

# Standing in my own SHADOW

by Barry Daniels

the autobiography  
of a life-long  
Depression



## **Standing in my own Shadow**

The Autobiography of a Depression

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## **Standing in My Own Shadow**

### ***Prologue:***

I never thought that I'd one day write the story of my life. Though it's been interesting enough to me, I couldn't see why anybody else would ever want to read it. I started out as the dirt poor son of a soldier in a mining village in Yorkshire at the beginning of the second world war and ended my working life as a Senior Executive in Canada's Civil Service, and the trip from there to here has had all the twists and turns of a Harlequin Romance. My kids might be interested in reading it one day, but why should you?

What makes my story of more general interest is that I carried with me from my earliest days a mental illness which at its worst is terrifying and debilitating, and at its best is a dark cloud which spreads its shadow over every aspect of my life. I have been for most of my life in the grip of Depression.

From what I've read Depression is, like cancer, difficult to avoid completely. Millions suffer from it, millions more struggle along from day to day undiagnosed, untreated and unsuspecting. Then there are those who stand by our sides, who have to watch loved ones, friends or family, battle this illness. I think that it has been as hard for my wife to watch as it has been for me to bear. And how can I explain it to her? How do you explain to someone what it is like to be trapped inside your own body, listening to terrible things coming out of your own mouth and yet unable to intervene?

Perhaps this book can help. It was, in fact, my wife's idea. Write the book, she said, and tell how it felt. Tell it from the first signs to the time you were diagnosed and started treatment. Trace its development along with your life story. Explain how it affected your personal life and, especially important, how you managed to keep it from interfering with your career -- people will especially want to know that! And it will have advantages for you, she said, to put this down on (virtual) paper; it will give you a chance to step back from yourself and look at the illness objectively.

She was right. She almost always is. So here it is. Depression from the inside looking out. The story of my rags to riches career is in here, too, in parallel, but if you find my life story too boring, skip it or speed read those parts; I won't be offended.

If you're looking for a learned dissertation on the subject of mental illness, don't download this book. If you want to know how a serotonin uptake inhibitor works, there are books which will tell you that, but this is not one of them.

If you are a fellow sufferer, or a family member, or a close friend of someone who suffers from depression I have written this book for you as much as for me. Hopefully it will bring us both to a better understanding of mental disease in general and Depression in particular.

To fellow depressives let me add this: We suffer from a disease like any other; it is not of our making; nothing we did, or didn't do, brought this down on us. We have no reason to be ashamed or embarrassed. We should not allow a bell to be hung around our necks; those days are past. There is no stigma involved in being mentally ill unless we allow it. We must not allow it.

May we all find peace of mind.

Barry Daniels

Nova Scotia

August 2014.

### ***Interlude: An Important Definition:***

As I write this we are in the middle of Mental Illness Awareness month here in Canada, a period devoted to presenting to the public the facts of life regarding mental diseases. The project hopes to eliminate, or at least mitigate, the stigma attached to mental illness and to foster understanding, possibly some measure of sympathy for the devastation caused by these illnesses on those of us who suffer from them.

Having been big-D Depressive for most of my life these efforts are of great interest to me. The project includes a TV spot in which an off-camera voice asks the question: “Where does Depression hurt?” and gives the whispered reply “Everywhere.” Then “Who does Depression hurt?” with the answer “Everyone.” I like this ad. It is realistic and true. It has been shown many times over the last few weeks. So can I now expect that people I meet casually in my everyday wanderings will have some new, deeper understanding of the hell to which my illness periodically subjects me? A little sympathy, perhaps?

Probably not. And one of the reasons for my low expectations, a very basic reason, lies at the very root of the condition; its name. My dictionary says:

Depression: (n)

1. A feeling of being extremely unhappy.

(Many children show signs of anxiety and depression after a divorce in the family.)

2. To suffer from depression.

(She suffered from depression after the death of her husband.)

My Depression is not defined by unhappiness. Well, not only unhappiness, though this is certainly part of it. I have been sad and I have been Depressed. There is a world of difference.

Unhappiness is what you get when your pet dies, when you get passed over for a promotion or your girlfriend goes off with another man. Realistically I don't ever expect to meet a person who has never suffered sadness and most people, I think, accept that being occasionally unhappy is a part of living. There are those who believe that sadness is an important part of life, one which makes us spiritually stronger by experiencing it.

Depression, on the other hand, sometimes plunges me into a deep black pit of pain and despair; or it can drive me into a destructive rage in which not even my most deeply loved ones are safe. Do you see now why I expect (and receive) little or no sympathy from those unclear about the basic difference between Depression and simple unhappiness?

Me: "I'm Depressed."

Them: "What the hell have you got to be depressed about? You have a good job, no money problems, a happy marriage, robust health and great kids! You've no right to be depressed!"

Me: "No, I mean I am really Depressed."

Them: "Well for Heaven's sake snap out of it."

I wish the people behind these ads the best of luck. I hope that they succeed in teaching the difference between depression and Depression. I hope that in my lifetime I may see the end of the stigma which haunts those of us who suffer this terrible, destructive mental disorder.

But I'm not holding my breath.

## **Chapter One: Early Years 1940 – 1953**

### ***About the Beginning:***

I don't think that I was born depressed. I have many clear memories of my first few years, and, by and large, they were happy times. I've heard it said that the human brain is not sufficiently developed to record and store memories before the child is 4 or 5 years old, but that some people had stories told to them so often as small children that they come to think the memories of those events are their own. Maybe so, but I have many clear memories that go back well before the age of 5.

I was born in Rossington, a North England mining village in the West Riding of the County of Yorkshire in October 1940. Above me, in the blue autumn skies, a small group of extremely brave young men, not a lot older than myself, were putting their lives on the line to ensure that my life could be lived in freedom. I have never forgotten what they did for me nor the debt which I owe to them.

My first home was a coal miner's cottage at the end of a long terraced row of such cottages on a cobbled street recently equipped with gas lamps. I shared the house with my mother, my grandmother and a large shaggy dog called Nell who had belonged to my grandfather. Granddad Thompson died before I was born, so Gran took over the house and the dog. When my Dad was called away to war, driving a lorry for the Royal Engineers, it was a natural thing for my expectant Mother to move in with Gran.

Infants School (Preschool) was directly across the road from our house, not even a two minute trip. I'd been aware of the place for months, knowing that I was to become a pupil sometime soon, as a steady procession of relatives had been paraded before me in preparation for the event, and I was told by all of these that "you're going to just love school." My main memory of those first schooldays is the afternoon nap on camp cots, a very civilised custom and one which I still enjoy.

One bright sunny morning I was watching the teacher draw chalk letters on the blackboard. She was demonstrating the letter K, explaining that it was like a butterfly landing on a blade of grass, when my Mum walked into the class. Being able to read simple sentences I was wondering what the talk of butterflies was all about but the presence of my Mum pushed such thoughts aside. She talked briefly with the teacher, who became excited. Still wondering, I took my Mum's hand and we left the school and crossed the road to join the queue waiting for the Doncaster bus. Thirty minutes later we stood at the exit to Doncaster station until a smart young soldier carrying a very large duffel bag came smiling up the staircase and my father entered my life.

***About Bullies:***

In September 1947 I was given busfare, directions, a kiss from my Mum and sent off to start Junior School. I met the first of the school's bullies on my second day. As soon as we were dismissed for morning break there was a rush for the exits as several hundred boys poured out of the building. About half of these immediately began a football match which I learned had been going on for several years. No one knew or cared about the score and the game took up half of the playground. Boys who were not playing the soccer game were pushing, pulling, punching or wrestling in pairs or small groups. Not interested in either activity I stuck to the perimeter, minding my own business when for no reason that I could see I was grabbed, pushed against a brick wall, punched in the side of my head and thrown to the ground.

To add insult to my injuries, the old crone who taught my first year class chose that day to do a cleanliness inspection, and called for a show of hands on entry to the classroom. Mine, of course, were scratched and dirty, earning me a painful rap on the knuckles with a wooden rod, and I was sent to the bathroom to clean up.

By the end of my first month, with the help of fellow students, I had identified all the significant school bullies. I say 'significant' because many of the bigger boys would give me a push or a punch as they passed me in the corridor or on the playground but this was harmless and of little account. I was small, weak and non-violent, so a natural prey for the bigger boys. There were other boys in the same circumstance as



myself, and we were drawn to each other by some natural law, but sadly this did not provide us with any significant protection. The bullies would stalk us, select one from our group and go about their dirty business . The rest of us ran away and re-grouped elsewhere. Teachers largely ignored this activity. They would intervene if a smaller boy was being seriously beaten by a larger boy but this was rare. If two well matched boys were involved in a schoolyard scuffle few teachers would bother to become involved.

The 1947 Education Act, that brilliant and farsighted piece of legislation which allowed and assisted my education, also freed me from the worst of the bullies. When I started Grammar School in 1952 I was delighted to find that the 11-plus exam had filtered out the worst of the bullies and shunted them off to complete their education elsewhere.

As I grew older and developed my coping skills bullying faded from an everyday concern to an occasional nuisance; but they were always there, at the back of my mind, much like the constant toothache which plagued my early years and cast a dark shadow over what should have been sun-filled days.

My last meeting with a true bully took place about a month before I left Doncaster for Leeds University in 1959. I was talking with friends at our garden gate when a nightmare in a gray overcoat came walking towards us. At least six feet tall, twice my width at the shoulders, he outweighed me by a factor of three or more. He stuck his face so close to mine that I could smell his breath, and proceeded to tell me in gruesome detail what he would do to me if I ever laid hands on his brother again. I recognised this ‘boy’ as one of the residents of a half way house, a home for troubled youths, which had been built a hundred yards or so down the street. I told him I had no idea what he was talking about, nor who his brother might be, nor when I was supposed to have ‘laid hands’ on him – or on anybody else for that matter. This caused the ‘boy’ to do a fairly good impression of Al Pacino as “Scarface”. The face came close again and a fist the size of a soccer ball was waved under my nose. This done, the nightmare wandered off home.

I consoled myself with the fact that my escape plan had worked and I would be well away from Doncaster and its bullies within the month.

Today there seems to be a growing tendency to find excuses for bullies. I have even heard it said that “bullies are the true victims”. That may have been true to some extent in that place at that time, for many of them saw their inevitable future as working down a coal mine alongside their fathers and other male siblings, a dismal outlook to a life which would probably be bleak, brutish and short. They were often treated violently by their fathers and other adult males, and saw such treatment of the weak by the strong as a normal and natural part of life. However, little sympathy could be found for them amongst their smaller prey in the 1940s and 50s.

All things considered, bullies had a mixed impact on my young life. For the negative, they cast a shadow over almost everything I did and took much of the joy from a childhood which could otherwise have been happy. For the positive, I made an early vow that as soon as I could I would get as far away as possible from Doncaster, in the firm belief that life anywhere else would most certainly be better and could not possibly be worse. By the time I made that vow I had already realised that the means of escape would come to me through education.

***Postscript: 2014: Bullying then and now:***

I thought it might be interesting to do a little research into how things have changed since my Junior school days. Surely things must be much more civilised after six decades of progress. Or maybe not. A Google search for ‘Bullying in Yorkshire’ got 752,000 ‘hits’. Apart from the fact that high-tech ‘social media’ has been added to the bullies box of tricks, and that teenage suicides seem to be more prevalent than I recall, not a lot seems to have changed. From the myriad examples I found on the Web I’ve chosen one, because I think this must be my all-time favourite bully story: It happened in Doncaster earlier this year.

*Five-year-old Ethan, was playing in his yard with his two-year-old brother when a pack of three bullies starting taunting and picking on him. According to his mom Sharon, who watched it all go down from inside the house, Ethan tried to ignore them, but one of the boys came over and pushed him to the ground. That's when his cat finally had enough. After Ethan got pushed, his mom ran outside, but Smudge the cat got to the gang before she did. “I saw Smudge fly out from under the*

*car and jump on the boy's chest," she told the Daily Mail. "The boy stumbled backwards, burst into tears and then ran off."*

This could have been me at about the same age. Wish I'd had an attack cat.

### ***About Teeth:***

My early years were so full of toothache that I thought it was a normal part of life and my only option was to get used to it. My generation was raised among food shortages of all kinds. Much of the food which reached our table came to England by sea convoys, which often suffered great losses, while home grown fruits and fresh vegetables were always in short supply.

By 1949 it occurred to the National Government that many, if not most, British children's teeth were in a terrible state. The response was to assemble small teams of dental surgeons and technicians, pack the necessary equipment into ex-army trucks and send them off to the schools. None of this was known to me at the time. I had met dentists twice in my short life both of these meetings had been in emergency conditions when my toothache became overpowering.

I was probably nine or ten years old when one morning a white-coated woman came into the classroom and interrupted the lesson. She read from a sheet of paper the names of five boys who rose from their desks and followed her out. Half way through the lesson two boys came back and the woman in white read out five more names. Mine was the fifth. I followed her and four other boys into a large room with white walls. A row of metal chairs sat against one wall, and four of us were told to sit there and wait.

When my turn came I was taken into the room and told to sit in a large chair which I recognised from my limited experience as a dentist's chair. An old man came over immediately, pulled open my mouth and said something to his colleagues. One of the other men came to me with a hypodermic needle -- also recognised from my past encounters and I lost it. The dentist pulled out two teeth while the assistant and nurse tried vainly to hold me still. Eventually they gave up.

The nurse pulled me from the chair and took me to the door. She said “Come back here tomorrow morning before school and bring your Mum. Give her this.” She handed me an envelope and opened the street door. Not knowing what else to do, I walked home.

Mum opened the letter and said “They want to take some teeth out. What do they need me for?”

We got there early in the morning and they were ready for me. I was seated in the chair and a large rubber mask was placed over my mouth before I had any chance to resist. I dreamed of Mickey Mouse and woke up confused to find my mouth was bleeding and I was minus four more teeth. I don’t think the whole thing had taken five minutes.

I did not see another dentist until I was sixteen. After a detailed examination of my mouth he told me “We could possibly save two or three, but you’d still need plates. Better to take out the lot, I’d say.”

I came back the following week and they took all of my teeth out. I must have been a celebrity of sorts because several dental students were present as observers. There was no pain and little discomfort, and Mum got us a taxi to get home. I started my year in the sixth form with no teeth, and a week later showed up with a perfect set and a beautiful smile. Nobody seemed to notice one way or the other.

I went back to the same dentist to have my wisdom teeth pulled as soon as they threatened to burst through my gums. Once again the surgery involved no pain and little discomfort. The dentist gave me a bill for five pounds and my Gran paid. I have not visited a dentist since – fifty eight years and counting.

### ***About my Father:***

I come from a family of five; my parents, a brother and a sister. My extended family included my Mum’s twin brother and family (two female cousins) and my Mum’s sister and family (two male cousins). We were in and out of each other’s homes constantly and these people have remained dear to me. All of them have now left Doncaster. My Mum was at all times loving and supportive and made the sun shine in my life when outside was cloud from horizon to horizon. My Gran was cut from similar cloth. My brother and I fought and tussled and argued

with each other but were always united against any common enemy. We built a love which has deepened over the years. My sister, born ten years after me, has always remained close.

When my father came home from WW2 he brought me my first Meccano set and showed me how to connect the parts with tiny nuts and bolts. We built a truck and a crane. This was a wonderful time for me, and I thought I had entered into a new chapter of my life; he would teach me how to defend myself like a soldier; how to catch a ball, swing a bat. We would go fishing together and have a great time. Perhaps we would get a dog.

We got a dog, a mid-sized mutt who we called 'Laddie'. None of the rest happened. For the next thirteen years, until I left home for university, he rarely encouraged me, commended my efforts or even spoke kindly to me.

At first I tried to work out how to make him like me, to put right whatever I had done to turn him so sour, but I eventually gave up. My Mother could not understand or explain his actions and asking him to explain himself was a short cut to a loud row. Out of nowhere he would tell me "You'll never make anything of your life; you'll never hold down a job."

He told me that he knew I was a sex maniac, which was rather weird since I did not have any sexual experiences until after I'd left university. He brushed off my academic achievements as of little use or value. I was always in the top three or four when exam results came out, and often the top boy (there were two girls in my class who consistently outscored me). This made me the top boy in the top form in the top school in the region, but he would only ask me if I had been chosen for the first eleven soccer team, or where I'd finished in the cross country race.

His job as driver for the 'Snow White' Bakery ended when the company filed for bankruptcy, and with it went the house we rented which had belonged to the bakery. We moved to a council estate and my father joined friends and relatives as a coal miner at the local Colliery, a pit which featured prominently in the war with Margaret Thatcher when unprofitable mines all over England were summarily closed many years

later. If he was at home when I got back from school he would be sleeping on the sofa, and the family had to tiptoe around the house until he awoke.

When my GCE results qualified me for the sixth form – generally seen as preparation for University – Dad opposed it vociferously. He felt that I had ‘wasted enough time’ learning things that would never be of any use. He realised that I would never be able to do a ‘real man’s job’ but conceded that I might make a passable shop assistant, or perhaps ‘something in a bank’. Not that he thought I would hold any job long. I probably could not get up early enough to be at work on time and would soon be sacked. If I didn’t like it I could just get out and see how long it would take before I came running home to Mummy.

Fortunately, my Mum and Gran attacked him from both sides and he eventually agreed that ‘if he could not see sense, he could just shut his fool mouth’. As usual, the ladies carried the day.

A similar situation occurred when I submitted my applications to several universities, until he realised that I would be leaving home, and I’d have my own source of funds.

To give him his due he was never violent to any of us. In later life I came to realise that my father had kept a roof over our heads and food on the table and a safe place to stay while I soaked up the education which was my ticket to a better life. And he did that by working at a job which he hated, day after day after day. But he was a mean man, with a nasty temper, and it was not possible for me to do anything to please him. At the end I still could not understand his dislike for me. Many years later one of my therapists suggested that he might have been jealous of the opportunities of which I took full advantage and yet had never been available to him.

When I left home he borrowed a car from a friend and, with my Mum in the back seat, drove me to university, dropping me in the Student Union grounds where dozens of bewildered students were milling around looking urgently to make new friends. His last words to me were “You know we won’t be able to help you with anything. There won’t be any money.” I said “I won’t be asking for anything.” My Mum was crying as they drove away.

Looking back I have come to realise that my Father was showing several symptoms of mental illness. I have no doubt that for most of his life my father was severely depressed.

### ***Depression Checklist:***

In this section, which will appear at the end of each chapter, I will try to look back on that period of my life as unemotionally and objectively as possible, and identify any early signs of mental illness. Here is my checklist, showing ten warning signs and symptoms of Depression for which I will be looking. They were taken from various websites devoted to Depression and other mental illnesses.

- |                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Warning sign #1...    | Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness; |
| Warning Sign #2...    | Loss of interest in daily activities;      |
| Warning Sign #3.....  | Appetite or Weight changes;                |
| Warning Sign #4.....  | Sleep changes; insomnia; oversleeping;     |
| Warning Sign #5.....  | Anger or Irritability;                     |
| Warning Sign #6.....  | Loss of energy;                            |
| Warning Sign #7.....  | Self Loathing;                             |
| Warning Sign #8.....  | Reckless Behaviour;                        |
| Warning Sign #9.....  | Concentration problems; trouble focusing;  |
| Warning Sign #10..... | Unexplained Aches and Pains;               |



## **Chapter One: Depression Checklist: Warning Signs:**

#1 Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness; Yes.

#2 Loss of interest in daily activities; No.

#3 Appetite or Weight changes; No.

#4 Sleep changes; insomnia; oversleeping; No.

#5 Anger or Irritability; No.

#6 Loss of energy; No.

#7 Self Loathing; No.

#8 Reckless Behaviour; No.

#9 Concentration problems; trouble focusing; No;

#10 Unexplained Aches and Pains; No.

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