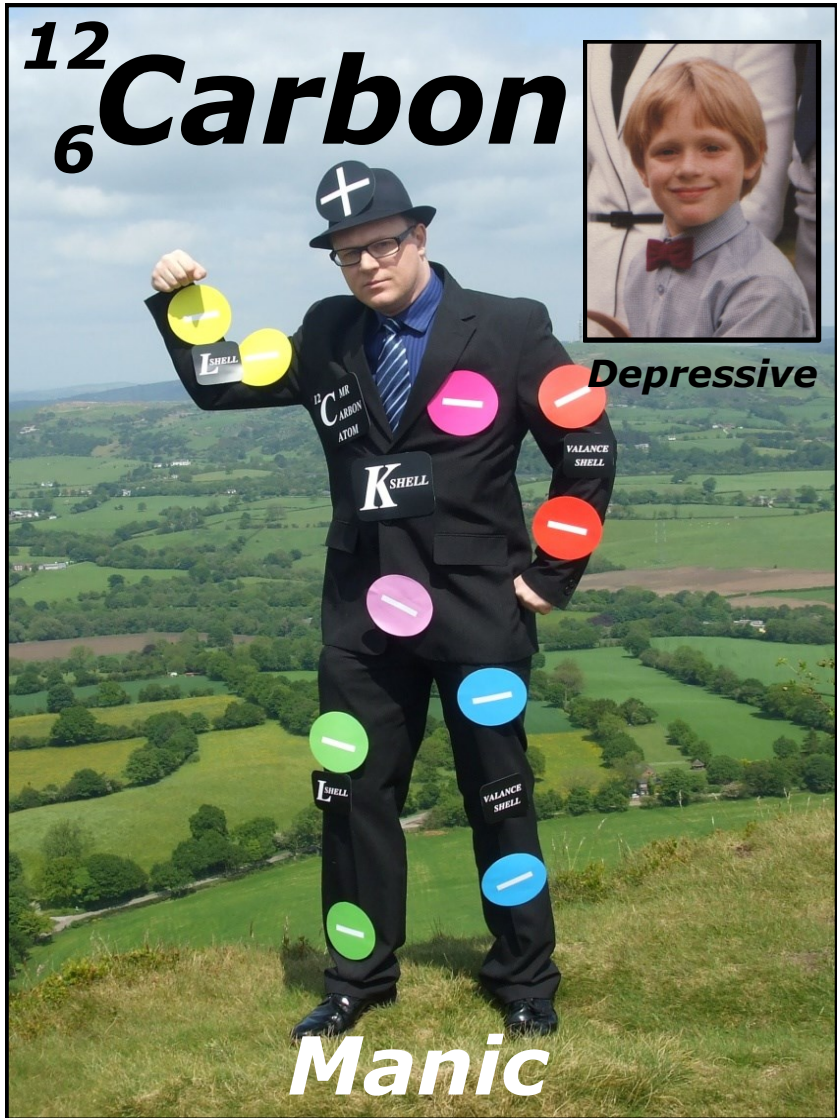


The **Manic** Depressive



The biography of a
polarised man

The Manic Depressive Universe.

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Introduction to the Manic Depressive.

Ever since I was born, I knew I was different and complex. Even in the womb, I was very energetic and manic. As a baby, I would have periods of joy and high energy coupled with periods of little or no activity at all. During my energetic periods, I would rock in my pram and cot for hours on end without stopping. As I got older, I added humming to my periods of energetic outpouring. I broke my cot, my pram, and the seats in the back of my parent's car. This included the chairs in our house. Not once but many times over throughout my early childhood. I had a reputation for this within my family. Coupled with this were moments where I was highly *disassociated*.

During disassociated periods, I would stare and look fixedly or vacantly at someone or something with my eyes wide open, often for hours on end. It was clear from a very young age that I was polarised. I was an extremist in everything I did, even as a very young child. There appeared to be no middle ground with me. I never did moderation but instead went from one high level of energy to ultra-low levels of energy, often in a concise period. My family knew that I was complex, and many felt I was very bright. I was often told I would end up as an Oxbridge graduate when I grew up.

I took my first steps at the age of just seventh months old. I was curious to the extreme and wanted to investigate my world with passion and intrigue. But I would also act with periods of deficient energy where I didn't want any stimulation at all. During these periods, I suffered from tremendous anxiety and experienced butterflies in my stomach. I remember it very well; it was an awful experience. I would often have these feelings early on in the morning. I would later call

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these my morning blues. When the first thing you feel in the day is anxiety, it doesn't set you up very well for the day ahead.



A truly wonderful family. I have been so lucky to have such marvellous parents and siblings whom I love deeply.

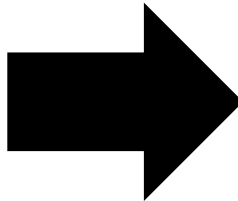
I was born on a very cold January day in 1973 in Macclesfield.

I was very ill for many weeks with a mysterious condition with my ability to eat. I spent quite some time in the hospital before eventually coming home.

I was walking after just seven months and was sensitive from birth.



From child (depressive) to man (manic).



From the *little boy* to the *man*.



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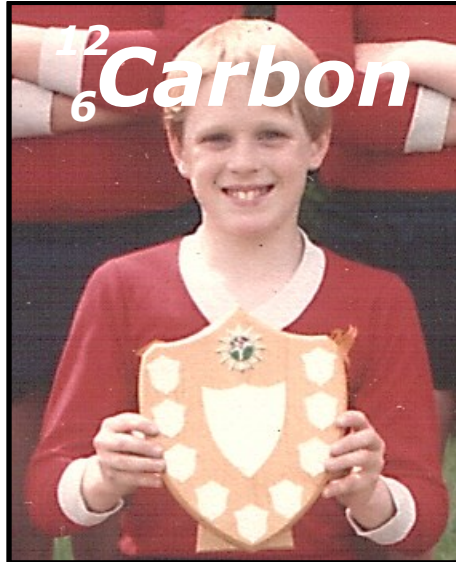
I was also super sensitive to my environment, and it took next to nothing to upset me. I hated this and would often feel shocked with terror that could last for months. I was a good child, but we all make mistakes, but as a child, it just seemed to affect me more than the other children around me. Aside from my morning blues and hypersensitivity, my mood would rise in the day, and I would become hyperactive, although it was always controlled. I didn't run around like a crazy thing at all. My periods of hyperactivity were always directed and highly focussed. I just rocked endlessly in my pram and cot, and as I got a little older, I began banging my head against my pillow in my cot and pram. This became the new normal for me. It would stick with me into my early teens.

My mind was highly active during periods of banging my head on my pillow. I would fantasise about all sorts of things, and as I reached primary school age, I became obsessed with being a professional footballer. I would spend countless hours thinking about this while I rocked in the chair or banged my head on the pillow. This would later become part of my delusional state. I was as high as a kite and out of control during my delusions. I felt invincible and felt like I could conquer anything I desired. These were the happy moments of my childhood. But hiding inside me was a very dark and sinister side that would haunt me for the rest of my life.

In primary school, I suffered terribly from my hypersensitivity. I never caused any trouble and was generally considered a good child with no obvious danger. I did reasonably well at school but certainly didn't stand out in any way from my friends in my class. This would change later on in my life. I found school to be a nightmare, and my anxiety on any given day was abnormally high and out of control. I absolutely

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hated school and only dreamed of leaving all the way through. I excelled at sports in every way and became the school football team captain at a very young age. I played golf, and my fantasies turned from professional footballer to professional golfer. I would bang my head on my pillow dreaming of being famous and successful.



Failing to take football further into professional status is one of my great regrets in life. I hope it's my only one. I am not sure why I didn't? Professional footballers were not paid one hundred thousand pounds a week back then or I might have taken it further.

I was never really that good at golf and was a little delusional about the whole situation. During the summer months, I played endless football, but when it came time to return to school, I went into a meltdown. The first day of the New Year was a terrible experience, and my anxiety was in meltdown. I know many children go through this,

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but it seemed to affect me more than my friends. I felt sick to my stomach and couldn't eat in the last week of the summer break. By the time I went back to school, the butterflies in my stomach were off all scales.



I absolutely hated every second I spent at school. When a child has a severe mental illness, school is the first place the condition attacks. I had more anxiety regarding school than anyone deserves. I had many friends and that was good, however sport was the only aspect of my experience that was acceptable. I didn't excel academically at primary school.

I became dissociative again during this time and would sit in my room, staring into nothing. My feelings were sad beyond belief; no child should have to experience this. Things came to a head when I was just 8. I had my first teacher, who was a man, and I reacted very badly to this. He was nice, although he was very violent with certain pupils. This terrified me and made my low mood even worse. I remember hating

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the summer. I would often find the intense sunlight of this period and my friends' happy, carefree behaviour disturbing. This was because they were happy during this period, but in some sense, this confounded my negative feelings. The sunlight and carefree attitudes of my friends made everything even worse.

I also didn't understand why they didn't have the same sensitivity I had. It seemed that nothing bothered them, and yet everything bothered me. I would just regress into my periods of high energy full of fantasies to escape the bleakness deep inside me.

The swing of my moods was even harder to cope with at this time. I was deficient in energy at school but would come out of it during the evenings when my fantasies would run free. My days were so polarised that I had become two people in one body. In later life, I would face this dual existence even more.

At school, I was a terrified little boy with appalling physical symptoms. I always felt like I had a lead cap on my head, pushing down with great force. I carried this physical sensation around with me at school and then would take it off in the evenings.

I was a night person from an early age and experienced great anxiety when it was time to go to bed. I hated the mornings and had to endure this terrible morning anxiety daily.

Come Saturday, I would lie in very late and would feel calmed and collected since I was rising at 11 am instead of 8 am.

I was also committed to a strong religious background as a family member had found Jesus again through me. I hated church not only because it meant I had to get up early on the weekend but also

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because I found it all so sad and depressing. I always had my lead cap on when I was at church. I couldn't understand how these types of experiences uplifted everyone around me.

I always hated the symbol of the cross as it made me feel shocked and deeply disturbed. I never had a cross of my own as a child, as I didn't want one. The whole nature of the crucifixion disturbed me as I gained no solace or inspiration from it. I hated Easter, and I would say to myself, "Why is all this violence and barbarism uplifting to those around me?" I was deeply traumatised throughout my childhood by this image.

I wondered why my family member wouldn't let me watch a horror movie but yet would encourage me to watch movies with whippings and a crown of thorns, and a man nailed to a cross. Again my lead cap and my intense anxiety would always prevail at these symbols of ancient barbarism.

I also hated the hymns, which I found to be sad and soul-destroying. I was heavily infected with religion and often found myself lying about my commitment to what I felt were terrible ideas and imagery.

At the age of 8, my anxiety took on a new and terrifying stance. I was cut to ribbons by my new male teacher and was afraid of him. Again he was a lovely man, but I was a ridiculously over-sensitive child. The culmination of my negative feelings, lead cap, and religious desperation drove me into a wall. I found myself unable to listen to uplifting songs as their happiness confounded my feelings and made everything worse.

It was the first time I would face feelings of suicide at the age of just 8. Suicidal ideas are terrible at any age, but for a small child to harbour

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these feelings is just heartbreaking. These feelings were terrible; for some time, even my hyperactive side vanished and brought me no solace. I had no idea how to end my life at this time, which made it even worse. I was trapped inside an eight-year-old messed up and disturbed body. I had stopped banging my head against my pillow at night for many months.

My parents probably thought I had outgrown it, but I hadn't. I had simply put it away for now, and my usual fantasies didn't excite me in the same way they normally did. I felt shattered, crushed, and utterly helpless, and I was afraid of admitting it to them. My family member always said, "Never let it be said your parent raised a shirker." I used to hate hearing this as it made me even more anxious and nervous.

My siblings were already grown up when I was born, so I was raised in an adult world without the regular interactions of brothers and sisters. I was also spoilt by them as well, which didn't help me in later life, where I had to contend with the idea of sharing my life with others.

Eventually, my suicidal thoughts calmed down as my school year progressed. My periods of elation and mania came back, and I was back to being the greatest golfer of all time or the greatest footballer of all time. A family member was a naturally gifted and very talented artist. I grew up knowing this and watched him create incredible artwork. From a very young age, it made me think about my natural talent. This is probably where my fantasies of supreme success came from as I tried to find my way in this life.

The religious indoctrination component of my childhood continued to disturb me as I got older. This came to a head when I was about eight, the year when I had suicidal thoughts for the first time. It happened

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one day after the main service during Sunday school. All the little children were taken into a room, and we were told about Hell for the first time. I had been brought up to believe that Jesus was a loving, caring entity, although I was still bothered by all the human blood sacrifice. They told us that evil people went to this place called Hell.

In Hell, these people were tortured in a *lake of fire* where their skins would be burnt off. It was then regrown, only to be burnt off again and again. This would go on forever, and their screams would be eternal.

We were also told that good people went to Heaven, where they would worship God forever in a happy place absent of any suffering at all. They were a lot sketchier about Heaven than Hell.

But the point was that the Hell idea was so disturbing. I likened the experience to that of being punched in the face with an iron fist. It traumatised me most profoundly and shocked me to my core.

It would be a significant catalyst for my future depression from that moment onwards. It certainly was my last straw and led to my early suicidal thoughts. I was raised to believe that Jesus was all about love and peace, and yet Jesus created a Hell. How could a child reconcile this terrible concept and not be permanently disturbed by it? How could Jesus create any situation that would demand Hell? And how could the creator of an infinite Hell be described as *loving* and *peaceful*? If Jesus created everything, couldn't he have created a better system than this? Again, I could never make any sense of this, and it would sit behind my future depression for the rest of my life.

From that day onwards, I considered the Jesus character to be *creepy*. I never looked at this character with reverence and respect ever again.

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He was always disturbing me from that moment onwards, making me hate the symbol of the cross even more.

The week after this traumatising experience came something else even worse. We went to Sunday school and were all told that it isn't simply a case that *evil people go to Hell*. We were all informed that people go to Hell if they don't believe that:

Jesus lived, died and rose again. Without any evidence of his existence, you went to Hell.

And that he is only doing this because he loves you!

The creepy nature of the Jesus character still took on a more disturbing position after all this. I felt this belief was useless even as a small child. Why should anyone be tortured forever for not believing in what I thought was an empty, baseless assertion? I couldn't understand why not believing in something without evidence would result in such a terrible punishment. None of this made any sense to me, and it made my negative feelings even worse.

Although I went to a Church of England primary school, the vast majority of my friends didn't do the religious thing at all. They were from atheist families and didn't take any of it seriously. And so I wondered whether they would go to Hell because they couldn't believe in Jesus. Again it traumatised me further and made me fearful for my friends' future. I couldn't understand why everything in my religion was very driven by barbarism and cruelty.

And how could this hypersensitive child reconcile all of this? It's not surprising I faced my first suicidal position at this point. Who wouldn't?

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I think my childhood would have been very different if I hadn't had all of this negative emotional baggage to deal with. My friends, however, seemed less sensitive to it and, in a sense, took it with a pinch of salt.

I longed for the day I could leave all this barbarism and hate behind me and free my mind of all of it. I also found the Bible to be very wicked and profoundly evil. I didn't understand why Jesus had to drown all those little children and their parents in the *Noah's Arc* story.

I didn't understand what all those animals had done to Jesus for him to drown them all. It all seemed so unnecessary.

And why did God come down to Earth in human form as Jesus to have himself tortured to death in a gruesome and intolerably hideous manner? So that he could change rules, he created and exclusively controlled to forgive humans of their sins. Why didn't he just forgive people instead? It seemed Jesus was obsessed with blood and horror, and how could I ever have respect for such an entity?

It appeared there always had to be a death for Jesus to get his point across. I wanted nothing to do with any of this, and I wondered when I would ever see a day when I could just leave it all behind. I am sure many people with severe mental illness have a bedrock of this type of barbarism and cruelty. It's not surprising is it when you look at it like this.

I continued to have a lot to do with the church. I was an altar boy and assisted with the Holy Communion service. I found that to be most disturbing as well; again, why did people have to *drink the blood* and *eat the body* of a supposed human? Also, it was very dark, and all seemed so unnecessary. I found the whole thing utterly dehumanising and longed for it to end. I had further rounds of suicidal depression

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during my 8 to 11 years. We won the football league that year, and I celebrated with the silver shield. My moments of high energy continued to splinter between anxiety and depression during this time. I shifted my manic episodes towards a swing.

I would spend hours on my swing in the garden at my parent's house dreaming of being the greatest golfer of all time. The teachers said Mark is never satisfied with 99%. He always wants 100%.

My perfectionism caused me even more anxiety and drove me to excel.

Eventually, I reached the age of 11 and left primary school, and I was delighted and felt my problems of the past had gone away. That was my biggest mistake, as they would take on a new and even more sinister direction.



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I decided to start secondary school with a fresh attitude. I was determined to work hard and excel in everything I did. And I did and became the captain of the football, cricket and athletics teams. In my first year, I got 25 A's and 1B, gained the highest exam results in most subjects, and was propelled into the top class in all subject areas. I was bullied for my passion for learning things and found that hard going. Remember, I was still hypersensitive and experienced anxiety in the usual way. I stopped rocking in chairs and banging my head on the bed. And put all my delusions into my garden swing instead. I started to listen to music while I was on my swing as I had a massive passion for it. I spent hours lost in a fantasy world where I was great at everything I did. I wanted to excel, but there is a fine line between my efforts, successes, and failures. My family member was worried about all this deep introspection and the countless hours I spent on my swing. She was always trying to bring me down to earth, which was frustrating. I just wanted to lose myself in my delusions.

I gained a reputation from the teaching staff for my intelligence, and they felt I was going to do big things in life. It's always difficult to find your thing in life, especially when you excel in many avenues simultaneously. I was still experiencing extremes of mood, finding it hard to function in the mornings and dreaming of being able to rise at my normal time of 11 am.

I began to be bullied at school because of my sports success and academic studies. I also started to lift weights at home and found that I had a strikingly different body from the other boys at school. They were amazed during sports to find a 12-year-old with a full six-pack. I also had peaked biceps and sweeping triceps. My pectorals rippled and were separated, and I had a very narrow waist and a V tapper. My

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shoulders were separated and broad, and I looked more like a man than a child. My back was broad, and my trapezius was clearly defined. I had very low body fat, was vascular, and had separated leg muscles. I became well known for this, and the local nutcase of the year took my physical prowess and academic and sporting success as a threat. I became his target for bullying as he hated me.

I didn't know how to deal with this as I was a very peaceful person and didn't have a *bad bone* in my entire body. This simply amplified my depressive side and brought about terrible anxiety and pure fear. When we went out, I had to have lookouts to give me early warning signs of the presence of this psychopath. This local lunatic bullied everyone at some time or other I just got it worse than any others.

To this day, although we are 49, if I see this guy, we let each other know with a stern look. Some people are so twisted and deranged that there is no hope for them and never will be.

All this fear, on top of early adolescence and falling in love with a girl in my form who rejected me, pushed me over the top. My depressive states and anxiety levels reached a fever pitch. My studies at school started to suffer from this, and I was lost in a dream world where I felt I could be the greatest bodybuilder in the world. So, my delusions focused on this now, although my most extraordinary sporting abilities were in football.

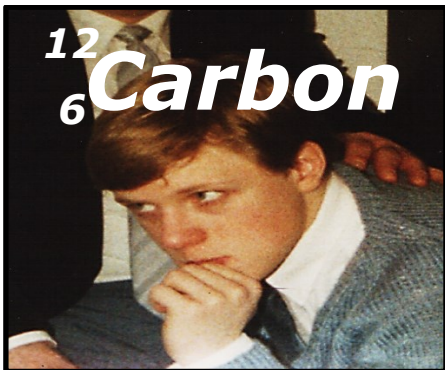
Football was the easiest game I have ever played; it was so natural. I remember one day, a girl in my class came to see me. In front of the whole form, she said, "Mark, I have been watching you play football, and you're exceptional. You must play for the team!" I said, "I do. I am

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the captain.” That felt good as she had assumed there was a cut-off between academic and sporting ability, but I had both.

One of my biggest regrets is not pursuing a career as a professional footballer. By the time I was an adolescent, bodybuilding seemed to take over my mind, and my delusions resided there instead.

My school work started to suffer badly as I was off school month after month. The doctors sent me for test after test, always suggesting I had some kind of viral infection. It wasn't a virus. It was very severe suicidal depression. Back then, they didn't like to give a child a diagnosis of a severe mental illness. Plus, my family member didn't want me labelled as such, although it was mentioned a few times. My mood was now predominantly low all the time, and I would sit in my room in the dark in a dissociative staring state for hours on end. I just wanted to die all the time and had nervous breakdown after nervous breakdown. Panic attacks were common in this period, often in front of other people. This can be very embarrassing and very scary for the people around you. I had them at school regularly and struggled to control them. Eventually, you become more afraid of the panic attack itself.



A perplexed and hypersensitive person. Swinging from one state to another on any given day. Unsure what to do or what was wrong with me. My suicidal drives were terrible at this time, and I kept everything inside me and didn't confess to any of my problems and feelings.

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I had no diagnosis at that point, but I wished I had. At the very least, this would have given me a chance to live with it. The doctors wanted to put me on an antidepressant, but my family member sent me for homoeopathic *sugar tablets* instead, which of course, did nothing. I still had the odd occasional high when I was on my swing. But for the most part, my early adolescence was a genuinely terrifying and highly destructive experience. When you have mood swings, it's like being asked in the morning what your favourite colour is, and you say, "Red." Then being asked the same question in the evening and saying, "It's green." In both instances, you're convinced you are right, yet both can't be true simultaneously.

I continued to have more and more time off school which severely hampered my education as I missed more of my syllabus. I chose GCSEs, which avoided certain teachers who scared me. I just tried to survive day-by-day, but my low mood dominated my state of mind daily. My friends realised that I was in a bad way and were concerned about my waning health. Again, even though I thought I might have a virus, I didn't automatically assume I had a mental illness. I didn't know anything about mental illness, so I couldn't see it in myself. I was just painfully sad all the time. My teacher would call my family member at work and state that she must come and get me as I was grey in appearance. My family member can tell if my mood is low just by looking into my eyes. My eyes become dark, like the dead eyes of a shark. She tends to know instantly, even if I try to hide it.

I was still coping with adolescence and all its difficult consequences. I was desperately in love with a girl at school, and my heart pounded out of my chest every time I saw her. My school performance was plummeting by the day as I fell further behind. My more manic

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moments were dramatically in decline, and I missed them, but they couldn't help the situation as they only exacerbated them.

My close friends didn't know how to react anymore and were afraid for my sanity. The teachers were also very concerned and kept a close eye on things. At that time, I kept everything inside and wouldn't talk honestly about my feelings as I felt ashamed of them. I cried myself to sleep many nights, hoping I would never wake up in the morning. But I found myself in the same terrible predicament every day I woke. Depression is a torturous experience at any age, and my lead cap remained firmly on my head throughout this entire period in my life.

I always listened to sad music staring into the darkness of my room day-after-day. Painful feelings dominated my mind, and thoughts of suicide were constant. The hardest thing a depressed person does is trying to put on a brave face. I was so bad that I couldn't even hide it. Depression on this scale is like an unbearable pain in your entire being. I ached all over my body, all the time, and had headaches often. I couldn't stand to hear the phone ring. When you suffer from what I call *hypersensitivity syndrome*, a phone ringing has instant physiological implications. At the sound of a phone, my heart rate shot up, and I felt panicky all over and very paranoid. If someone called my name, the same effects occurred. People don't realise this, as being terrified of a phone ringing seems innocuous to most people. However, people with severe mental illness must endure this all the time. My nervous system was out of control, and nothing seemed to calm me at all. The terrible emergence of paranoia in depressive states is unthinkable terrible and crushes the person susceptible to a hypersensitive nervous system. If a car pulled up outside my home, I would go into meltdown, thinking all sorts of things. I would panic and

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assume that they were coming for me to take me away from my family. If a newscaster smiled on television, I would think they were laughing at me, which terrified me.

The total absence of manic episodes during this time was problematic. I longed for my dream world of great success and fame. I wanted to be back there, feeling invincible again and in complete control of my world. But they never came until the summer break, where my symptoms lifted a little. I continued to lift weights during this time and somehow managed to captain the football team. Doing exercise when you are low is difficult, and my body ached all over.

Most people don't realise that when a person is in a deep suicidal depression, they have obvious physical symptoms. It is typically thought that a person should shake it all off and change their attitude. This is impossible, and I hurt all over, especially in my head on any given day hence why the doctors thought I must have a viral condition. I was tested repeatedly to determine the cause of my strange condition, but nothing was ever found. My doctor advised my family member that a person with my intellect should be in a private school, not a state-maintained comprehensive. They felt I needed to be with other children who reflected my intelligence, and that might be the solution. They used the term *mentally ill* for the first time when I was 13.

Something else was happening in my mind between the ages of 11 and 13. I was confirmed at church and began participating in the Holy Communion system at church. I found this shocking, and I didn't want to do it, but it was expected of me. An altar server is a lay assistant to a member of the clergy during a Christian liturgy. An altar server attends to supporting tasks at the altar, such as fetching, carrying, and ringing

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the altar bell, among other things. The server is commonly called an altar boy or altar girl if young. I also read the Bible out loud in church, and some of the older ladies suggested I work towards a future in the church. I never wanted any of this, and at 11, I realised that I was just pretending to believe in God. I didn't want to pretend as I had poured my entire childhood into this enterprise and wanted it to be real and not imagined.

I was given a green leather Bible for my confirmation, and I decided to try to read it diligently. I realised that most of the parishioners at church didn't seem to know anything about their Bibles. We spent all of our time covering the same material year-after-year so I thought I would investigate it. I wanted to believe in God for good reasons.

I wanted it to be real and not imagined. So, I started at the beginning and began to work my way through page-by-page. The supernatural claims came thick and fast. Throughout my earlier childhood, my hypersensitivity produced another terrible effect. I believed in every supernatural claim out there because I was told supernatural things were real.

I had night terrors every day, believing that vampires were in my bedroom coming to get me; it was terrible. I was afraid of the dark all the time and felt I could see ghosts in my room. The fear was terrible, and I would run into my parent's room night-after-night in terror.

If I had been brought up not believing in the supernatural, none of these things would have happened. But I wasn't, so I unnecessarily suffered terrible psychological fear during most of my early childhood. I digress a little here, but it is relevant to my psychological state during childhood.

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So, I continued reading my Bible night-after-night and was shocked at the extent of the mess I found. Nothing made any sense at all. I questioned why Adam and Eve were blamed for eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It struck me even at a young age that if they had no knowledge of anything, then how could they know their actions were wrong? I was also raised to believe that God was omniscient and knew the outcome of every event. If God knew that Adam and Eve would fall in the Garden of Eden, then how could they ever change the outcome? If God set up initial conditions knowing they would fail, what could they have possibly done to change it?

And why would God punish the whole of humanity for this? It reminded me of a situation where a person takes 20 four-year-old children and puts them in a room full of matches and flints. Then they cover the room with petrol and dynamite. If one of these children struck a match and the room went up in flames, could you really blame it on the children? They didn't know about fire and matches, so who is at fault here? Are the unknowing children or the nutcase who set up this situation to blame? It is clearly the nutcase who set this up, as the children couldn't possibly know any better.

And this was precisely what the *Garden of Eden* story was all about. Adam and Eve were innocent pawns in a ridiculous game. And I thought, why would God put this ridiculous temptation in front of them first? Why not put the tree out of their way of them or not create such a stupid situation in the first place? And I noticed another shocking fact about this story. God tells Adam and Eve that if they do eat from the tree, they will surely die. And the snake said they wouldn't and would simply be banished from the garden instead. And what happens in the story is that God banishes them. This is exactly

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what the snake said they would experience. So, in this story, God is a transparent liar, which was very shocking to me as a child, and I couldn't reconcile this situation at all. It all seemed very silly to me, and I was just a teenager, yet I could see how ridiculous this was. My church believed that Adam and Eve shouldn't have done it, but what else could they have done? If God set things up knowing ahead of time that they would go wrong, how could he punish humanity forever? Again we all seemed to be pawns in a pointless story with apparent flaws, even to a small child such as myself.

During this time, I began studying science at school and had a natural aptitude for it, getting 99% in my first-year exams in science. I even won a major prize, sending me to Wales for a week to study science with other winners from all over the UK. My interest in science continued to grow, and with it, I found myself looking at my religion with less and less respect. I noticed that the two Genesis accounts in my Bible contradicted themselves out of existence. I also realised that we couldn't have known about days 1 to 5 in the story because no humans existed to observe and record them. So, how could we have possibly known about these events?

At no point in the Bible does God tell someone about the events on days 1 to 5. So, how could we know? I also realised that the Genesis accounts didn't explain anything at all. They just asserted what happened but explained nothing at all. The order of events didn't match with Nature and was contradicted by modern science. It was looking more and more like these were simply the ramblings of very primitive people and nothing more. Which Genesis account was the right one? They couldn't both be true, so one must be a lie, I thought. Again there was that word *lie*.

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I had been brought up to think that the Bible was a perfect historical record of actual events. I had been convinced that it was the greatest historical record in history and that all the events and people mentioned in it were real and accurate reflections of history.

Another observation fell out of my investigations into my Bible. The order of human life didn't have any continuity at all. We went from Adam and Eve to Cain and Abel, and then suddenly Cain had a wife, so where did she come from? Then suddenly, there were people everywhere. There was no continuity in the story at all, and none of this made sense. I was also shocked when I discovered these early humans lived for 900 years. How was this possible, and how could a 100-year-old woman give birth to a child? It was starting to look more and more ridiculous by the minute. And when did people stop living for that long, and how did it all change? There were questions in my mind over all of it. For the first time, I felt embarrassed and ashamed of my beliefs.

Whenever I asked questions about this to the priest at my school, he always told me to stop asking such questions. His reactions were very sharp and almost ignorant. He was a lovely man and very calm and gentle, but every time I questioned things, he changed and practically told me off for daring to be so inquisitive. Again my suspicion grew and grew, and the reluctance of my other church parishioners to answer my questions amplified. I continued to investigate my Bible and found it hard going as the material didn't seem remotely relevant to my life. Why did I care what Bronze-aged people did and thought? How did this teach me about morality, and how could any of this confusion guide me in my life? My religion didn't help my mood at all. The material was full of some of the most terrible and evil behaviour. God