to do everything.

Imelda: The work that I did with Imelda has given me peace and confidence. I'm conscious of what's going on rather than reacting. I don't sweat the small stuff and see that a lot of things don't matter.

Carl (Buteyko Breathing): I became a lot calmer by breathing through the nose which helped me to think before I act, while also improving my biking. Before, I would be wheezing and get worn out. A few weeks into the program and it was so much easier and no wheezing.

Grace: Her healing and being told no more forgiveness was needed and to send love to particular people was peace of mind. It was reaffirmed that I should not eat yeast and

that music and community work is important. To start with I took that to the extreme, thinking it meant I needed to be a social worker but what I'm doing (Big Brothers Big Sisters volunteer work) is perfect. I hadn't played guitar for over a decade but soon after the session a group of workmates put together a band and I love playing bass guitar.

Sridhar: Helped me to see where I was putting my focus and efforts. The sessions as a couple got rid of the blame and shifted our focus to understanding what we both wanted.

Musicians: There are a number of musicians and music that speaks to me. Modern punk and ska make me feel upbeat and puts out a good vibe.

Bands such as H2O with their songs 'EverReady' and 'One life, one chance' are inspiring. The lead singer Toby Morse believes in a positive mental attitude and through his One Life, One Chance program he visits schools encouraging kids to be thoughtful and not give in to peer pressure.

Michael Franti & Spearhead: Michael Franti sends out a positive message in his songs such as 'Gloria' and 'I believe'. I respect that he takes action that is brave and peaceful, and no matter how depressing the news is, his message is that the world can be a great place.

Advice to younger self

Be yourself and don't let others influence who you are.

Stop looking for more or thinking it's never enough. What you're really hunting for is a happy place. Rather than looking for something better start looking for the lessons. People like you so move on.

Advice to self when first unwell

Just don't panic, it's all going to be okay.

Advice to someone else in a similar position

Find what works for you, if something's not working don't settle for 'there are no other options'. Find what works for you and heal yourself.

Life now

Life's not perfect but I feel like I'm a lot calmer. I hardly ever panic anymore and I'm a lot more thoughtful and think about others more than I used to. I don't get down on myself if I make mistakes.

We don't sweat the small stuff as much and not even the medium stuff. Somewhere along the way I lost my jealousy, it's gone. I guess I still find I'm a little bit anxious about seeing people I used to work with as I feel I was a bit of a mess. I'm not sure if it's embarrassment or just anxiety about seeing certain people. I went to an old workmates party last year and it took a lot of mental techniques to get out of the car and go in. It was fine though.

Family life is satisfying I think it was a good thing for me becoming a parent. If I didn't have the responsibility I would likely be drinking and partying more, so, it's grounded me, made me grow up a bit and I'm proud to see how well Isabella's doing and how grounded she is.

I think home life is going well. We share what needs to be done and I look forward to coming home and doing stuff together.

I still need to be careful not to have too much coffee and amp myself up but I'm much calmer now and don't take offence. I can say no and I'm not worried about looking good or what others think. I don't bottle things up now. I either communicate the upset or let it go.

I currently take two medications on the lowest doses and this keeps me balanced. I have experimented going off them and found that I deal with life better when I have them. If I was to do some form of meditation like qigong every day I have a feeling it may be possible to be medication free. I'm not sure why I don't try this at the moment but it's a work in progress. I can't do everything at once and I am proud of how far I've come.

There's plenty more I want to do. There are always things that could be improved but for now I'm happy and content.

Looking to the future

It can be a scary prospect in terms of how the future will go – climate change, robotics, resources. I'm aware not to get caught up in negativity and do my best to make positive changes – volunteer with Big Brothers Big Sisters, not be too greedy, recycle. I could be doing a lot more, but I need to be calm about it. I think as a family we'll continue to grow, learn and love.

Books that can help

Think and Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill – helped me to cultivate a positive mental attitude.

The Power of Now by Eckhart Tolle – helped me to stop overthinking.

The 4 Agreements by Don Miguel Ruiz – helped me to not take things personally or make assumptions and to do my best.

One Second Ahead by Rasmus Hougaard – helped to give me time to think before responding.

Her Perspective

The biggest learning curve for me is that these tough times are an opportunity for us all to grow. There are times when it has been tempting to blame my disappointments or lack of achievements on Andre's diagnosis. If I wasn't so stressed, I wouldn't be eating so much. If Andre could wake up in the night to help, I wouldn't be so tired.

I had been in a meeting once when working in England when a psychiatrist had said to a patient, 'Of course you'd say that, you've got a mental illness'. We were planning the person's discharge and I'd asked him how he thought things were going. He replied he felt ready to leave hospital and gave reasons why. His father was there as well as several other staff.

I think most of us were shocked by the psychiatrist's response. He was literally laughing and seemed amused that we would listen to what the patient had to say. Certainly, in my mind it was the psychiatrist who appeared to be the crazy one.

I never wanted to use Andre's diagnosis against him and yet even if I didn't say it out loud there were times that I could have. Thinking our finances would be better if you didn't go manic and spend that money. In truth, I can spend money quite easily too, it's just when money is spent on things that I don't value as much, it seems a waste.

The old 'things would be different if only...'

The reality is I've found it a lot more empowering to take responsibility. I'd always thought of responsibility as being a boring or draining thing. It wasn't until I read in a book where they broke the word down:

Responsibility = the ability to respond

I feel a lot more able to relax and respond to what's happening. I feel more comfortable in myself and trusting that things will be okay.

Interestingly a person asked me how I was today. Not a superficial *how are you* but *I don't want to hear the real answer*, it was more of a *I want details of how things are going*. It felt quite strange answering because it didn't feel like there was any massive, life changing update. Normally I'd have been so focused on different steps to do with the business or big things happening in life.

I feel very calm and contented. There are things that I would like to do and sometimes there are things I think I should be doing better, but really, I have a feeling that things are just where they need to be and I'm happy with where things are. I'm enjoying being in the moment and I have so much to be grateful for. I get to enjoy the company of my family and friends. I have a job that I absolutely love, is extremely rewarding and feel like I was born to do.

I'm a lot less bothered about what people think about me and the people I care about. I feel a lot better about making mistakes, knowing I'll learn. I do sometimes still worry about Andre, but it doesn't last long and it's not the intense feeling I used to get. I feel a lot more relaxed about the future and a lot freer.

Together Andre and I have shared a story – and if it helps one person, to us it's a success.

Advice to younger self

You can choose how you feel. Everything is happening for a reason. You can relax knowing there will be learning for you. Enjoy the moment.

Advice to someone else in a similar position

You can look at what you're experiencing as a gift with lots of good things to come from it. It can be easy to think that the person with the diagnosis is the one with the problem. You can use it as a chance for you to let go of the things that hold you back too.

Looking to the future

It's a little hard to imagine the future. I think whatever is happening we will keep learning. I hope that it involves being able to pass on what we've learnt and getting more and more comfortable with ourselves and being able to enjoy what is happening in the present moment.

Books that can help

The Secret by Rhonda Byrne

The How of Happiness by Sonya Lyubomirsky

The Choice by Edith Eger

The Universe Has Your Back by Gabrielle Bernstein

The Long Walk to Freedom by Nelson Mandela

Thrive by Adrianna Huffington

TED Talks that can help

The surprising science of happiness

https://www.ted.com/talks/dan_gilbert_asks_why_are_we_happy

How to make stress your friend

https://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend

The power of vulnerability

https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability

How great leaders inspire action

https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action

Nurturing Hope

Desmond Tutu describes hope as...

Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.

To me it's your mindset that makes the difference. It's our mind that creates the reaction to situations. It's what creates the stress and it's also what can create the peace. Whatever situation you are in please know there's always a reason to have hope.

I'd once been on a training day which was in part about listening to people and understanding their perspective. One of the questions to ask was, 'What's important to you right now?'. I went home and asked the question to Isabella who was aged four at the time. She went quiet and thought about it and said, 'That I'm alive'. I thought what a profound statement. She really was alive in that she was often bubbly, really enjoying simple things and found lots to laugh at. As well of course just being alive having this experience of being a human and all that goes along with it.

Despite all the challenges, it does seem a privilege to be alive, so I think we may as well make the most of it. I get the sense we are here to bring our own uniqueness to the world. We are not here to worry and judge ourselves and others, but to keep on learning, keep finding ways to have joy and keep on having hope.

The Garden of Hope

One of the reasons I chose not to attend any support groups was because I wanted to have hope. I'd hear others saying people need to understand there is no cure for mental illness it's about managing the illness. It's a lifetime struggle and it's hard. It's like diabetes you have it for life and you can manage it. This was from family who were 20 or 30 years on from where we are.

To me, that was depressing. I wanted our story to be different. I wanted it to be, 'Actually it was the best thing that could have happened to us'. I wasn't wanting to put my head in the sand and yet I felt times had changed.

I knew there was some research that showed people who didn't believe their diagnosis of schizophrenia did better. They were seen by the health professionals as being in denial or lacking insight and needing to come to terms with what was happening. Ironically, they were doing better in terms of social life, study, work, etc.

It did make sense to me. Our lives play out by the labels we are given, or we give ourselves. If we believe we are responsible, irresponsible, quick learner, stupid, sporty, lazy, victim or strong, our actions follow.

I have no idea what Andre's current diagnosis is, as it's been changed several times. The only reason we needed it was to access funding of medication which is just a system thing. We have far more important labels – loving dad, supportive husband, sexy and hard worker to focus on.

To me it's like a garden. Sometimes it needs fertiliser (medication) to get the conditions right for the garden to flourish. There can be weeds (negative self-talk) that are there for years without realising and suddenly they get away and are as tall you. They have to be

removed – ideally taking out the root (mindset work such as releasing negative thoughts).

You can decide how you want your garden to look and plant those things (self-belief, helping others, laughter, being active) and enjoy watching them flourish. They take up space which means there's not as much room for weeds to grow. Companion planting (social support) helps too. Putting certain plants together can keep bugs and insects away.

Sometimes it looks stunning, other times it needs to be dormant for a while putting energy back into it. You can share with others by taking a cutting, or when a seed gets taken in the wind to another place (you never quite know how you're making a difference to others).

Weeds can still pop up and that's okay: it's a garden that's what happens. Sometimes those weeds do serve a purpose, it's okay for them to be there as they have a way of leading to positive things – we've got some weeds that bees love.

We'd never describe a garden as incurable, we accept it for what it is. It's nature – so of course there are things that are out of our control. And yet there's plenty we can do to have it flourishing. At times we need to give it more attention. That time we invest in it does reward us.



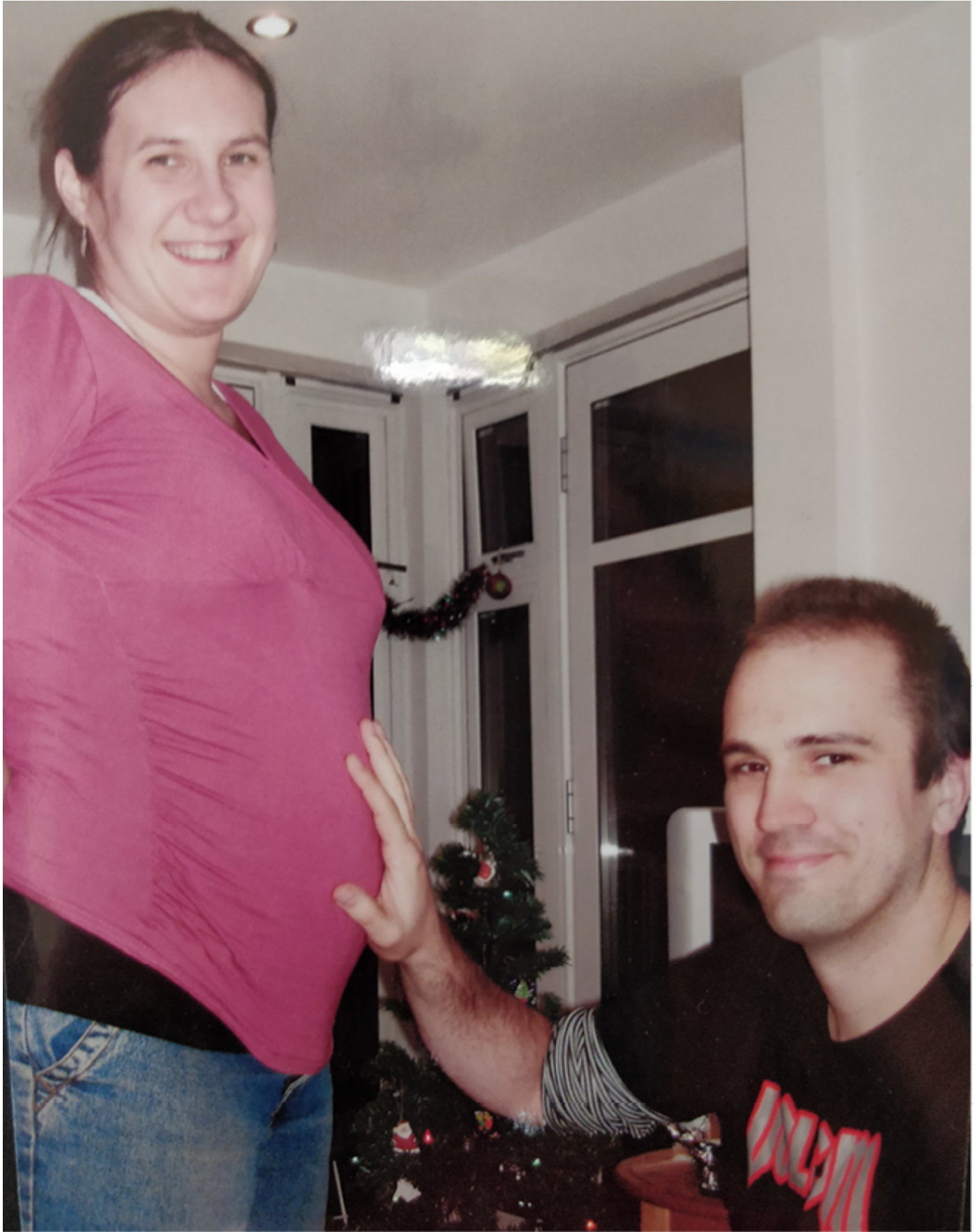
Andre & Rebecca – 6 month anniversary back at the pub where they met



Andre & Rebecca – after a year of dating a trip to Australia and New Zealand to meet the families



Andre – 6 weeks after being in hospital, a natural Dad



Rebecca, bump & Andre Christmas 2007, a few weeks before Andre became unwell



Rebecca & Andre's wedding, listening to Andre's Dad giving a speech



The day after Rebecca & Andre's wedding, Andre's mood very low thinking he's a terrible person



Rebecca, Andre & Isabella at a friend's wedding – Andre's mood really high and about to have a 'crash' and time off work



Andre competing in the Coast to Coast race raising money for the Mental Health
Foundation



Family biking fun



Healthy Minds Team & Partners – John, Imelda, Andre & Rebecca

PART 3

The How of Hope

The How

The secret of change is to focus all your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new.

~ **Socrates**

Thanks for making your way to the ‘how section’ of this book. In this part I share some of the most effective techniques I have found to shift to a positive mindset and let go of the beliefs and emotions that are holding you back.

The idea for this Rapid Mindset Shift Toolbox initially came about as a result of the first exercise in this section and the impact it had on me. I was inspired from there to start gathering up my favourite tools and techniques that I had used myself to create powerful change in my life. These tools are based on techniques I learned while completing my Diploma in Hypnotherapy in Christchurch at New Zealand School of Professional Hypnotherapy. As part of the diploma I also obtained my Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) Practitioner Certificate, and many of the techniques shown here and used in my practice are based on the teachings and principles of NLP.

I used to laugh when I saw sections in a book that explained how to read the book and yet, here I am about to do the same because I now realise how important it is. The tips below are the difference between, ‘oh yeah that makes sense’ and ‘wow this really does change my life’.

Like most things the reading helps the understanding – but it’s the taking action and doing the techniques that brings about the results. Make the decision now whether you are going to commit to just reading – or reading and doing.

If you're ready to act, let's dive in.

Rapid Mindset Shift Toolbox

When completing a technique ensure you are in a quiet space where you won't be (or are less likely to be) disturbed.

It's good to be aware that you may have a range of experiences when working your way through the techniques. The ultimate aim is for you to be feeling free and experience moments of calmness, confidence, joy, connection and the sense that no matter what is going on, 'I've got this'.

Without realising it, we avoid our feelings as a coping strategy. An uncomfortable feeling rises up and we distract ourselves with activities such as work, chores, TV, eating, alcohol, exercise, socialising, etc. It's a great strategy that works until it doesn't!

NOTE this super important information: Our feelings are valuable information used to guide us. There are no good or bad ones – they all play a part. For example, if we are feeling angry or frustrated that can allow us to stick up for ourselves or take action to do something differently. Sadness over time can motivate us to change because something isn't working. Feeling depressed can allow us to get rest, seek support and let others take responsibility.

When we're pushing down or ignoring emotions, over time it takes its toll. Those signals that came in the form of emotions start getting louder and in a way that gets our attention such as pain, injuries, not sleeping, and a range of other physical illnesses and conditions. All with the aim of stopping us so we can address what it is we need to do.

Each time you use a technique you can feel different – sometimes amazing, other times you may feel emotional and perhaps tears may come. If emotions come up **CONGRATULATIONS** – you are feeling. Feeling is healing, we need to allow the

emotion to come out. Welcome the feeling, sit with it, knowing it will pass soon and that you are right on track with feeling better. You can even open your mouth a little to help with letting the emotion out. Allow those tears to flow, allow yourself to sob if need be – it's such a great release.

Sharing without annoying

It's natural that we want to help others particularly when we see them struggling. When we find something useful, we want to pass it on so that people we care about can get the benefit. However, not everyone is ready to take on what we want them to know. One thing that can be handy to know is the only person we can change and influence is ourselves. When you use the techniques and make changes, it can inspire others. It can spark a curiosity about what it is you are doing that's making a difference. At the very least you are feeling better, which may allow you to be there more for others.

If others are open to learning more, you don't necessarily have to pass on the whole technique. You can share concepts, a small section of a strategy or talk about what you found interesting.

Approach

You'll notice that a lot of the techniques involve your senses, e.g. bringing images to mind, imagining what you'll be saying to yourself, etc.

The simple reason for this is because we are sensory beings. We experience the world through what we see, hear, feel, taste and smell. Often when we are looking for change, we try and 'think' our way out of problems. This works well in many circumstances however it does restrict us from using the full power of our mind and how it operates.

When we were born, we didn't have the ability to think. We learnt so much – how to walk, crawl, socialise, a language, all without thinking or analysing how to do it. This shows we can learn, change, create new habits and make huge progress without thinking.

The reason this is important is to remind us of the way the mind works so we can take advantage of it. It saves a lot of time and energy when we're not having to 'think' to

make changes. Another reason it's so important is because thinking has its limits.

Both myself and many clients I've worked with have often had thoughts along the lines of:

- I know logically it doesn't help worrying but I don't seem to be able to stop
- I try and think positively but I find it really hard
- I logically know I'm worthy and deserving but I don't feel it.

We feel better when we have ways of letting go of the habits (including negative/stressful thoughts) that are holding us back. This is amplified when we also know how to create new helpful, exciting ones.

Ultimately, you want to have your 'thinking' and 'feeling' mind working together to live the life you wish. One that is exciting, meaningful and free.

Most of the techniques that follow are powerful, yet simple enough that you can easily take yourself through them. Some you may find easier to work through with a practitioner. If you are wishing to see someone to support these types of techniques you may wish to search for your local Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) practitioner, hypnotherapist, therapist or mindset coach.

I hope this collection of tools and techniques will help you as much as they have helped me. And in the process, will show you how to go from feeling out of control to living the life you want.

YOU ARE IN CONTROL

Happiness is an attitude. We either make ourselves miserable, or happy and strong. The amount of work is the same.

~ **Anonymous**

Sometimes it feels like things happen that are out of our control, and it is true, there are things in life that we really can't do much about. There are, however, so many things that are in our control. One of the most powerful learnings I had was in a communications class while studying my Bachelor in Occupational Therapy. We were given a scenario:

There are three people stuck in a lift. One person is very anxious, another is angry and one is quite happy. They are all in the same situation. What is it that makes the difference in how they are feeling? It was presented to us like this:

Situation	Thoughts	Feeling
Stuck in a lift		Anxious
Stuck in a lift		Angry
Stuck in a lift		Happy

Here's how it looked after we filled in the gaps:

Situation	Thoughts	Feeling

Stuck in a lift	I'm going to die We'll never get out I don't like being in small spaces	Anxious
Stuck in a lift	This stuff always happens to me I'm going to be late I'm sick of incompetent work That anxious person is so annoying	Angry
Stuck in a lift	I'm sure it won't be long It gives me a chance to relax I'll have a story to tell people	Happy

Same situation, completely different experience. This was a real light-bulb moment for me. I could relate to blaming the situation or behaviour of others for making me feel stressed, anxious or not great about myself. The concept that changing my thoughts could change the way I felt was extremely freeing.

YES, YES, YES

This exercise demonstrates how our self-talk and our body language affects both our mind and body. When we understand the impact of the way we talk to ourselves including the tone and speed at which we're talking and our body posture, we can bring awareness to it and make changes that will work for us. Give it a go to see for yourself how you can change your energy in an instant.

- 1. Close your eyes and say to yourself: 'I can't do it, I can't do it, I can't do it'. Notice what it feels like in your body when you're saying it.*
- 2. Now open your eyes and shake it off; literally shake your arms and legs, move your head about.*
- 3. Close your eyes, stand on the tips of your toes, with your arms above your head in superman/woman pose. This time say to yourself loudly and quickly, 'yes, yes, yes, yes, yes' 'yes, yes, yes, yes, yes'.*
- 4. Now try to feel really sad whilst saying to yourself, 'yes, yes, yes, yes, yes'. Notice how your body feels...*
- 5. And open your eyes.*

People usually describe feeling quite heavy when they are saying to themselves they can't do it. It's then really hard to be on tippy toes in superman pose saying yes, yes, yes and feel sad at the same time.

Why do you think that is? Our mind associates standing tall and stretched out as powerful or a celebration. The word 'yes' is usually associated with something positive such as getting what we'd like, and when we are speaking quickly it's usually associated with energy or excitement. All the information that the mind is receiving is positive and overrules our attempts to feel sad.

Some examples of how you can apply this to your life

You can use the above technique to start off your day in superpower pose, on your tippy toes saying yes, yes, yes. It will give you quite a boost, particularly if you're feeling

low. And it only takes a few seconds to feel the positive effect.

In fact, you can use it as a boost at any time. We've had clients say they've had their colleagues do the exercise at the start of a meeting. Although it can generate a bit of nervous laughter or seem a bit silly, it does make a difference to the quality and efficiency of the meeting.

Toilet breaks are another time when people take the opportunity to use the exercise to give themselves a boost as it noticeably helps them to re-energise and focus.

If you are working on something that requires extra concentration it can be tempting to say to yourself 'this is so much work'. Instead, try saying to yourself 'yes, yes, yes,' to put yourself in a more energetic, positive zone.

When others around you are feeling down and you notice your energy is being drained, try saying some 'yes, yes, yes' to yourself to bring your energy levels back up.

Another way to use the concept is to be aware of your posture. If you find yourself slumping, stand up and do some stretches to open your body up. This sends messages to your mind – I'm confident, energetic, I've got this! You may also like to look up some other 'power poses' for additional energy boosts.

Using this very simple exercise can give you confidence in your ability to quickly bring about changes in the way you feel and become curious as to what other changes you can make.

To learn more

For further understanding of the impact of how our posture can change the way we think and feel check out Amy Cuddy's TED Talk, 'Your body language may shape who you are'

https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are?language=en.

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

Miracles start to happen when you give as much energy to your dreams as you do to your fears.

~ **Anonymous**

If you wanted to travel from Christchurch to Wellington, you wouldn't put in your GPS 'don't take me to Queenstown' or 'I don't want to go to Kerikeri'. It sounds ridiculous, but this is what we do. Rather than have our mind focused on what we do want, we focus on what we don't want.

Does any of this sound familiar? *I don't want to feel tired. I'm sick of not believing in myself. I hate being stressed all the time. I'm sick of not saying what I want. I wish I didn't look this way.*

This technique is for those times when you are wishing to make any type of change, such as improving your health, finances, friendships, relationships, work, or learning a new skill.

There are several reasons that we need to focus on what we do want rather than what we don't. When you are thinking those negative thoughts, it drains your energy. Our subconscious mind cannot process things in the negative. To illustrate this close your eyes and whatever you do don't think of a pink elephant. The subconscious mind ignores the 'don't' and in some way, even if it's for a split second, brings it to mind as an image or sound of the word.

You need to have your mind focused on what you do want so it knows what it's aiming for.

To illustrate this, use your imagination to come up with answers to the below.

Think of something you want. When everything is the way you'd like it to be, what will you:

- See
- Hear
- Feel
- Taste
- Smell

Here's an example:

Goal: I want to sleep better and wake up feeling refreshed.

Start by bringing to mind all the sensory information that you'll be experiencing when you are getting a great night's sleep.

I can imagine lying in bed and noticing the feel of the sheets and breathing slowing, my stomach rising and falling, feeling a slight smile on my face while the thought goes through my head, *I can relax knowing the purpose of sleep is to relax to allow my body to restore, process the day and prepare for tomorrow and I can start that process now while I'm still awake.* I can smell the slight scent of the toothpaste and I feel a slight smile on my face as the thought goes through my mind, *paying attention to what I notice in the moment is helping me relax further and my body loves it.*

I can hear my thoughts of three things I'm grateful that happened today, I notice my breathing is even slower and I feel the sensation of my belly rising and falling. I begin to imagine tomorrow going really well, I can see myself waking up and stretching, there is a moving feeling in my stomach like I'm excited to get up and get on with the day. I can hear the thought, *I'm looking forward to the day – bring it on!*

When I get up in the morning, I feel tall, there is a spring in my step, and I hear the music I played because I felt like moving. I feel the sensation of the water run over my face in the shower. I imagine arriving at work, smiling at colleagues, holding eye contact for a few seconds, they are smiling back saying, 'What's up – you look full of energy'.

In the afternoon I am still feeling energetic, I notice it most in my posture. My shoulders are back and I'm making statements to myself, *You've been really focused today, good on you.*

I can see myself in a meeting where I share my opinion with a strong, confident voice. Another person disagrees with me and I can feel a calmness in my stomach and my

temperature remains the same. I tell myself, *You're doing really well, stay calm and interested and something good will come from this conversation.* I leave the meeting ready to focus on what I've got to do next.

When I do feel my energy drop a little, I hear me saying to myself, *What do you need – shall we go for a walk, have a drink to re-energise?* I have a few pieces of apple and it tastes delicious. I'm enjoying all the sensations, the sound it makes, the texture, the taste and I hear myself saying, *It's so good that you are taking the time to give me great food and fully enjoy it.*

While I'm going home I notice beautiful trees, I feel the sun on my face, I notice the clouds in the sky and say to myself, *You are so lucky – good on you for taking the time to notice all the beauty around you.*

After dinner I can see myself sitting down and making a phone call to a friend, I can hear the laughter at times and feel the warmth flow from my stomach to my face as I do. After the call I tell myself, *That's great you had the energy to make the call, in the past you would have been too tired.* I decide to do some tidying and cleaning and love how the kitchen bench and table has space now and looks shiny.

I feel my muscles sinking into the bed more, I notice the coolness of my pillow and slight scent of washing powder. I feel the air move through my nose and notice the coolness of the air as I breathe in, and the warmth of the air as I breathe out through my nose. I notice this feeling of drifting... and have a vague thought *This feels really good.*

GPS OF THE MIND

Accept yourself, love yourself, and keep moving forward. If you want to fly, you have to give up what weighs you down.

~ Roy T. Bennett

This exercise allows your mind to experience, in the now, what it is that you would like to achieve. It helps your mind understand what it is aiming for, as well as knowing what it will see, hear, feel, and possibly smell and taste when you've achieved it.

It can be hard to imagine getting from where you are now to achieving and maintaining your goals. By allowing your mind to experience the steps along the way, you can be prepared for the challenges that may prevent you from reaching your goal. If you find it difficult to move onto the next step, just stand, take a deep breath and ask yourself *what is it that I need to keep moving forward?* It may be confidence or self-belief. Just take a few deep breaths and imagine that confidence and self-belief pouring into you. When you are ready, you can take the next step.

Start by rating yourself out of 10 where you are in relation to your outcome:

1 = Couldn't be further away.

10 = Feels amazing, have achieved and maintained the changes I want.

Find a space where you have room in front of you. Imagine there's a line ahead of you and close your eyes.

Experience through all your senses, what it is like being the rating you gave yourself. For example, if you rated yourself 4/10, what do you see when you are 4/10? What sounds do you associate with being 4/10? What things do you hear you telling yourself? What does it physically feel like and how is your posture? Which smells and tastes do you associate with being 4/10?

Continue moving forward one rating at a time, until you have experienced how fantastic it is being 10/10! Then open your eyes, knowing that this exercise has helped your mind to know what it's aiming for, and what to do on that unconscious or automatic level.

HOW TO FEEL GOOD

So keep your head high, keep your chin up, and most importantly, keep smiling, because life's a beautiful thing and there's so much to smile about.

~ **Marilyn Monroe**

We naturally form associations connecting one thing to another. This technique allows you to trigger the feeling you want by creating an association with an action, so you can bring about that feeling whenever you would like to experience it.

1. Choose your desired state, e.g. feeling calm, confident, motivated, focused, secure.
2. Close your eyes and bring to mind a time when you strongly experienced the feeling you want.
3. Really experience what you see, hear (including what you are saying to yourself), feel within your body, and maybe smell and taste.
4. When you have a strong sense of that feeling do your trigger action.
(Examples of trigger actions are pressing your thumb and finger together, making a fist, stroking your arm or visualising a colour.)
5. Let the images get bigger and brighter, the sounds clearer, and feel stronger. Just before those sensations peak, stop the trigger action. Open your eyes and briefly bring your attention to something in the room to reset to neutral.
6. Repeat steps 2–5 ten times.
7. Close your eyes and fast forward in time to a situation where you want to have the desired feeling you've created with a trigger action. It is usually a time when you are experiencing the opposite of what you would like.
8. Experience what is happening, then use your trigger action and notice what you see, hear and feel.
9. Open your eyes and enjoy feeling good!

Tips for success:

- Make your trigger action something easy to repeat in the situation you are likely to use them.
- You can create as many trigger actions as you would like, e.g. you may have one for feeling relaxed, one for feeling energised, one for feeling focused.
- The more you use your trigger action the stronger and quicker you experience the desired feeling.

FLICK IT AWAY

Anything that costs you your peace is too expensive. Learn to let it go.

~ **Author unknown**

Many things can happen that upset or annoy us. Someone says something that hurts or that we disagree with, we're asked to do something we would rather not, we see something on the news or social media that pushes our buttons, or we've got into self-doubting mode. We keep replaying the events in our mind – hearing what was said, seeing what happened and feeling how we felt at that time.

There are various ways to respond to these situations. One of the responses can be deciding I don't want to do anything about it I just want to move on. Even when we choose this approach it can keep popping into our mind – replaying what happened, what 'should' have happened, worrying what could happen in future. This is an extremely quick technique that gives our mind a message, *I'm choosing to let go and focus my energy on what I want.*

This can be used at any time when you notice you're wanting to focus on work, be really present with family or friends, relax at the end of the day or are attempting to go off to sleep and an event keeps running through your mind.

1. Close your eyes and think of something that bothers/distresses you or something that you don't want to think of anymore. Notice how you feel when you are bringing it to mind.
2. Focus on the image or movie of that memory in your mind.
3. Take that picture and make it smaller, move it off into the distance and drain the colour and brightness out of it.
4. If you hear voices or sounds of the scene, make them fade away.
5. Make the picture so small, you have to squint to see what's there, then make it even smaller.
6. When it's the size of a breadcrumb get ready to give it a flick (you can do the flicking motion in your mind or physically with your fingers). Now flick it away

and it's gone.

7. Open your eyes and notice how you feel now with it gone.

Here are some examples of times when this technique can help:

- Your boss has dismissed your suggestion, rolled their eyes and looked angry saying, 'No that's not going to work'.
- A family member blames you for something you think isn't fair.
- A customer, member of the public or someone on social media makes a comment that insults you.
- A friend brushes off what you are concerned about.

FINDING FOCUS

Our attention is the fuel that drives our lives. The clay with which we mould our days.

~ **Viral Mehta**

We all have a great imagination. When we are stressed out, we are usually imagining the future negatively – thinking of the things that might go wrong or what's currently not great continuing to happen. We are programmed to have a bias towards the negative for our survival. Being alert to what can go wrong can help prepare us or keep us safe. On the other hand, it can be extremely draining of our time and energy. It can also stop ideas and creative solutions, as well as preventing us from enjoying what is going well in the moment.

Here is a technique that allows us to draw any positives from worst case and best case thinking and then choose where to put our focus.

It's a useful one to go through when you are beginning to feel stressed, or hopeless about a situation. This could be when you're worried about a family member or friend, unsure about a relationship, having financial worries, worried about your own health or not sure what decision to make, e.g. whether to change job, speak up, move or leave a relationship.

1. Hold out your hands with your palms facing up.
2. Close your eyes and in one hand put an image that represents the worst-case scenario. Describe all that is happening in this scenario.
3. In the other hand put an image to represent the best-case scenario. Describe what is happening in this scenario.
4. Look at both scenarios and acknowledge that each one is possible.
5. Go to the worst-case scenario and list the advantages and disadvantages of putting your focus on it.
6. Go to the best-case scenario and list the advantages and disadvantages of putting your focus on it.

7. On reflection, which scenario seems most likely (you may wish to give percentages to each).
8. Which scenario do you choose to give your focus and attention to? Once you've decided let go of the other scenario. In whatever way makes sense keep all learnings and positives that came from focusing on it and let the rest fade away.
9. Hold the scenario you choose to focus on with both hands. Spend some time noticing what you see, hear and feel when you focus on this outcome.

Here's an example:

You are worried that something bad will happen to a family member.

In one hand put an image of the worst-case scenario – black clouds

Imagine all that's happening in the scenario, e.g. your family member gets more and more withdrawn, won't speak about what's happening, looks really sad, is not working. You find it hard to sleep, are exhausted and worry all the time. You take time off work to look after them, but struggle to pay the bills. Your family member ends their life. You find it hard to carry on.

Now, in other hand put an image of the best-case scenario – a big smile

Imagine all that's happening in the best-case scenario. Your family member has more moments of enjoyment. They're doing little things that are helping like going for a walk and spending time with friends. In time, they talk about what they feel they've gained from it, and thank you for the support you've given. They say the caring did help, and now they are more comfortable with themselves, stronger than ever and more appreciative of life.

Advantages of putting focus on worst-case scenario:

- It motivates me to keep searching for ways to help and let others know how important this is
- Allows me to think about what might be needed for me and my family member
- I can prepare myself that if something bad happened how I could cope.

Disadvantages of putting my focus on worst-case scenario:

- It's depressing and drains my energy
- I feel scared and hopeless.

Advantages of putting focus on best-case scenario:

- It gives me hope, I feel better
- I can paint a picture for my family member about the possibilities I see for them
- I feel lighter and therefore have more energy to do what I need to help
- What I put my focus on I'm more likely to bring about – this is what I do want.

Disadvantages of putting focus on best-case scenario:

- If I share my hopes my family member might think I don't get it or find it annoying.

Which scenario seems more likely

Best-case scenario – 70%

Worst-case scenario – 30%

I choose to put my attention on the best-case scenario and have the worst-case scenario fade into the background behind, however, it's still there in case it needs to prepare me or give me any ideas. When I hold the best-case scenario in my hand I can hear me giving myself encouragement for relaxing and taking care of me, I can see my family member having a shower, them smelling fresh and saying they actually feel better for it, I can see them listening to music and moving their body like they're enjoying it, when I give them a hug it's like they're more there. I hear them saying, 'It is what it is' and not seeming so bothered in a good way. I can hear them ringing up saying that a session with a therapist went well. I hear them down the track describing what it was like when they weren't feeling themselves and how life is better now.

SWISH FOR SUCCESS

Success? I don't know what that word means. I'm happy. But success, that goes back to what in somebody's eyes success means. For me, success is inner peace. That's a good day for me.

~ Denzel Washington

Here is a visual exercise that allows us to shift our focus to what we would like to bring about. It's a signal to the mind we are letting go of the old and creating a new way. The positive energy we experience whenever we do this exercise assists with us feeling motivated and ready for change.

You can use it as a way of letting go of anxiety or a phobia, or to improve your relationships, fitness, health, money or social situations. It can be applied to anything you would like to be different.

1. Bring to mind something you would like to be different. Fully experience what it's like in the situation you would like to be different. What do you see, hear and feel?
2. Rate how you currently feel about the situation:
1 = terrible, couldn't be worse, up to 10 = amazing. Open your eyes and think of your favourite colour to reset your mind to neutral.
3. Close your eyes and imagine the new/positive image of what you would like. What do you see, hear and feel? Open your eyes and think of a song you like to reset your mind to neutral.
4. Now close your eyes and imagine the old negative image (black and white), paused still on a TV or computer screen. Now imagine a tiny, tiny box in the bottom left corner of the image. In this tiny box is the new positive image (colour) of what you'd like.
5. What's going to happen on the count of three, is a loud swish or zoom sound. As this sound is made, the tiny new, positive image is going to burst over the old/negative image. Let the old image shrink and fade away, replaced by the new/positive one.
6. 1, 2, 3 swish/ zoom. Let the new positive image burst over the old negative one.

7. Now try to put back that old/negative image and repeat steps 5–7 (around 7–8 times).

Each time let the positive image get brighter, bigger, louder, stronger, more powerful. Be aware of what is changing and what you are noticing. Double the size of the positive image. Have fun with it – add music, letting the image get brighter, sharper, clearer.

8. You may notice after a while it starts getting harder to bring back the old image. When you no longer can, step into the image of the new positive way of being.

9. Enjoy how you feel amazing and look amazing. Every fibre of your being is feeling great and filled with energy. All those feelings are getting stronger, more powerful. You are radiating, glowing, beaming.

10. Now imagine a time in the future – a week, month or year from now, and notice how it's different.

11. When you are ready open your eyes.

Here are some examples where this technique can help:

Fear of flying

Old image: Looking down at white knuckles while on seated on a plane.

New image: Smiling, relaxed shoulders, watching a movie on the plane.

Wanting to improve your health

Old image: A reflection of looking despondent and your clothes looking tight.

New image: A slim, toned you, standing tall, smiling while doing an activity you love.

Wanting to feel confident and comfortable in a social situation

Old Image: Standing in corner on your own with slightly slumped shoulders looking at your phone.

New Image: Standing tall in the middle of the room, smiling and chatting to others.

HAPPINESS BOOST

Those who are truly grateful are deeply moved by the privilege of living.

~ **Auliq-Ice**

Two useful questions to ask yourself are:

Right in this moment am I okay? (the answer is usually always yes)

In this moment what is there to be grateful for?

There is always something to be grateful for. An extreme example of this is described by Viktor Frankl, a survivor of a concentration camp, in his book *Man Search for Meaning*. With all the horrendous things happening around them he could still see the beauty in a sunset. On one occasion he observed two other prisoners admiring the reflection of the radiant sky in puddle. One of them remarked to the other, 'How beautiful the world could be'.

When we bring these things to mind, we are changing the way we feel. We are changing our physiology. There is mounting evidence of the benefits of being grateful.

When we are no longer able to change our situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.

~ **Viktor Frankl**

Create your 'grateful' routine.

Perhaps you want to start off your day bringing to mind what you are grateful for. Sometimes people use their gratefuls as a way of transitioning. For example, when they leave work to help them arrive home in a more relaxed state. In order to create a routine, associate the gratefulness with something you do every day, for example eating. If you love writing or are a big fan of stationery you may wish to have a grateful journal to fill in before bed.

If you would like to access a free beautifully designed ‘Month of Gratefulness’ sheet – go to <http://healthyminds.co.nz/free-downloads.html>

THE POWER OF WORDS

It is not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves.

~ **Sir Edmund Hillary**

The way we speak to ourselves has a great impact on our energy and what we do. You know how people have a swear jar, where every time they swear, they put money in the jar. We believe it's a good idea to have them for certain words.

A 'should' jar, a 'try' jar or a 'but' jar. At the very least bring awareness of the impact of them. Here is an exercise to demonstrate this.

1. Think of something you are saying that you 'should' be doing, e.g. I should be exercising more, I should go and visit, I should be more tolerant, I should make time for myself.

Write it down: 'I should _____

2. Close your eyes and experience where you notice it most in your body when you say the sentence to yourself.

I should _____.

I notice it in my body _____ and describe that feeling as _____.

3. Now take the same sentence and this time change 'should' to 'could'. Close your eyes, say the statement several times to yourself. Notice when you are saying this where you experience it most in your body.

I could _____

I notice it in my body _____ and describe that feeling as _____.

4. Finally change 'could' to 'choose'. Close your eyes, say the statement several times to yourself. Notice when you are saying this where you experience it most in your body.

I choose _____

I notice it in my body _____ and describe that feeling as _____.

Which word is most likely to help you achieve what you'd like? Should, could or choose?

Most people find that should is a very draining word. Could tends to be a useful word when the person wants to keep their options open and not commit. Choose is a very powerful word when the person does want to carry out whatever they are wanting to do.

When you are doing this exercise and choose doesn't sit comfortably with you, chances are it's not what you really want. We might be saying this to ourselves because it's what others expect, or we think is the right thing. My advice is, save yourself time and energy and focus on something else.

Either choose to not do it or if you do choose to do it... do it wholeheartedly.

Should can also disguise itself as a 'I have to...', 'I must...' or 'I can't not...'.

When people are caring for someone, they can tell themselves or say to others, 'I have to go and do this, no-one else will'. The reality is, it is still our choice. To demonstrate this, we will sometimes ask the person saying the 'I have to...', 'Was there a gun to your head?'.

The answer has always been no. Sometimes the result is the person realising – I thought I had to and now I am going to change what I've been doing. Other times the person keeps on doing what they've been doing while changing 'I have to' to 'I'm choosing to'. That way the experience is a lot more enjoyable.

When we realise it's a choice, we can feel a lot better about the situation.

Another cheeky word is 'but'. It was explained to me once that when we use it, we're basically discounting all that was said before it. Again, this can be quite an energy drainer.

Have a go saying these sentences and notice the difference in energy as you say them. This is about tuning into how your body feels when you are speaking.

'I'm getting better, but I've got a long way to go.'

'I'm getting better and I've got a long way to go.'

By using a but here we are taking away the positive aspect and the positive energy attached to those words, leaving us focused on the hard part.

Which one do you think gives you the energy and focus to keep getting better?

This also applies when you are talking to others.

'I'm happy you did the dishes, but can you wipe the bench too.'

'I'm happy you did the dishes, and can you wipe the bench too.'

It's subtle and yet it can make such a difference these little tweaks to words we use.

'I'm pleased I've lost weight, but I still have more to go.'

'I'm pleased I've lost weight and I still have more to go.'

'But' can dismiss what has been said before it. We know what we focus on the mind brings more of. We therefore don't want the positives to be dismissed.

STRESS BUSTING

When you release stress you come home to yourself.

~ **Donna Eden**

We store stress in the body. There are different ways we can remove stress – sometimes through physical action, like going for a walk or having a massage. We can also use our mind to let stress go.

In the same way that bringing to mind a thought can create a stress response, imagining stress leaving our body removes tension. Here is a technique that uses our mind to quickly remove stress.

1. Feel the stress, worry, anxiety or panic. Notice where you experience it most in your body (often it is in our head, chest or stomach)
2. Take time to experience it, acknowledge it, even welcome it.
3. Put a colour to that stress.
4. Imagine that there is a tiny window in that area of stress.
5. Close your eyes and clench your fist.
6. Imagine opening that window to release a tiny amount of that stress. As you do slightly release your clenched fist. See the stress floating high up in the air until it evaporates, and it's gone.
7. Imagine opening the window and continue to release small amounts of stress. Releasing your fist as you do. Watch it evaporate as it drifts high into the atmosphere and disappears. Continue until all the stress is gone and your hand is open.
8. Focus on how good your body now feels.
9. Scan your body for any other areas of stress or tension and repeat the exercise.
10. Open your eyes and enjoy a feeling of lightness, calmness or a shift in energy.

Variation

Imagine the stress area as coloured liquid. Remove with a dropper and place into a large swimming pool. As it dropped into the pool it dilutes until you no longer see any colour and it's gone.

MAGIC OF METAPHORS

Words can inspire and words can destroy. Choose yours wisely.

~ **Robin Sharma**

Our mind is listening to what we are telling it and how we describe our experiences are often quite sensory based.

- I'm bitter about it. (taste)
- Can you see it from my view? (visual)
- I don't like the sound of that. (auditory)
- What's the point? (visual, feeling)
- I'm stuck. (kinesthetic)

We also talk in metaphors, for example:

- I'm hitting my head against a brick wall.
- When I go to talk, I freeze.
- I get so angry I just see red, my blood boils.

We can use the way we speak to describe a problem metaphorically to give us what we need.

1. How are you describing the problem? What's it like?
2. What images, sounds, feelings come to mind as you imagine that?
3. What would be the opposite image of this?

Example responses:

1. It's like I'm on a treadmill, it's speeding up and I can't get off.
2. Being a little mouse in a dark room on a treadmill, hot, sweating and tired legs.
3. Stopping the treadmill and taking a stroll in a beautiful field with the sun beaming down.

We can also go directly to the solution metaphorically

- In this moment what do I need?
- I need a rocket under me.
- I need a hug.
- I need confidence.
- I need encouragement.
- I need to believe in myself.

What our mind is describing we need, we can give to ourselves.

We can imagine a rocket under us blasting off, propelling us forward, giving us energy to get up and do what needs to be done. A hug might be the biggest, softest bear with the most welcoming embrace that makes us feel safe, special, important.

Confidence could be imagining swallowing a confidence pill where it seems easy to be relaxed, it vanishes doubts and we feel confidence oozing from us in a kind, compassionate and yet unwavering strength, happy for others to disagree, confident in our ability to express ourselves, be heard, to say yes to some things, not to others and get things done.

Encouragement can be brought to mind by having a mini cheerleading team on your shoulder, saying the words that you need to hear. Words that make you smile, give you strength, feel like you've got this, that people have your back and you have the energy to get on with it.

Belief in yourself could be putting a colour to that self-belief. Imagine being showered in that colour, it circulates through your body, the colour is getting stronger, more vibrant. As the feeling of self-confidence grows within, every little cell is spreading that self-belief like a Mexican wave that continues circling round, along with that fun, exciting energy radiating out.

BE HEARD

Raise your words not your voice. It's rain that grows flowers, not thunder.

~ **Rumi**

There are four types of communication styles: passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive and assertive. Each has its upside and downside to it. For example:

Passive communication can avoid conflict in the short term. Long term it can lead to people not trusting you or you feeling frustrated because you are not sharing your ideas or opinions.

Aggressive communication can mean you are listened to or get your way in the short term. In the long term it can lose people's friendship or respect and feel out of control.

Passive-aggressive communication is when a person is indirect about what they are experiencing. On the surface they appear passive but underneath they are expressing their anger in subtle ways such as sarcasm. Short term you've avoided conflict and may receive support from others. Long term people may not trust you, thinking you don't say what you truly think and maybe are talking behind their backs.

Assertive communication is about expressing your thoughts, feelings and needs in a way that's respecting yourself and others. You are a lot more likely to be heard, and when it comes to conflicts, come up with win/wins.

3 Part Assertion Message

When you _____. (state the specific behaviour)

I feel _____.

I would like _____. (state the specific behaviour)

That way _____. (state the benefit/s including for the other party)

Example

When you look sad, I ask you what's wrong and you say nothing.

I feel worried and rejected.

I'd like you to tell me what's going on for you.

That way I won't keep asking and if there's a problem we can work it out together.

When you ask me what's wrong and I say nothing.

I feel confused and sometimes harassed.

I'd like you to know that it's sometimes hard to put into words and when I say nothing it means I'd like space.

That way I feel more like talking to you at other times.

What is a situation you would like to express in an assertive way to be heard?

BE CALM NOW

Be where you are, otherwise you'll miss your life.

~ **Buddha**

You've probably heard of mindfulness; you might have seen articles about it being taught to children at school. Maybe you've gone to a class or had some techniques shown at work.

Mindfulness is about bringing your attention to what's happening right now. The reason we do this is because of its calming effect. Most of the time when we are stressing, we're either playing re-runs in our minds of things that we didn't want, for example, *I should have done that differently, I didn't like the way I was spoken to*, etc.

The other place we could be in our minds is in the future imagining things going wrong, for example, *what if I don't know what to say, what if things get worse, what if I don't have enough money, what if I'm not prepared*, etc.

Most of the time if we ask ourselves the question, *In this moment am I okay?* the answer 99% of the time will be yes. We are clothed, warm, safe, have enough food to sustain us and we're alive. Being in the moment is therefore a good place to be.

We can focus on the present by bringing our attention to what is happening right now. What can you see, what can you feel, what can you hear, what you can smell and maybe what can you taste?

For me right now – I can see pictures that my daughter has drawn, which have made me smile and I'm noticing how that smile feels. I feel the muscles round my face working, as well a warm feeling in my heart. I can hear the sounds of the computer typing, there is a bird chirping, cars driving by, a hammer being used. I'm breathing out to test if I can smell anything on my breath (nice!) and I can vaguely smell the almonds I ate 20 minutes ago. As I do this, I feel the warmth of the air on my nose, and my fingers and toes are a little cold.

Wherever you are, you can be mindful. My favourite time to be mindful is while doing the dishes – noticing the warmth of the water, the shape and colour of the bubbles, the food moving off and shiny finish.

Gardening is another of my favourites. I feel the warmth or breeze on my skin, spotting all the tiny creatures, the way the birds hop and sing, seeing up close the beauty in the leaves and flowers, muscles tensing to pull out a determined weed and the releasing feeling when it does come out.

Driving, queuing, cleaning, working, walking, eating. Really being with people and observing them – their smile, their laugh, their energy. We're lucky enough to have these senses and we can put them to good use.

Mindfulness for thoughts and feelings

When it comes to our thoughts and feelings without realising it, we can be judging them. We can think to ourselves, *I shouldn't be thinking or feeling this way*, and this can drain our energy. We end up spending more time experiencing the thoughts and feelings we were attempting to avoid.

A mindfulness solution is to observe them.

Example

I am thinking 'I am stressed' and when I think that I notice my shoulders and stomach tense.

When we observe rather than judge, the thoughts and feelings tend to go faster. When we judge, it tends to hang around longer. This is because we're giving it attention which fuels it.

It can be helpful to think of thoughts and feelings like buses coming into a bus station. Sure, they may rock up and sit there for a bit, but we don't have to climb on board. We can notice them and decide that's not the destination for us, knowing it will move on soon enough.

A destination we observe and decide is not for us might be the 'I'm not good enough bus', the 'I can't do this bus', the 'I'm useless bus', the 'it's hopeless bus', or the 'feeling stuck bus'.

Destinations might arrive that we do like, such as the 'feeling joy bus', the 'I'm doing great bus', the 'I'm important bus', or the 'I'm proud I keep learning bus'. These might be ones you choose to hop on board and enjoy for a while. Literally we can tell ourselves I'm choosing to enjoy this feeling or thought.

The more you observe and don't hop on board every bus that arrives, your mind can begin to decide it's not worth running that bus as much or may discontinue the service all together. On top of this, it can also start operating more of the services we'd like.

Tension is who you think you should be. Relaxation is who you are.

~ Chinese Proverb

THE INNER CRITIC

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? ...'

~ **Marianne Williamson**

Our thoughts play a massive role in what we do or don't do in life.

We pick up beliefs without realising it, often when we're very young and don't even have the logical, analytical part of our mind developed to question whether something is true.

For example, if we're told we're useless we may not have the ability to think – *it's probably this other person having a bad day or their limited skills in dealing with a situation. It's not really about me.*

If we see others able to do something that we haven't mastered yet we can decide we're not intelligent, sporty or good enough.

We might have grown up around people who have told us that life is hard or that life is an exciting adventure, that you'll be let down or good things will be on their way for you, not to trust people or that there is good in everyone, that money is really important or that it's evil, that having a certain type of job is good or bad. That eating healthy and exercising is fundamental to a happy life or that it's boring and not worth it. How do you know what your beliefs are and those which belong to others? It's not really a matter of where did they come from; the most important question is are they working for you now?

Most beliefs worked for us at some point.

For example:

As a child when you expressed your opinion or questioned the rules and you were shouted at, put down, embarrassed, told you were wrong or physically hurt, it would make sense that having a belief – *It's better to say silent, No-one wants to hear me* or *I've got nothing good to say* as it protected you and kept you safe.

As an adult you may decide that having this belief is now holding you back. Perhaps you are feeling frustrated by not expressing your thoughts. You may be not getting what you want because you don't make requests. Or you may not be taking the chances in life that can lead to great relationships, work opportunities, improved health, etc.

The power of changing beliefs

You can see how beliefs stop you from doing things that might be fun, fulfilling and build your confidence more. Another really important reason to let go of unhelpful beliefs is the energy that they drain from you.

In order to demonstrate the effect our thoughts have on our energy we often do the arm test with clients. Remembering when we are thinking there are often corresponding images, sounds and feelings going through our mind.

We ask the person to bring to mind three events: a time when they felt really proud, disappointed in themselves and finally a time when they felt very excited. They bring one event to mind at a time. We ask them to recall what they saw, the sounds (including what they were saying to themselves), how they were feeling and where they noticed that most in their body. They are given the instruction to keep their arm out straight. We will apply pressure to push their arm down and they are to keep their arm out straight in front of them. I'm sure you can guess what happens. The strength in the arm changes as they bring to mind different events. The weakest being when remembering the disappointing event.

Do try this at home. Ask someone to test you. The trick to it is waiting until the person has in mind the event and is recalling the sounds, images and feeling. It also pays to remind the person the aim isn't to resist and get the arm up to the ceiling, instead just keep it straight in front.

It's a reminder of how powerful our mind is, that it can change our energy and physiology within seconds. It doesn't mean that we must go around imagining happy memories all the time. It can however mean we have ways to refocus our mind and get the right energy for what we're aiming for.

It also means we can get excited about releasing beliefs that no longer serve us. Knowing what a difference it makes to our energy and experience of life.

How to create empowering new beliefs

There are different ways to create new beliefs that empower you. I was so grateful to attend Helen Mitas' UHS training which covered releasing negative emotions and limiting beliefs, as it brought it home to me why we hold on to things. The understanding in her approach (which is a modified program by Timeline Therapy) is that emotions (feelings) and beliefs are stored as memories along with the event. We experience something, and the memory of the event, emotions and beliefs are stored together.

Not matter how horrendous the event there is always something to take from it. It can sound crazy or insensitive that something positive can come from these events or times. The positive learning can come years or even decades later.

Some of the positive learnings can be:

- I find amazing strength when I need
- I'm able to speak up
- I can move on
- I can trust myself
- I can be excited about a new situation
- I'm likeable
- I'll stand my ground when needed
- I'm okay as I am
- I'm free to allow people to be themselves and own my own stuff
- I'm understood and worthwhile
- I listen to my intuition and do what's right for me
- I can start afresh
- I can be free

- I can be me
- I get more when I give more
- I can show people who I am and what I like
- Mistakes are my biggest learnings
- I could have asked for more support
- I'm safe in my mind
- I'm brave
- I still have something to offer
- I've used it before (my power to succeed) I can use it again
- I'm good enough and I feel it.

It's always a little difficult to get across on paper how powerful these words are. If you can imagine the incredible shift in energy a person experiences, the empowerment, lightness, peace and look of strength on their face as they allow these learnings (that were always there) to come forward and be with them always now.

You can see why a person wouldn't want to let go of such incredibly powerful learnings. Through this process, you get to take all the learnings with you, now and into the future, while at the same time letting go of the draining emotions and beliefs.

The beauty is you don't need to share with the therapist the details of what happened (which can often be traumatising in itself). You can still be taken through the process and experience that freedom of really sorting something and a feeling of lasting relief and new energy.

There are a couple of reasons that I haven't included the full process in the book. For one, it is copyrighted for the system. It also seems to be a technique where people get so much more when they are working one on one with a person. Although a straightforward and safe process, you do want the therapist to be trained in this approach particularly for times when the person gets a sense there is a part of them that doesn't want to let go.

The reason I have included this taster is because I really think this concept gives us hope. Even in situations we're struggling with, the idea that there is some positive learning in this, for me, can change the way we feel about a situation. We can start to be curious – what might be the learning here? Often it seems once we've got the lesson/learning we can move on.

If we've been annoyed or frustrated with ourselves that we haven't been able to let go of something, know there is a really good reason for it and there is a way.

BYRON KATIE FOUR QUESTIONS AND TURNAROUNDS

A massive thanks to Byron Katie for allowing us to include this in our book. It follows on from that concept that we pick up beliefs often at a young age and without questioning whether it's true or not. It also allows us to notice the impact a thought has, and the possibilities of what can happen if we didn't have the belief.

These powerful questions sometimes allow us to see the ridiculousness in what we once believed. It can be a shift in an instant. Other times it gives us more awareness and puts us in a position of choice – to hold on to the belief/thought or to let it go.

It can be useful to have someone you trust take you through the questions. They can help you identify the thought/belief. Sometimes when we're identifying the thought that's impacting us, our logical part of the mind starts justifying and interfering with the original thought.

Here are some examples:

Logical thought – 'I know that I'm loved I just don't always feel it.'

Actual thought – 'I'm unlovable.'

Logical thought – 'Other people say that I'm intelligent and I know there are aspects I'm good at, but I don't always feel it.'

Actual thought – 'I'm dumb.'

Logical thought – 'I get that I'm making progress, but I'm still embarrassed about my body.'

Actual thought – 'I'm fat.'

Logical thought – 'People do say nice things about me, but I don't really know if they are just doing that because they have to.'

Actual thought – 'People are against me.' or 'People don't like me.'

When we are with clients to get to the thought that's driving what they don't want, we ask the question – what's underneath that thought? We keep doing this until we notice the

person's energy change. There is a look of hurt, of energy drained, of frustration and you know you've reached it.

To do this for yourself, use the following four questions and optional sub-questions with the concept that you are investigating. When answering the questions, close your eyes, be still, and witness what appears to you. The enquiry stops working the moment you stop answering the questions.

1. Is it true? (Yes or no. If no, move to question 3.)
2. Can you absolutely know that it's true? (Yes or no.)
3. How do you react, what happens, when you believe that thought?
 - Does that thought bring peace or stress into your life?
 - What images do you see, past and future, and what physical sensations arise as you think that thought and witness those images?
 - What emotions arise when you believe that thought? (Refer to the Emotions List, available on thework.com.)
 - Do any obsessions or addictions begin to appear when you believe that thought? (Do you act out on any of the following: alcohol, drugs, credit cards, food, sex, television, computers?)
 - How do you treat the person in this situation when you believe the thought?
How do you treat other people and yourself?
4. Who would you be without the thought? Who or what are you without the thought?

Turn the thought around. A statement can be turned around to the self, to the other, and to the opposite.

Find at least three specific, genuine examples of how each turnaround is true for you in this situation. For each turnaround, go back and start with the original statement.

For example, 'He shouldn't waste his time' may be turned around to 'I shouldn't waste my time', 'I shouldn't waste his time' and 'He should waste his time'.

UNIVERSAL NEEDS

I attended a training facilitated by the Centre for Non-Violent Communication. The concept that stuck with me and changed the way I viewed myself and others was universal needs.

1. Everything that we do is to meet a need.
2. Every need is reasonable – it's the way we go about meeting it that impacts ourselves and others.
3. When a need is met it leads to certain feelings. When a need isn't met it leads to other types of feelings.

Everything we do is to meet a need

Whether moving our body slightly to protect ourselves from pressure sores. Brushing our teeth for comfort. Going to work for security, stability, challenge, fun or satisfaction. Forming relationships for connection, sense of importance, love, to be understood, to contribute.

Every need is reasonable

Generally, the need for respect would be seen as reasonable. One person's way of going about meeting that need could be quite different to another. For one it might be speaking calmly and assertively about their opinion. Another it could mean beating someone up that they thought disrespected in some way.

If we take examples from historical figures, Hitler and Nelson Mandela probably both had a need for control.

For Nelson Mandela he met this through choosing how he spoke and viewed the prison guards, not leaving prison until he was happy with the conditions of being released, choosing to forgive. For Hitler his need for control resulted in him convincing people to steal, persecute, carry out horrendous medical experiments and kill millions.

When needs are met and not met, they result in different feelings

When the need for warmth is met it can lead to feelings of comfort, safety and relaxation. If it's not met it could lead to feelings of discomfort, despair, misery and resentment.

A need for a challenge being met could lead to feelings of empowerment, satisfaction, self-belief or rejuvenation. If not met a person could feel irritated, frustrated, anxious, helpless or lost.

How to use to your advantage:

- Send in the need
- Find win/wins – understand yours and others needs
- Go straight to the feeling.

Send in the need

You can save yourself a lot of time and grief by being aware of what your needs are and giving that to yourself. You can either do this in the moment or reflect back on a time to identify what the need was. This means if it happens again you are prepared.

1. Ask yourself in this moment what do I need? List your top three needs (refer to universal needs sheet in the Appendices).
2. Whichever way makes sense, imagine that need being met. Experience what you see, hear, feel. Keep making changes until you've got to truly experience that need being satisfied.

Note that this technique doesn't rely on others assisting you to meet your needs. However, when you are aware of them it's a lot easier to express them to others. This is a lot more effective than hoping others are mind-readers.

Finding win/wins

A lot of upsetting emotions and frustrations are related to the stories we tell ourselves about us and others. By understanding a situation in terms of needs it saves lot of time

and energy. It stops all the surrounding stories and cuts to the chase of understanding what needs weren't being met and therefore we can start to focus on how everyone's needs can at least be considered if not met.

Remember all needs are reasonable – it's the way we go about meeting them that makes a difference.

1. Bring to mind the situation that is causing you stress or upset.
2. In that moment what were your top three needs? (refer to universal needs sheet).
3. In that moment what were the other person's top three needs? (refer to universal needs sheet).
4. Do yours and the other person's needs seem reasonable?
5. Imagine how the situation could be different now you are focusing on yours and the other person's need.

The shortcut

When needs are met or not met, they lead to certain types of feelings. For example, if the need for belonging is not met it may lead to a feeling of hurt, loneliness, disappointment or sadness. However, if this need is met it may lead to feelings such as being secure, confident and happy. Rather than a need being met to generate the desired feeling we can take a shortcut and bring to mind the feeling we would like.

By experiencing the desired feeling, it can provide a useful energy that is more likely to help us achieve what we are aiming for.

Exercise

1. In this moment how am I feeling?
2. In this moment what would be a more helpful feeling?
3. Bring to mind a time when you experienced that feeling – what did you see, hear, feel and maybe taste and smell? Let that feeling grow stronger, dial up all the good feelings – you've just taken a shortcut to where you want to be!

Here's an example:

In this moment I feel overwhelmed.

In this moment it would be more helpful to feel focused.

Bring to mind a time when I felt focused – my head feels light and clear and my shoulders are relaxed, I also feel I've got energy in my body. I say to myself 'you're really in the zone', I see the tasks being completed, I feel a smile on my face as I'm telling myself 'you're really on fire today.'

5 TASKS FOR CHANGE

Holding on is believing that there's only a past; letting go is knowing that there's a future.

~ **Daphne Rose Kingma**

Below is an adaptation of William Worden's model of mourning. The loss or grief can be for any change in your life. We can experience these tasks in many different ways. It is not a step by step process – the tasks can be revisited many times. It's part of being human, learning and growing as a person.

The reason I've included this is because it is such a powerful task when we are faced with a loss or are feeling stuck and not sure what to do about it. There is no pressure to act, while allowing us hope that down the track things can be different, and we can start to see what that may be.

Give yourself space to close your eyes and imagine. How might these tasks apply for you?

1. To accept the reality of the loss.
2. To experience the pain of the loss.
3. Adjust to a new environment.
4. To find meaning of the loss into your life.
5. To withdraw emotional energy and reinvest it somewhere else.

QUALITY QUESTIONS TO MOVE ON...

Courage is the power to let go of the familiar.

~ **Raymond Lindquist**

You don't need strength to let go of something. What you really need is understanding.

~ **Guy Finle**

Sometimes when our needs haven't been met as we'd hoped, it can naturally lead to feelings such as sadness, frustration, humiliation or bitterness. These feelings can affect our physical health, mental health, energy levels and therefore impact many areas of our life. At these times, people can advise that it's time to move on, get over it, we need to forget about it. Or we may have a sense that we're holding onto something and want to find a way of letting go. The question is how to do this...

Examples of symbolically letting go

Imagine:

- Being handed the keys to break out of jail and walk free.
- Flying free, soaring high.
- Putting a shape to the issue, then digging a hole, burying it and letting beautiful plants bloom.
- Dragging something along, weighing you down, then cutting the ties and feeling the freedom.
- Writing down the issue, putting it in a bottle, letting it float out to sea, travelling thousands of miles away, to wash up on shore one day, be read by someone where it has no meaning and then left out in the sun to fade and disintegrate.
- The issue is written down in a book, when ready, start ripping out all the pages, continuing to rip them into tiny pieces.

- The issue shrinking down to such a size that you need a magnifying glass to look at it; it's no longer significant.
- The issue being played on an old film set, inside a beautiful old movie theatre, then the film catches fire and is gone for good.
- Announcing to an audience, who have come to see you to talk because they are 100% behind you, that you have made the decision to let go of the issue. Include all the positive benefits this will have for you and for them. The audience loudly applauds you.
- Writing the issue on a balloon and letting it fly high into the atmosphere, taken far, far away, never to be seen again.

The exercise on the next page gives you a process to work through when you're considering letting go of something. This exercise works well with the use of symbols, stories and metaphors. Some of it involves using the conscious/ thinking part of your mind to think through the issue. Other parts are suited to making changes within the unconscious/ automatic mind.

Here are some ideas that can be useful to consider – particularly when someone else is involved in the situation you are considering moving on from.

- All actions by people have an underlying positive intention/need.
- All needs are reasonable, it's the way we go about meeting them that will impact others.
- Everyone is doing the best they can with the resources they have at the time.

Questions

1. What was the unmet need? (refer to universal needs sheet in appendices)
2. When the need wasn't met, what feelings did that lead to?
3. If I let go of this, what will I gain?
4. If I let go of this, what will I lose?
5. What will others around me gain or lose? Are there any actions I want to take now?

6. Are there any people I know that I can role model moving on? What is a way I can symbolically let go?

Universal Needs

Connection

acceptance
affection
appreciation
belonging
cooperation
communication
closeness
community
companionship
compassion
consideration
consistency
empathy
inclusion
intimacy
love
mutuality
nurturing
respect/self-respect
safety
security
stability

(Connection cont.)

support
to know and be
known
to see and be seen
to understand and
be understood
trust
warmth

Physical Well-Being

air/food
movement/exercise
rest/sleep
sexual expression
safety
shelter
touch
water

Honesty

authenticity
integrity
presence
Play
joy
humour
Peace
beauty
communion
ease
quality
harmony
inspiration
order
Autonomy
choice
freedom
independence
space
spontaneity

Meaning

awareness
celebration of life
challenge
clarity
competence
consciousness
contribution
creativity
discovery
efficacy
effectiveness
growth
hope
learning
mourning
participation
purpose
self-expression
stimulation
to matter
understanding

Feelings when our needs are satisfied

Affectionate

compassionate
friendly
loving
open hearted
sympathetic
tender
warm

Engaged

absorbed
alert
curious
engrossed
enchanted
entranced
fascinated
interested
intrigued
involved
spellbound
stimulated

Hopeful

expectant
encouraged
optimistic

Confident

empowered
open
proud
safe
secure

Excited

amazed
animated
ardent
aroused
astonished
dazzled
eager
energetic
enthusiastic
giddy
invigorated
lively
passionate
surprised
vibrant

Grateful

appreciative
moved
thankful
touched

Inspired

amazed
awed
wonder

Joyful

amused
delighted
glad
happy
jubilant
pleased
tickled

Exhilarated

blissful
ecstatic
elated
enthralled
exuberant
radiant
rapturous
thrilled

Peaceful

calm
clear headed
comfortable
centred
content
equanimous
fulfilled
mellow
quiet
relaxed
relieved
satisfied
serene
still
tranquil
trusting

Refreshed

enlivened
rejuvenated
renewed
rested
restored
revived

Feelings when our needs are not satisfied

Afraid

apprehensive
dread
foreboding
frightened
mistrustful
panicked
petrified
scared
suspicious
terrified
wary
worried

Annoyed

aggravated
dismayed
disgruntled
displeased
exasperated
frustrated
impatient
irritated
irked

Angry

enraged
furious
incensed
indignant
irate
livid
outraged
resentful

Confused

ambivalent
baffled
bewildered
dazed
hesitant
lost
mystified
perplexed
puzzled
torn

Disconnected

alienated
aloof
apathetic
bored
cold
detached
distant
distracted
indifferent
numb
removed
uninterested
withdrawn

Disquiet

agitated
alarmed
discombobulated
disconcerted

Embarrassed

ashamed
chagrined
flustered

guilty
mortified
self-conscious

Fatigue

ashamed
chagrined
flustered
guilty
mortified
self-conscious

Pain

agony
anguished
bereaved
devastated
grief
heartbroken
hurt
lonely
miserable
regretful
remorseful

Sad

depressed
dejected
despair

Tense

anxious
cranky
distressed
distraught
edgy
fidgety

frazzled
irritable
jittery
nervous
overwhelmed
restless
stressed out

Vulnerable

fragile
guarded
helpless
insecure
eery
reserved
sensitive

Yearning

envious
jealous
longing
nostalgic
pining
wistful

Aversion

animosity
appalled
contempt
disgusted
dislike
hate
horrified
hostile
repulsed

About the Author

Rebecca Cragolini has been described as a ‘magician’ for her ability to get to the underlying issue with her clients and help them quickly turn things around.

She grew up in Christchurch, New Zealand and completed a Bachelor of Occupational Therapy in Dunedin. Rebecca has spent most of her career working in mental health in hospitals and support services in New Zealand and the UK. While in her twenties, she travelled to England for adventure and work, and it was here that she met her Australian husband. After six years they returned to New Zealand to live with their nine-month-old daughter.

From an early age Rebecca was interested in what is going on when a person wants to make a change and yet seems to sabotage their own efforts. This has been from both a professional perspective and on a personal level related to her own anxiety and weight issues.

Frustrated by the limitations of current mental health services, she completed her Certificate Practitioner of Neurolinguistic Programming and Hypnotherapy Practitioner Diploma. Excited by the results she and her clients were achieving from NLP and hypnotherapy sessions, she set up her business Healthy Minds in 2015 along with her business partner Imelda Curtin.

Rebecca is also an experienced presenter, where her relaxed, down-to-earth approach puts audiences at ease while imparting valuable mindset techniques on the topics of stress and anxiety, emotional issues, lasting weight loss and workplace wellbeing. A presenting highlight was in 2005 when she was invited to talk at Butabika Hospital in Uganda regarding setting up community mental health services.

She works from home supporting individual clients and workplaces. Her office is in a private area which looks out on a picturesque courtyard where her cat Patrick sometimes keeps an eye on sessions.

Most days Rebecca starts off with some short Yoga with Adrienne YouTube videos. In her downtime she loves hanging out with family and friends. Her family are fortunate to be able to borrow a gorgeous Samoyed dog to take for walks. She is currently attempting to learn Italian as would love to be able to visit Andre's family in Italy and speak their language.

To keep fit she attends Janelle's Circuit class at her daughter's school. The social aspect and appreciation of her humour has her coming back despite days resulting in pain and cursing when getting on and off the toilet.

Rebecca is extremely grateful to those who have gone before bringing awareness of mental health and reducing the stigma. Her first memory of this was when All Blacks player Sir John Kirwan disclosed his mental health struggles. She recalls the impact it had on people, realising if someone at the top of the game who is strong, intelligent and talented can be experiencing it, it really is an issue that any of us may face.

She has great admiration for New Zealander of the Year, comedian and mental health advocate Mike King and his honesty of his mental health challenges. There are not many people that can have a room in laughter while still bringing awareness with sensitivity to the issue of suicide.

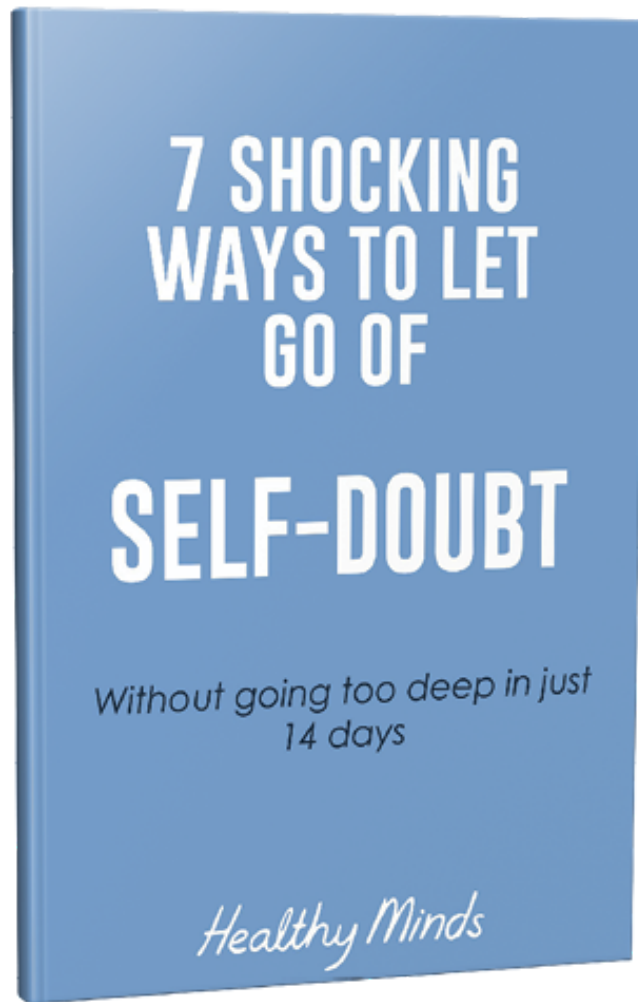
Rebecca believes we can't look to one person or even mental health services for the answers. We all have unique roles to play in improving our own and the community's mental health. She views her contribution as bringing awareness of the power of the mind and how we use it to our advantage.

Her particular passion is teaching people how to let go of what's holding them back, how emotions are not 'touchy feely' things to be pushed down and ignored; they are there to guide us, so the smart thing is to learn how to use them more.

The Al Noor Mosque shootings in her hometown this year were a wakeup call to her of the need to learn how to be kinder to ourselves and others, to judge less, free ourselves from everyday frustrations and focus more on understanding and connection.

It made her realise there is plenty more work to be done and she looks forward to being part of it.

Download your free workbook:



The seven simple but practical tools in the workbook will show you how to:

- Not only logically know you're doing well, but deep down feel it and radiate it too (without being arrogant)
- Go into any situation with self-confidence and an 'I've got this' feel
- Focus your spare energy on creating the life you want, now that the draining self-doubt is gone.

This workbook (and many other great resources) are available to download instantly via this link:

<http://healthyminds.co.nz/free-downloads.html>

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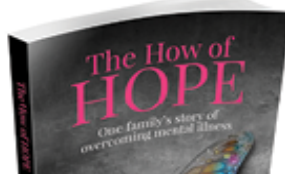


Need an inspiring speaker on the power of mindset to implement positive change?

Rebecca Cragnolini is an author and international speaker who has presented in New Zealand, Australia, England and Uganda. Through her 20 years of experience working in mental health as an Occupational Therapist and Hypnotherapy Trainer, she has developed a powerful set of mindset approaches which she now teaches to audiences both small and large across New Zealand and abroad.

Her down-to-earth nature and ability to simplify complex ideas into snack-sized takeaways capture the attention of participants, leaving them with tangible takeaways to kickstart personal change.

The underlying theme to all her presentations is that every behaviour and habit starts in the mind. She is on a mission to show people everywhere how to get their mind working for them rather than against.



Here are some of the targeted topics Rebecca can cover:

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- **Cool, calm, collected zone:** 30-second mindset hacks to reset from stressed to calm and confident.
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- **Letting limits go:** Learn the secrets to release second guessing, wanting to please, feeling invisible or not valued and transform it into an 'I've got this' feel.

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- **No more fake it till you make it:** Three ways to banish self-doubt and feel a deep inner confidence coursing through you.
- **Clear-headed and in control:** Three techniques to look after yourself when you make mistakes or others are directing their frustrations your way.

To find out more or
make a booking, contact Rebecca:

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