

Anne Plank

DELIVERANCE
from DEPRESSION

as told to Vic Francis
(Former Editor, N.Z. Challenge Weekly)



Deliverance from Depression
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Foreword

This story is an example of God's grace and mercy. His mercy never ceases.

As a participant in Anne's deliverance, I rejoice greatly that God in His goodness grants His gifts. As we seek to operate in the gifts of the Holy Spirit and allow God's anointing to flow, then great miracles can happen.

In Anne's case God has granted her a miracle. She sought help with all her heart. As the Scripture says:

"...seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you." (Luke 11:9)

I believe the message in this book holds the key to deliverance for many people. So often in counselling others, we find many people who are deeply depressed and often prayer does not seem to be of avail. It is only as they deliberately decide to break free from the past and look to a future with the Lord that they are set free. That is the message of this book and it is a powerful message!

Thank God for people like Anne who are prepared to bare their heart before God and mankind and find deliverance through the Cross of Jesus Christ.

Bill Subritzky

Introduction

Depression in one form or another is the most common condition treated by psychiatrists. It is said that in any one year 25 percent of people will experience the symptoms of depression for a period of time. As it is difficult to differentiate between unhappiness in response to adverse life events and true depression, a more realistic estimate is of about 15 percent of the population becoming depressed at some time in their lives.

Depression is a real illness and the sufferer is genuinely disabled. It may be triggered off by outside stress factors, and in turn affects how one functions in the everyday world. The inability to cope, or sometimes even to feed or clothe oneself while depressed, places substantial stress on relationships both at home and work.

Excerpts from a letter written by a leading psychiatrist who treated Anne Plank (used with permission).

*"But thanks be to God,
who gives us victory through
our Lord Jesus Christ."
(1 Corinthians 15:57)*

ONE

Discordant Notes

The small brown bottle of halcion tablets rattled in my hand as the bus wended its way towards my home on Auckland's North Shore.

The doctor had prescribed the pills in good faith to help me sleep as I tried to negotiate my way through yet another extended period of depression and paranoia. But deep down I knew they contained a more permanent, sinister solution.

By the time the big yellow bus stopped, I knew what I would do. As I walked through the door of my home, I was calm, calculating and confident.

Heading up the stairs to my bedroom, I took out the 10 or so confetti-sized white tablets and played with them on the bed, arranging them in order, then rearranging them as I decided with remarkable clarity how to proceed.

I picked up the picture of my husband, Roland, which sat on my bedside table, and looked directly into his eyes, apologising to him for the devastation I was about to bring into his life. At that moment I couldn't see any other way out.

After about 20 minutes there was no point waiting any longer. Picking up the halcion tablets, I concocted a lethal cocktail of other pills, and in a trice the colourful, thick mixture had washed down all the pills.

Putting down the glass with some satisfaction, I carefully walked downstairs and made my way into the family room, inevitably sitting at my piano - given to me by my father in an attempt to ease me through the torment that was now leading me to suicide. Today, however, it would ease me into something else entirely.

Above, lining the wall left and right, were dozens of pictures of my ancestors, which I had lovingly and carefully put together over the last couple of years.

As I sat at the piano, I almost automatically began playing "Love Story" - "Where do I begin?" I scanned for the hundredth time, or the thousandth, the faces of the dead in their narrow wooden frames. Some smiled, some were serious, some seemed to cast judgement. What were they like? Where did they come from? Had they been happy? Were they happy now?

As the drugs began to take effect my fingers began to lose their dexterity. I took courage from those faces above me. No longer would I have to endure the trauma and difficulties of life. No longer would I have to worry about my future, or hear the voices, or suffer the shame.

The numbness in my fingers became more pronounced and "Love Story" became an unrecognisable blend of discordant notes, so I abandoned my piano and somehow dragged myself back up the stairs and slumped over our bed.

My head and whole body began to drift, and I could feel the life ebbing from my being. Soon I would be free, like my ancestors.

But then my husband came home!

TWO

Obsession

Ancestral worship is a term most often used to describe the practice of primitive people who worship the spirits of their dead forebears.

However, it has little apparent relevance to suburban, middle-class New Zealand in the 1980s where I undertook my own particular brand of ancestral worship which ended up nearly killing me.

It started innocently enough, when in February 1985 I began compiling a group of family and ancestral photographs from my grandmother's photo album. It's a pursuit that many New Zealanders, and indeed many people from around the world, find pleasurable and fascinating - and seemingly harmless.

Excited by the wealth of family history I discovered, and spurred on by my grandmother's advancing age which meant my fact-finding time was strictly limited, I delved deeper and deeper into my family's roots.

I still find it impossible to distinguish just where my fascination crossed the line between healthy and unhealthy, but during those fevered months of research, interviewing, cataloguing and assembling photographs, something went badly wrong. The natural desire that many of us have to discover our roots became an unnatural drive that would ultimately nearly destroy me.

My particular passion was photographs, and I made reprints of Granny's old and not-so-old family photos and began to line the wall near my piano with row after row of sepia-coloured faces. I also spent many memorable hours with my grandmother, Elsie, drawing out new information and storing it away with absolute fascination.

I spent hours pouring over the old photos, studying each face, assessing family likenesses both real and imagined and trying to interpret every wrinkle, worry line or smile.

Roland and other members of my family were uneasy at my extreme interest in these matters - and I always took down one particular picture of Granny's stepmother, whom she didn't like, when Granny visited - but I pushed aside any doubts as I rushed headlong into my passion.

Yet from the time I started compiling the photos my world began to fall apart.

THREE

Breakdown

I had already had a glimpse of what was to come when I was a child of 12 or 13 holidaying with my parents in the South Island of New Zealand.

I was very excited about the holiday, and thoroughly enjoyed the travel and visiting new places, but the trip was marred by a sensation that people were talking, laughing and staring at me. Going into a crowded tearoom became agony, with the feeling of people pressing in on me, examining my every move. Eventually this sensation became so unbearable that I resorted to having dinner in our motel room rather than face the crowds. I concluded I must have been the ugliest person on earth!

These sensations continued for about a year whenever I was in a crowded situation.

However, after some counselling the symptoms disappeared and I was able to enjoy a normal teenage and early adult life. On reflection, I see those experiences as a toughening up process and preparation for the more severe onslaughts yet to come.

My first adult indication of trouble came when things began to go badly wrong at work. I was already stressed by a demanding job, but when a lady I had been training to relieve some of the pressure tragically died of a brain haemorrhage on Easter Monday 1985, my increasingly fragile world fell to pieces.

Her death reinforced my own grievances of feeling overworked and taken for granted. Somehow it was typical that she should die just at the time she was going to relieve me. So with a fatalistic feeling that no human help was going to arrive, I looked for artificial means to cope, taking solace in a good stiff whisky before I headed off for work each day.

However, as the pressure mounted even that recourse was inadequate, and before long I resigned, exhausted, frustrated and bitter.

The feeling of relief was incredible as I walked away from my office that afternoon, but such was my state of agitation that within days I was as bad as ever, worrying about what had happened, wondering if I should go back and apologise, pondering my decision to quit work and my rapid emotional, psychological and physical decline.

I began to experience extremes of emotions, unnatural highs followed by a crashing feeling which reduced me to a blithering mess. I had trouble sleeping at night, so I would get up and go over my problems, real and imagined, time and time again.

Normally I am a social sort of person, gaining immense satisfaction and enjoyment from organising events and getting together with friends and family. But suddenly I found myself

hating and avoiding the very things that I had loved.

I began to jump whenever the telephone rang, refusing to answer it and even fleeing the room to get away from it. On rare occasions when I did pick up the receiver I was very rude and abrupt.

I also went to great lengths not to appear by any windows, because when I looked outside, people constantly seemed to be staring at me.

At times I couldn't handle even the most straightforward tasks - deciding which light switch to turn on, or which curtain to draw first. Everything in life seemed to involve decisions, and I couldn't make even a simple one!

I completely lost confidence in my own ability, and began to feel alienated from my family and friends, feelings which led to my first thoughts of suicide.

Roland tried to encourage me, listen and even confront some of the issues as he saw his wife slowly break down before his eyes. We had been married only a few years and had enjoyed a wonderful early marriage, full of fun and easy communication.

Such was my state, however, that I withdrew from him, unable to talk and eventually, in desperation, took to writing him notes on little pieces of paper.

Then came the voices - some from without, some from within. Often when I saw other people in conversation, I would be convinced that they were talking about me. At other times voices in my mind accused me, laughed at me and hounded me; intent on my demise.

With the voices came apparitions. One day I heard voices yelling out obscenities, and when I looked outside a figure in a red cloak and two demonic looking henchmen were standing across the street from my house.

Such experiences confirmed a haunting feeling that all was not well and, worse, never would be.

And all the time, I took refuge in my dead ancestors and my piano which sat at their feet.

FOUR

Glimmer of Light

My family were alarmed at how much I had deteriorated. I was losing weight and had become irrational, moody and difficult.

Roland was wonderful, trying to encourage and inspire, while obviously hurting deeply himself as my life and his disintegrated. He had complete faith in the medical profession to come up with a cure, and while he wasn't opposed to the Christians who prayed for me from time to time, he didn't really believe this would produce the desired effect.

Another source of strength was my parents, who continued to uphold me in prayer and were there for me always.

My mother-in-law, Barbara, was also marvellous. A born-again Christian, active in Women's Aglow, she prayed constantly and supported Roland and me in every way possible.

Barbara and I had developed a close relationship after the death of her husband a few years earlier, when I had helped her through the grief process, and the strength that developed was vital during my own time of need.

Roland initially tried to hide my problems from everyone, but eventually he had to confide, first in my mother and then his own mother. After that, the immediate family closed ranks and tried to hide my condition from other relatives and friends, though eventually the excuses of temporary illness and stress began to wear thin. When my beloved Granny died at the age of 91 and I didn't go to her funeral, my true state became obvious to everyone.

We tried many solutions, but with little success. Counselling was the first recourse, but I lost faith in counsellors after one threw my notes at me across the table and lectured me on being self-centred, while another prescribed a bottle of pills with a warning to Roland to ration them out and not let me near the whole bottle.

He was right, of course, because increasingly suicide seemed the only viable option and several times I unsuccessfully tried that most permanent of solutions.

On the day I took the overdose, the only thing that saved me was Roland arriving home from work, quite unexpectedly and out of character, and rushing me to hospital.

On another occasion, at 4am after a long, sleepless night, I made my way downstairs and ran a bath, hoping the hot water would "melt" my body back to normality. I was racked with tension and my mind battled seemingly impossible problems.

The bath water was hot and steamy, but soon became stone cold in the midwinter air. If only I could put my head under the water and fall asleep it would be the end of all my

problems. I did. But in the depths of my consciousness a voice said, "You're a fighter. Fight this!" I pulled out my head and waited for the men in the white coats to arrive.

Actually it was Roland who found me. He had woken up and was alarmed that I was missing from the bed. As he came into the bathroom he was shocked at the sight of his wife turning blue in the now freezing bath water, hands crossed over her chest.

Such instances alarmed my family and various members were assigned to keep an eye on me.

Even though I had come close to death on this occasion and others, I don't think I ever really wanted to die. I was a fighter, but my longing for relief made me willing to do anything to deal with the horrible dread of life and coping with it. All I wanted was someone to sweep in, see my condition and produce a solution.

I felt I needed prayer, exorcism, miracles, but I had long since shelved my early Christian upbringing and never really opened myself up for God to move significantly in my life.

One day, after an unsuccessful attempt to slit my wrists, I was helped by our neighbours, Dennis and Minna Acramen, committed Christians who are now pastors.

Roland and I met Dennis and Minna in 1981 and always found them friendly, but somehow different. They seemed to have something we didn't. Needless to say, they also saw there was something vital lacking in our lives, but we didn't know it then!

On reflection, if I had accepted an invitation to attend their church and a Bible study group, the trials ahead may have been

averted. But while I admired their dedication and devotion - studying the Scriptures for hours on end outside in the summer sun - I thought of God and the Bible as boring and historical.

While I went to church regularly, it was more out of habit than conviction. I called myself a Christian, and did many things that Christians seemed to do, but really I had no idea of what the word meant.

With God not invited to help, the only alternative was hospital - and with reluctance my family admitted me for psychiatric assessment to a private hospital in a converted house with long corridors in a tree-lined street. I agreed to go because it seemed an ideal place to have a rest from the tiresome course of my life, but as I was admitted I was struck by the terrifying thought that I would never get out.

However, the God whom I refused to acknowledge was with me even then, and on my first night in hospital He showed me a small glimmer of light that was to be a lifeline over the months and years to come.

After my parents had left, and as I lay down, eyes shut, stiff, not daring to move, a sudden and inexplicable peace and warmth radiated through the room. I sensed someone was there, sitting in the visitor's chair, praying for me. After a while, I sensed him leave, and when I dared to look there was no-one there. Deep down, though, I knew I had just had an encounter with Jesus.

FIVE

The Voices

Not that anything changed in the short term. Buoyed by my experience, the next morning I asked a nurse for a Bible. Opening it at random though, I stared in horror. All I could see was a mass of symbols which I couldn't understand. I snapped shut the book and at the same time snapped shut my heart to God. It was all very well Jesus praying in a chair, but I needed something more permanent to hold on to.

That night the voices opened up in full fury. They were outside my door, sarcastically talking about me and predicting, "This is going to be a great day." They spoke of me as a saint, as a figurehead who would call all the world's religions together.

Watching television and listening to the radio only heightened this impression. All the items seemed to be about me. The voices seemed to be using the media to get me to step out and lead some great religious movement.

When the Greenpeace ship Rainbow Warrior was sunk in Auckland, the Prime Minister at the time, David Lange, said on television that while they didn't know who had sunk the

ship, they had good leads. I immediately assumed I was to blame and wondered how long it would take them to find out. It felt as if I was about to take on the world, as well as saving it through linking up the various religions.

While I knew I was incapable of such activity, that it was just another hallucination, no amount of logic could shake the feeling.

In an effort to eliminate these intrusions, I turned off the television and the radio. But still the voices rattled on - in my head, in the room next door, at the table next to me in the lunchroom. On occasions I even got up from my hospital bed and burst into the next room to confront the perpetrators, but somehow they always seemed to escape - a bit like trying to find the end of a rainbow.

My paranoia extended to the doctors and nurses. I was sure they were plotting against me. My every movement seemed to be monitored, screeds of notes were taken and small gaggles of doctors spoke in whispers at the end of my bed, throwing occasional accusing glances at me. If I closed the door they noted that, and if I left it ajar they wrote that down as well. We battled over medication, which I hated, and eventually they tried to disguise my pills in jam, which both amused and infuriated me.

Even the kitchen staff were in on the act. Every day the meals sent to me seemed different from the ones I had ordered.

The only hospital person I trusted was my psychiatrist who visited each day. I enjoyed his company as he seemed to be on my side, but despite the trust that developed I never really

thought pills would totally cure me - deep down I knew I needed prayer and counselling and this became my heart's cry to God.

That cry was partially answered in the form of a dear Christian named Shona, who came to visit me after my mother-in-law informed her of my trials.

She was kind, gentle, patient and caring and had an inner radiance which I wanted too. When I couldn't cope, Shona would come. When my family despaired, she arrived like a heavenly angel and somehow made things right again.

Between Shona, Christian friends, my minister, my husband and family, I felt a loving warmth which carried me through many long hours of pain and heartache.

While the lows in hospital far outweighed the highs, there were some lighter moments.

Even though I was helpless to help myself, let alone others, I had a great desire to assist other patients, much to their dismay. I helped bathe an elderly patient without her consent, an incident which ended up with her screaming for help and scratching me as I lathered her back with soap. I later found out that she was allergic to soap, poor woman. One day I helped the gardener tend the hospital gardens, much to his astonishment and consternation; another time I went for a run without informing the staff and got ticked off for leaving without permission; and in yet another incident I carefully divided up flowers given to me by my mother and distributed them to the other patients who didn't appear to have any.

After a couple of weeks in this unreal world of tests, drugs and analysis, during which time I celebrated my 25th birthday,

I was discharged more confused than ever. Deep down I knew nothing had changed, so instead of feeling happy at the prospect of returning home I felt a bitter dread.

However, mingled with my fears and anxieties were increasing signs of God beginning to move in my life.

After my release, Barbara and I went on holiday together, and although I had some weird experiences of people apparently talking about me in shops I also found some comfort.

As we walked in the sunshine I saw visions of golden hearts by the roadside and felt a supernatural peace envelop me. I also marvelled afresh at the trees and animals living so harmoniously in the environment - almost as a blind person given sight for the first time would do.

I held tightly to these little revelations, which were like signs that it was my destiny to be rescued from darkness to light, despite the darkness that was still ahead.

Then one night, in deep anguish, I had an experience where the Holy Spirit cradled me in His arms, enveloping me with His warmth and peace. For a short while, perhaps a couple of minutes, I was released from my trial. Though many difficult times still lay ahead, that experience proved to me that God cared, that He was leading me through.

These occurrences were rays of hope in an otherwise frightening and dismal landscape.

Even on the holiday I drove Barbara to despair by closing all the curtains just as the sun was setting over our magnificent view of Mt Tarawera. I just couldn't cope with the possibility, remote as it was, of being seen.

As I returned home, strange events took over - lights flickering, bumps and movements. All of them could be explained away naturally, but to my scrambled mind they were further signs of decline and despair.

SIX

First Phase of Healing

Terror continued to stalk me from all angles - both internal and external - but on the positive side they did lead me to finally begin searching seriously for answers.

I began to want to worship God and know He was real, and felt a desire welling up to fill the gap that was within me. The first answer to this inner cry came at a service in the church that Shona, Dennis and Minna attended. I had been there previously, and relished the atmosphere of contemporary music and the feeling of life among those attending.

After the worship, I sat with some nervousness, but with expectation as well, and listened carefully to the speaker. Much to my frustration, one of my legs was shaking, a side-effect from my medication, and I tried to hold it down with my hand and not appear too conspicuous.

Yet even as I did so, an ugly voice taunted me, "Why is your leg shaking so?"

At the end of the message the speaker asked if anyone wanted to know about Jesus, and I felt I just had to respond.

But even as I put up my hand, a spiritual battle began to rage around me.

"Traitor!" the angry voice audibly boomed.

A hissing seemed to reverberate around the auditorium, a distinctly snaky sound, though as I looked around I realised that only I could hear it.

I knew they weren't godly voices, because they were so taunting, but I felt intimidated and perplexed as I wondered how they could infiltrate a place of God. However, I was determined in my decision to respond, so I maintained my courage and walked to the front of the auditorium to make a commitment to Jesus Christ. A long, hard road still lay ahead, but it was the beginning of a new life.

The day after making that gigantic step, the oppression suddenly stopped, almost as if someone had turned off a switch.

Suddenly no-one was staring at me. There were no voices. No hallucinations. What a feeling!

This proved to be the end of my first phase of healing, and it happened as simply and naturally, or supernaturally, as that.

Slowly, like a child learning to walk, I began to claw back the ground I had lost. Having a normal conversation was a major achievement. So was answering the phone without terror, and reintroducing myself to the friends and family I had shunned for the best part of the year.

Gradually the doctors reduced my pill intake, my eyesight, which had been affected by the medication, returned to normal and I began thinking about working again.

However, without dealing with the root cause of my problems, I still hadn't been really set free. While the oppression was truly gone, depression remained and took the sparkle out of my life. The medication, too, continued to play havoc, making me drowsy, restless in the legs and over salivating while it felt as if my mouth was dry.

Shortly after our Christmas holidays, during which I lay in bed each morning too exhausted to rouse myself, I felt the depression increase once more to the point that by the time we returned home to start off the new year, I was again showing signs of instability and irrationality.

Soon after our return, I was contacted by the leader of a Bible study group, but although I had responded to God at that church service, and freely credited Him with my healing, I wasn't prepared to make any kind of sacrifice in my lifestyle. I knew He was real, but I wasn't serious about learning more about Him. I was grateful that He had healed me, but I was determined to push Him to the back of my life.

"I can't possibly afford the time. I'm returning to the workforce," was my tart reply to her invitation to come and study the Bible. But even as I said it I felt as if I had just slapped God in the face.

Looking back, I now realise that I still hadn't fully asked Jesus into my heart. Perhaps this is why the depression remained. I had a great opportunity for freedom, and let it slip through my fingers.

Beginning work again as a secretary was a disaster. I was so depressed that when running errands along the main street I couldn't have cared if a bus ran me over. Every time

the working day ended, I felt an enormous burden lift, but dread and fear would rear their ugly heads again the next morning when I had to return to work. After a few months, the heavy blanket of depression was so great that I had to quit work, though I then got another job and went through the whole mess again.

The crisis peaked one day when I couldn't face work at all, getting as far as the foyer and finding myself unable to go in. That was when I went to the doctor, conned him into giving me the pills and downed them whilst playing "Love Story" on the piano and looking into the faces of my forebears as I waited for the inevitable.

Roland's arrival was a miracle - he is a punctual and reliable man, and for him to come home early is extremely rare. But his unexpected return saved my life, as I was rushed into intensive care and just pulled through.

Miraculously, though, that incident finally closed off the chapter of oppression and depression in my life. When I was released from hospital I felt a freedom that I still can't explain or justify. One moment I was bound up and suicidal. The next minute I was completely free of the depression and oppression that had dogged me for months.

I felt wonderful. Every day was as it should be. I looked forward to my future with relish instead of dread. I was able to communicate with family, friends and strangers, enjoy a good book, watch television and listen to the radio. I even started to enjoy work again - and then Roland and I were delighted to discover that I was pregnant.

Over the next few months I was weaned off all medication, and experienced a normal and enjoyable pregnancy. I had boundless energy, and was extremely happy. Almost too happy, it seemed.

As it happened, though, there were further trials ahead. After all I had endured and learned, I still pushed God into the background, admiring Him from afar but not willing to totally commit my life to Him.

SEVEN

*Unworthiness
and Failure*

There was still the unfinished business of the ancestral photographs. It would take another nudge in God's direction before I finally got the message.

In June 1986, five months pregnant, I went out to dinner with Roland and some of his business colleagues. Such an event would have previously sent me into fear and panic, but this time I looked forward with great anticipation to the event, dressing up and revelling in the thought of a night out with my husband.

But after several months of complete freedom, that night signalled the start of another bizarre chapter of illness.

As I sat chatting to Roland and his companions, I gradually became aware of the same old restlessness returning to my legs, just as it was when I was on large doses of medication except by now I was completely off drugs.

Trying to act naturally, but feeling as if the whole world could see me, I glanced over at the next table and felt something in my stomach plummet as I imagined that they were laughing and staring at me. Within minutes, it had become just like the old days.

I shook it off, and managed to survive and even enjoy the evening, but during the next few months my condition worsened again to the point where it was a constant battle to stay sane.

Towards the end of my pregnancy, I was setting myself unrealistic goals, almost as if I wanted to fail. My confidence deserted me, and I felt trapped and worried about insanity.

On one occasion I went to a mothers' meeting in preparation for the birth of our daughter, and felt almost over-confident as I approached the room where the other mothers were. But as soon as I got in the door, the confidence drained away, to be replaced by a sudden and desperate urge to run. I jumped in the car and drove aimlessly, eventually stopping at the side of the road and sobbing uncontrollably at the ghastly realisation of what was happening again.

Before long it was the same old thing - the music on the radio was about me, the bad things on the television news my doing - and I began crying out, "Why, God?"

At night it was especially bad. Lying in bed, I felt as if I was shackled to a rack tightened so much that I could barely breathe, let alone move.

One night, though, I began to concentrate on God and noticed that as I did so I began to relax and the shackles came

off. The next night I tried again, and once more it worked; little by little I could sense the iron grip being removed. On one occasion, after consciously relaxing in His presence, I was moved to go downstairs and grab a pen and paper. Kneeling on the cool kitchen floor I wrote over and over again, "Oh God, oh God, oh God." Why had I forgotten to ask for His help? Why had I ignored Him so long?

Somehow in the depths of those experiences, the knowledge of the reality of God and the certainty that He would heal me was birthed.

In the meantime however, I had a second unproductive spell in hospital and returned home in time for our darling daughter, Stephanie, to be born.

But even this marvellous arrival didn't jolt me out of my decline for long. While I was euphoric for a few days, I struggled to come to grips with motherhood and even basic hygiene. Organising myself was a nightmare, let alone the responsibility of caring for a new baby.

While in hospital, the nurses were wonderful, but when I returned home it was a case of survival - and only just.

With help from Roland, Mum and Dad, Barbara and many other caring people, I eventually managed, and as things improved I at last relented and joined a Bible study group. God was gently nudging me in His direction again.

But for every step forward, I seemed to take a step back as well. While I opened myself up to God and received strength and some healing, a devastating new misery was overtaking me.

It happened quite distinctly one weekend when I was spring cleaning our house. At that instant, a new type of inner thought attacked my mind, convincing me of my unworthiness and failure. The attacks came in waves, hounding me mercilessly every few days.

In the early stages, if I retired to bed and closed my eyes, they would evaporate more quickly, but before long there was no respite available.

The condition lasted for a hellish eight months. The attacks started with blurred vision, then a flickering of the eyes followed by waves of inner obsessions and torment. I was no longer depressed, but felt somewhat aggrieved that I had been cured of one thing only to be hit with something else. Despite this, though, my Christian faith was beginning to bloom, and I took to writing my feelings to God, and sometimes writing what He seemed to be replying. On December 18, 1987, I wrote:

Dear Lord,

Praise You, Lord. Praise You, Father. Thanks for delivering me of an attack today. You have everything under control and are with us always. Continue to spread thick like honey Your love on us all and pour out Your goodness as You have always done in the past. I love You always and without bounds or limit, growing stronger every day. Praise You, Lord. Praise You, Father.

EIGHT

Breaking the Curse

The attacks increased so much in intensity that I was eventually waking up each morning with them and had to endure them all day. By February 1988, I couldn't cope any more. After a final attempt at suicide - averted when I rang my psychiatrist who sent for an ambulance - Shona arranged for me to see Bill Subritzky, a Christian Evangelist with a healing ministry.

Barbara and I sat in a small study at his house, while Bill questioned me closely from his seat behind the desk. He asked me about my history, from childhood through to the present. He explored possible occult links, and particularly focused on the photos which lined my wall, in pride of place over my piano, and concluded that I had idolised them to the extent that I had received a curse from my ancestry.

After some detailed discussion of these events, he laid his hands on my back and said, "Spirit of ancestry, leave her." After further prayer he pronounced simply, "The cord is now cut."

My fascination with ancestral photographs had allowed something to enter and turn my world upside down. I still don't understand how or why this happened, but all I know is that it certainly did. I see no harm in having an interest in one's family roots, and I still have an interest in old photographs. However, subconsciously I overstepped the line of having a healthy interest in them and developed an unhealthy one.

At first when Bill prayed for me, there was no manifestation of any change, but I went home with a curious sense of something having been achieved. Deep inside I felt a finality that hadn't been there previously. This time, to my immense relief, there was something really different - permanently. At Bill's suggestion, I dismantled my pictorial display except those of my grandparents and parents - burning the older pictures in a significant ceremony. It wasn't a reflection on the people in the pictures, simply a lesson that we were dealing with the unseen spiritual realm.

The result was remarkable and complete. Within a week the oppression, depression and obsessions passed as quickly as they had arrived. They have never returned.

My private hell had lasted for three full years - from Easter 1985 to Easter 1988.

Since then I have felt strong and completely free as I have clung close to my relationship with God. I feel Him working within me every day, and I look for opportunities to serve Him all the time.

With an incredible joy for living and a spring in my step, each morning I wake up and say, "Hi, Holy Spirit, what do You want me to learn today?"

I cannot explain my deliverance. On several occasions situations which plagued me, simply ended - sometimes with prayer, sometimes without.

A key I have discovered, though, is wholehearted commitment to God and obedience to His Word. When I tried to put God into the background of my life, and not respond to His leading and direction, I could never be free.

I have often wondered why I had ongoing episodes of suffering. I now believe that God was like a tutor having to go through the same steps of learning a second time with a student who did not grasp the concepts the first time. He was persistent, but gentle, and I knew His never ending presence as He coached me through. And, yes, I eventually got the message!

My life now is very fulfilling, and the Lord has led me to do things I enjoy.

God has blessed us with another child, Karl, a brother for Stephanie. Although I had abandoned playing the piano after my healing, I have recently taken it up once again and enjoy playing with the children and also in church.

Roland, too, found my healing opened the door to wanting to know more about God, and over the years that followed he has discovered the reality of God in a new way. It is with great joy as a family, whole and complete, that we head off to church each Sunday morning.

After years of fighting, I now regularly attend a Bible study and have discovered the Word of God coming alive in my life. As soon as I yielded to God's prodding, I felt the chains fall off and the Bible became vibrant and worthwhile. It felt as if God had taken away a veil from my eyes.

That feeling is still there today, stronger than ever. I have an air of expectancy and am poised to leap into each new faith adventure as fresh opportunities open up. God's timing has proved time and again to be perfect as doors which were previously shut to me have opened.

God continues to work in my life, but He has also given me opportunities to help others. I have not searched for people in similar situations to myself, but He has sent some to me, and I have seen His healing hand as He has gently taken each one out of bondage and restored them, giving them the freedom He intends us all to have.

I have concluded, both through my experience and from study since I was healed, that trials and tribulations are sent to each of us at some point in our lives for our own good. They mould us to become like Christ - perfect.

When I was young I had braces put on my crooked teeth. They hurt when they were tightened, and I received many jibes about my "railway tracks," but the end result was good, straight teeth. The pain was worth it.

So it is with God. Some of the things He does, or allows, are painful, but as we are faithful to Him we can be sure that the end result will be perfect.

For me, life is more than just living today and dying tomorrow. What would be the point of living, learning, gaining

wisdom and experience, only to die and perish forever? Earth is merely a temporary place for us to live, a probation if you like. Our true goal is to attain to our godly inheritance, which is to live life eternal with our Heavenly Father. Such a goal has become my sole aim in life.

Look out the window and see the light. I am the light of the world and am never in darkness. If you follow the light you will no longer be engulfed by darkness. Look at the wonders of the world and hear the birds singing now as the sun sinks down over the horizon. Let yourself be in the mood of this precious time of day. The sun casts a golden glow over the hills and this is what heaven is like - full of richness, full of wonder - paradise waiting for you when I say your time has come to meet us. Until that time, love, Lord.

- from Anne Plank's diary

Postscript

More than seven years have passed since my final deliverance from depression. During that time I have reflected at length on my experience, and come up with some keys which proved helpful for me during my nightmare. I offer them here as an encouragement to anyone facing depression, and also to assist anyone trying to help a depressed person:

Pockets of peace

Throughout my travail I found nature very therapeutic. Roland and I at times retreated to my parents' holiday home, and I remember one experience in particular outside on the lawn where I discovered total peace as I became immersed in the sounds, smells and colour of nature. The autumn sun was gently caressing, the big, bright wood pigeons whooshed and sang through the air, a stray cat wandered by. By marvelling at these wonders I was able to "step out" and leave the stress, tension and worries behind. Similarly, the walks I had with Barbara while on holiday were almost euphoric, as was retreating to a lake outside the maternity hospital.

Nature, I believe, is God's gift to the depressed person.

Music

Christian praise and worship tapes lifted the heaviness of the atmosphere which permeated the house, and it was the only type of music I could listen to without "reading between the lines." I drank in the words of praise and promise like a person in a desert who stumbles onto an oasis.

Family and friends

My family and friends, bewildered at their first experiences of depression and its effects, were put under incredible pressure. In these times, it is vital to maintain open communication or the emotional strain can become unbearable.

The chief burden-bearer in this area was my husband, Roland. Without him, I couldn't have survived. He always commented that his regular weekly game of soccer was a great way to release some pressures. Other people would need to find different outlets, but regardless of just what it is, they must find some sort of respite to prevent them getting overwhelmed by the burdens of the ones for whom they are caring.

It is also important to be a sounding board for the depressed person, not a sponge. If you soak in their problems too much there is a danger your physical and emotional levels will be drained.

Practical support is also vital in these times, and this came to me through a constant flow of meals, help with the housework and child care. We should never feel guilty for receiving such help from other people. The truth is, most

people are willing to help and like to feel needed. Remember, they may need your help one day.

One word of caution for frustrated family members and friends. Comments such as "Pull yourself together" and "Snap out of it" are unhelpful. A lot of healing needs to be accomplished, and sometimes what seems like giant steps forward are followed by even bigger steps backwards. At such times patience is essential.

Hope

Don't worry! How many times have we heard that cry? And how many times have we actually responded to it? Before my trial began, I was a born worrier, focusing on trivialities and blowing them out of proportion. The reason for this was that I had no hope; I thought we had to fight life's battles alone.

But the Bible is clear in it's call for us not to worry. Consider the words of Jesus:

"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He

not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

(Matthew 6:25-34)

The words "worry" or "worrying" appear six times in this short passage. I think there is a message here - God is telling us not to worry!

"Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, But a good word makes it glad."

(Proverbs 12:25)

Our responsibilities

While people in depression desperately need help and support, they also must play a part themselves in getting better. If we continue to look backward towards the past, then all sorts of problems occur. Scripture is very clear that we should be looking ahead, not behind, and this is one of the significant aspects that the Lord taught me in this whole experience.

I had broken the second commandment by idolising my ancestors. God says in His word:

"You shall have no other gods before Me."

(Exodus 20:3)

I had spent so much time thinking about my ancestors that I was virtually worshipping them. As a result of this I had allowed a curse into my life.

Despite my trials, my suicide attempts, my hopelessness at times, I always had an inner resolve not to let the illness beat me.

It is against this background that I offer two Scriptures which contain significant truths:

"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goals for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

(Philippians 3:12-14)

"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character, and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

(Romans 5:3-5)

Conclusion

Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane about His suffering yet to come: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken away from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will."

I believe I had to complete my time of suffering in accordance with my Father's will and purpose. My trial was bitter because of suffering, yet sweet because of the unforgettable encounters I had with God. And because of this, I would not have changed that segment in my life for anything. I feel that from today forward I am continuing to get to know the Lord in His fullness - and that far outweighs the relatively short period of suffering.

My suffering has helped me identify with people suffering in a similar way. I know what despair, anxiousness, dread and side-effects from medication feel like. Yet I also know the joy of being healed!

Secondly, and more importantly, my suffering and healing means that I can now let people know that God is real, and that He has a love for all of us that we cannot express.

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

(Revelation 3:20)

Let Jesus into your heart today and let Him heal you.

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