

W*all have a touch of madness in us.* Most people have the odd manic outburst, patch of *paranoia* and dose of *depression* and get away with it – but not everyone does. Some find medication alleviates such mental disorder while, for others, madness takes over. There is another way, however, of handling the crazy elements in our *psyche*.

Finding Your Self Through Madness gives an account of how we can weather a mental breakdown and come through with a more robust, real sense of *self*.

Whoever in their right mind would choose to explore madness? This book invites you to do just that. It challenges what are deemed to be normal standards of mental health and invites you to consider the benefits, and the dangers, of revealing what is deep within your unconscious. It is a demanding process as we are treading on delicate and potentially explosive ground. However, those of us who hide behind a public mask are the very people with the most to gain from confronting their mad elements. An extraordinary, bold and risky suggestion it may be, but one which is the foundation of this book.

While some rudiments of mental development are included as a framework to support you in this emotional venture, the perspective I present is not just from my objective viewpoint as a professional *psychotherapist* but also from my personal experience. Having a brush with madness is a very different story to the clinical theory.

Overall, Winnicott and Bowlby have provided the bedrock for child development studies, while I have needed Assagioli to be flanked by the founding fathers Freud and Jung, in exploring the need to ‘grow down’ (Hillman’s term) before growing up. I borrow Bion’s term of *non being* although what I have to say about it is original.

This personalised mix is pertinent as, when I was in the throes of *psychotic* episodes, most scholarly volumes lacked an essential ingredient. I was desperate for help from people who really knew what they were talking about, for themselves - and to me, the writers’ words were not informed by an intimate connection to their own psychotic realm.

I do remember reading Brian Keenan’s (1992) book, *An Evil Cradling*, and exclaiming with relief, ‘Yes, that’s how it is – he knows what it’s like!’ His experience of captivity and torture was fact, whereas mine was a creation of my imagination. However, where his world and mine converged was when the real danger to his physical survival waned and his psyche continued to play out his living nightmare in *hallucinations*. I felt the horror of what Keenan had endured coming from the pages of his book and such empathy rising within me for this man who had ‘been there’. His words gave me precious comfort and heartening courage.

Of course, no one makes an identical inner journey or comes to the same conclusions. However, my greatest inspiration for writing this first hand account of

psychological turmoil and recovery is that some who are troubled by their own, or another’s, mental distress may feel a link with me as they read of my experiences.

Since the language I use is more commonplace than in academic literature, the material might also awaken an interest in those uninitiated in the capriciousness of the psyche. My intention is for all readers to be stimulated, in an exciting and meaningful way, by notions which may challenge their own. Indeed, this book offers an unusual twist to mental development in that it focuses on the potential creativity in psychological disturbance. Thus it may prove a source of candid communication provoking debate on madness - which by its very provenance is as abstruse and difficult to understand as it is disturbing.

I sincerely hope that presenting my view on this complex subject might further an understanding and tolerance of mental disorder and may evoke greater respect for those who seek to grow from their psychotic roots.

As it is, most of us fear madness. It is all too close for comfort - best not to think about it, let alone go there. Yet such defensive devices prevent us from discovering the many intrinsic resources which lie enmeshed within this much damned area of our psyche. It may be hard to believe but, in finding our way through madness, we can end up with what is a clearer and more healthy sanity than that considered the norm. Either we take a proactive step to embrace what is in our psychotic layer, or run the risk of these powerful *drives* breaking through for themselves when we are ill-prepared.

The most common and deepest urge in mankind, for those who feel in control of their life and others going through psychological disturbance, is the longing for someone to come close and really know them. If we explore our psychotic dimension with a person well acquainted with this area, the ultimate reward is that we may develop an intimate and loving relationship with our self and with others. We all yearn to be loved for who we genuinely are. Yet so many of us fear rejection if our deepest substance was to be revealed.

When in the grip of madness alone with our ‘monsters’, often we can but cling to a wall or hug a cushion. If this book speaks meaningfully to those trapped in this terrifying space and gives them a voice, then it has done its job. It further extends a hand of encouragement, not only to those who feel crazy, but to all whose defence against what lies at the root of their psyche means they feel that the life they are leading is precarious, inauthentic and unfulfilling.

So whether you are mindful of others’ well being, you feel something missing in your life or you are wobbling on the tightrope of mental illness, you might find that an answer, not the answer, lies herein.

*extract from Introduction to
Finding Your Self Through Madness – Nicki Holland*