

# My Personal Journey: Schizophrenia

*The following article is a first person account written by a person with schizophrenia.*

It is wonderful to have an opportunity for patients, family members, psychiatrists, and nurses to share their experiences openly together.

My name is CC. I developed schizophrenia when I was 17, in 1983. Now the disease is under control as long as I follow my doctor's advice and take the medicine as he directs. I have injections regularly and consult my psychiatrist every 8 weeks.

My father was an electrician. He worked hard and was well-respected by his apprentices. My mother is 74 years old now but she still looks after me and does all the housework. I hope she has a very long life. She has been by my side throughout my 24-year journey through mental illness and has always supported me.

When I was a child my family lived in Mongkok, in a quarter owned by my father's boss. My brothers, my sister, and I spent our childhood there. As a child I was shy, not eager to talk and did not dare look others in the face. I daydreamed and enjoyed staying at home. Sometimes I felt unsafe. I can only remember things from that time by looking in the family photo album. I studied hard and got 2 prizes within 3 years in my kindergarten years. I joined in play and games, and took part in a dance performance called "Building a school". I had some writing and reading difficulties, but my mathematics was good. I inherited this from my mother who is good at calculations, especially in the market.

When I was at primary school, my coach asked me to play basketball. Although we played hard in every competition, we always lost but it made me into an athlete. It was my glory. I think sports are really good for me. Playing encouraged me to talk more and more and it refreshed my spirit.

The secondary school entrance examination result was a disappointment. Although I got grade 1 in Chinese and Mathematics, my English was grade 2. I entered a girls' Christian secondary school. I studied hard and had good times there.

I became ill around the time of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) in 1983. It was as if I had had a stroke and could hardly move. I could only take small steps and saliva ran out of my mouth uncontrollably. My head was filled with so many different thoughts and feelings it felt like it was stuffed with stones. I lay awake for 3 days and nights worrying about how to handle problems with my classmates and friendship problems in the Church. I think this was why I broke down.

At that time I was admitted to a psychiatric unit of a

regional hospital for the first time after I fainted in school. Once I regained consciousness, I found it so hard to move that I could not even cover myself with a blanket. My teacher asked me to consult a doctor and I went to a general outpatient clinic, then a gynaecologist, and finally to the psychiatric department. I begged my doctor to let me stay in hospital and he agreed. After 3 months of medical treatment, I became much better and could walk normally. I think I got better because my doctor prescribed suitable medicine.

My illness was diagnosed as schizophrenia. The schizophrenia made me unable to think properly and I believed that many people were talking about me nearby, and I heard voices that always seemed to be scolding me. I felt unsafe on the street because I believed that many people were following me. Sometimes I even quarrelled with myself. During this time in Kowloon Hospital, my mother sent me a meal every day and my father visited me every day as well. It was hard to eat but I knew that if I did not I would die, so I did my best to eat up all my meals. My boyfriend visited and our relationship was good during my 3-month stay in hospital.

Although I could not take HKCEE in 1983, I asked my secondary school to let me repeat and in 1984 I got 9 passes with 2 credits studying science. At that time, I thought study was my only priority and stopped seeing my boyfriend. After 2 years in Form 6, I studied hard and entered the Hong Kong Higher Level Examination (HKHLE). I got 4 passes in science subjects.

After Form 6 I went out to work. Then, as now, I wanted to be a teacher but my doctor advised against being a teacher or nurse as the workload might be too much for me. He suggested becoming an office clerk. I could not pass through the probation period in some jobs but in 1989-1991, I worked as an assistant sales coordinator. I dealt with the sales and work orders. However in 1991 I was feeling uneasy and left my position. Later, I had many positions as a sales clerk. The duration of employment for each was usually only 1 year. After that I would start to feel sick. At those times, I felt unsafe, read documents without understanding what I was reading, felt uneasy, and could not perform calculations.

Now I am taking Stelazine (trifluoperazine) and Artane (benhexol). I follow my doctor's advice and continue with the medical treatment. Since 1994 I have worked as a tutor in students' homes but I want to find a 9-5 job. I have not worked full-time for 5 years. I am eager to find a job as a sales support, or merchandising assistant in the toys field. In the past, I have been a clerk, receptionist, and a trainee dental surgery assistant. I trained at the Prince Philip Dental Hospital but could not sit my final exam because my father passed away and then I really broke down.

I go to the Clubhouse almost every day. I study computer there, and take some art and craft interest classes. I am usually the clubhouse guide for visitors. At the Clubhouse, we have a meeting at 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. Everyone comes back to work and gather. We have a birthday party every month, an outdoor activity every month as well, and a special competition every 3 months. Some charity agents support our activities, and some famous people sometimes visit us to get a greater understanding of mental illness.

I have not been hospitalised since 1999 and may say that I have recovered. I think that I was only really ill once, in 1983, when I became semi-paralysed. The other 5 to 6 times in hospital were because of family quarrels and fights. My mother always supports me but my family do not understand my disease. During the years 1983 to 2007, I have had hard days. I think a good family living harmoniously together is the way to diminish psychiatric disease. I also want everyone to care for their family. We all need the help of our family members.

Nowadays my friends do not discriminate against me because of my illness. However, when I was working, I used to hide my illness and not tell anyone. Once they knew I was a psychiatric patient, they would not spend time with me. They were all afraid I would be in a mess and would hurt them. I seldom told others that I was a patient so as not to be hurt by other's feelings about me and did my best to

be like everyone else.

When I became ill in 1983, I did not know what was wrong with me. The doctor said that I had schizophrenia, but I could not accept it. However, now I have accepted that I have schizophrenia, and this has been a step towards my recovery. I know I have the disease and hope it can be cured.

I used to hide my disease when job-hunting and not say anything about it. Now when some employers ask about my health experience, I try to tell the truth. After all, when I go to consult a doctor, my colleagues will know. It is up to them whether they will discriminate against me. In Hong Kong, discrimination still exists, although it is a bit better than it was. When someone has a psychiatric illness and others know about it, they sometimes avoid you, say you are crazy and you lose their friendship.

Nowadays, people are more open to talking about mental illness, because a few movie stars have owned up to having one. Public education helps people to have a better understanding of psychiatric disease. I just want people with a psychiatric illness to be treated fairly and for there to be no more discrimination.

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