

Awareness Day September 2008.

A Carer's thoughts

I feel reluctant to go back and bring to mind a very painful time in our lives. But I see that this is important if it will help others who are experiencing a similar traumatic time.

I have memories of confusion and failure – of not knowing what to do and how to meet my wife's needs.

It was important that I was there for her: that she could rely on me at a time when she felt very isolated and afraid of the future.

I will admit that all I wanted to do was lose myself in my work, away from home where I could forget and could pretend she was OK. The temptation was to be busy and work late. Not helpful and not supportive but easier. With hindsight, it was through the Lord's strength that we managed to avoid the easy way.

She wanted to cut herself off from everyone and to stay in the only place she felt safe and that was our home. No visitors, no fellowship with others.

When she felt able, we would talk about what helped. There were times when there was anger, panic attacks or just nothing. Emptiness. Silence. Sometimes there was manic activity which left us both feeling exhausted.

She needed me to be there. When panic and fear overwhelmed her I would just hold her in my arms, calmly trying to reassure her until the panic passed.

She wanted me to listen to her fears though to me they sometimes seemed illogical and out of proportion. But she did not want me to argue or justify or "rescue" her or tell her she shouldn't feel that way. And this was a powerful lesson for me to learn. Not to explain to her why she felt the way she did. But just to listen as she worked through her feelings.

Although my greatest wish was to make her better with answers, I found the best way was to listen and reaffirm the way she felt and to say that I understood.

There were grey days, bad days and very bad days. Not knowing what the day would bring was frightening.

I would go with her to all her medical appointments not necessarily to sit in with the doctor or specialist but when I did I was able to remember what was said when she often only came out with negative memories. She tried a number of forms of medication, with each taking some weeks before a noticeable effect, until she found one that was most helpful. This had the effect of taking away the lows but also the emotional highs. The advantage was that she now had some control of what was happening to her. She would set herself small targets to accomplish. Although only going one day at a time she set some form of structure to her day and to her week. It was a real effort for her to do this. It involved walking up to five miles a week.

We planned regular activities together and I took days off work each week for us to visit somewhere. We had what we called a place of healing to visit: the town of Malvern and the Malvern hills.

One of the hardest difficulties to cope with was her apparent loss of faith: that God had dropped her and was no longer there for her. It was not a place to be and she knew this and felt guilty about it. We developed a routine with a prayer together each morning to ask for strength and guidance during the coming day. We shared thoughts about a scriptural phrase or verse and this has developed over the years to a joy of sharing spiritual ideas and themes.

With our Lord's help we came through it. The good days became more frequent: the bad days less. We are always aware that in many ways, even after seven years, she may be quite fragile and vulnerable to stress and has only recently felt able to join in singing some of our favourite hymns from before the dark time.

If you and the one you love are in this dark place now, please be reassured that it won't last for ever. It will get better. Seek medical support and friends who understand and can empathise. And someone to pray for you.

Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning. Ps 30:5 RSV

The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms. Deut 33:27. RSV