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FORWARD incorporating BI - POLAR NEWS
A FREE & INDEPENDENT WORK IN PROGRESS

WEEKEND EDITION

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FORWARD is a non-profit mental health news & information publication produced by FORWARD PUBLICATIONS, a social enterprise committed to helping recovering addicts, alcoholics and people with mental health challenges to cross the bridge to so-called normal living through hands-on communication education

Our readers are primarily people who think they may have a bipolar condition, those who know they are bipolar, their care givers, family members, friends, mental health professionals and anyone interested in finding out more.



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SERMON FOR TODAY

AMY WINEHOUSE, HER BEST FRIEND AND BIPOLAR

My youngest daughter Juliette was Amy Wine house's best friend and that's a tall order for anyone to live up to.

Juliette, I can tell you, has been a loving trouble maker from the moment she left her mother's womb. Juliette and Amy were most certainly peas in a pod. They matured and ripened in different ways, though

They met when they were both four years-old at kindergarten, but it was not until they were seven and met again at Ashmole School in the north London suburb of Southgate...where they ended up sitting at adjoining desks in the back row of the class, which is when their reign of academic terror began

This four year period when teachers and parents were reduced, at time, to tears of pain and frustration was also the time in their lives when they truly bonded as 'til death do us part buddies - in it to win it.

That fierce determination is still very much alive today in Juliette who lost her best friend to bipolar on July 23rd 2011 as well as me, her father after I was diagnosed with bipolar following a serious suicide attempt 10 years ago

All suicide attempts, cries for help included, are serious.

One in four of us have the bipolar condition in the UK, the same figures which apply to the USA, Canada, Ireland, France, Germany, Australia, New Zealand and Scandinavia making it the number one mental health challenge (some diehards stigmatizes want to call it a disorder, disease or illness) on the planet... a mental rival if you like for the number one physical illness – cancer.

Of those of us who are the one in four, 60% of us will self medicate, with or without the support of mental health services including care co-ordinators, care givers, care worker visitors, GPs, psychiatrists, psychologists and therapists and a cacophony of legal medication

An incredibly large number of us go on to commit suicide in fact the majority of suicides in the UK each year are by people with bipolar.

Amy did not commit suicide. Her self-medication was the cause of her death but the drink and drugs were merely a symptom of something much more cunning, powerful and baffling... a brain chemical condition according to science which has those who have the condition going off the mood scale in either direction – high and low.

Some people successfully use medication, both legal and illegal, to self medicate successfully in that when they are down the drugs and/or alcohol will mellow them out and lift them up and when they are too up, the drugs and/or alcohol will chill them out and/or bring them down

I was 17 when I had my first puff on a joint of marijuana. Juliette and Amy were just 12. How do I know? Because in spite of the blanket Juliette used to roll up and stick along the bottom of her bedroom door, Jackie and I could both smell the ominous aroma that skunk marijuana gives off these days, whether it's being smoked or not..

In my infinite wisdom I started giving small quantities of my marijuana to my daughter to discourage her from buying from strangers with ulterior motives

What I am categorically sure of is that what I did was wrong. There are a number of things with hindsight I could have done better or not done at all however, with each of those incidences, I've learned something to enable me to move forward on sturdier ground

Juliette's like that too. Amy was not. Instead of dealin' with the chemical demons I believe showed up for the first time when she was seven, Amy turned to drink and drugs to deal with and distort reality throughout her late teens and early 20s to the extent of ending up in a critical care unit in hospital on at least three separate occasions is debilitating to say the very least

To have a best friend who does that to you – and sends a message each time via her dad at 2 and 3 in the morning from her hospital bed urging you to come right away and be with her...well, the effect that must have on you is food for thought

There were times when Juliette said she had given up on Amy. The truth is she never did. The bond between them was irrevocably forged during their childhood and is still very much alive today if you speak to Juliette.

She is a singer songwriter with a blossoming career as a solo artist as well as being the co-founder with her sister Jessica of an innovative production company, JJ Soulshack which gives other singers, songwriters and musicians a break or two

I'm a writer. I became a cub reporter on a local newspaper aged 17, about the same time that I discovered the joys of smoking marijuana.

Later after some formative years spent living in Spain and playing electric violin in a handful of rock bands, a national newspaper career beckon as a showbiz news reporter, columnist, feature writer, broadcaster and founder and editor in chief of the ground breaking World Entertainment News Network, which I was "edged" out of when I became mentally ill for the fourth time in 10 years in 2001 and a suicide attempt followed nine months later.

I've written a chapter about Amy and her bipolar in the book about bipolar which is being published at the end of January 2012 which Juliette doesn't like for a number of reasons including – it's too soon after Amy's passing for her to deal with reading about Amy in a book I have written.

.She also believes that I do not have any rights to write about her best friend because I'm her father and therefore it would be wrong to write about Amy against her wishes.

She told me very succinctly four years ago that she thought I was a c**t for even considering writing about Amy, something she stress by calling me a c**t not once but thrice.

Never mind that I have my own story about my relationship with Amy, such that it was. Amy pretty much came to my home after school every weekday evening for five years.

I'd also see her at school event and whenever my daughters had stay-overs with up to 7 or 8 friends – and they were frequent.

And the two years when Jackie and I and Amy's mum Janice would frequently visit them at the flat they shared together in North Finchley... the first time either of them had lived away from home...

...and then there's that small matter of me giving Amy, aged 17, her first job at Juliette's request as a trainee celebrity news reporter with WENN, where she fell in love with Chris Taylor, her first boyfriend and the news network deputy chief sub-editor, which provided serious in-house gossip fodder as well as Chris's

ultimate demise as a showbiz news journalist after Amy stole then broke his heart and ribbed salt into the wound by writing an album's worth of songs about their relationship, her debut album Frank

None of us knew at the time Amy was bipolar. Neither did she.

She didn't find that out until 2006 when she was 22. She refused medication, fearful, possibly about how they might react with the vast quantities of alcohol she was drinking and the drugs she was experimenting with.

During the five months that have prevailed since Amy failed to wake up, I've become embroiled in very heated disputes with my family that I could in no way ever have imagined

- like coming close to being sectioned and the acute awareness that my bipolar condition – my dis-ease as I like to call it - has affected Juliette, Jessica and Jackie in painful ways to listen to and witness - ways in which they have lost in me and have subsequently closed minded in their misery...

Untreated bipolar doesn't just take prisoners and innocent bystanders. it destroys families and steals lives.

So, will the four Jays have kissed and made up by Christmas?
Unlikely, although I believe, one day at a time, that we can.

It is equally unlikely that Juliette will spend any time during this season of goodwill to all men and women with Amy's mum and dad, Mitch and Janice, consoling themselves at spending their first Chanukah without their daughter

I don't suppose the Winehouses and the Ashbys will be the only families whose Chanukah, Christmas and New Year get-togethers this year will be blighted by a fractious bipolar loss

There will also always be those who spend the time alone - and others for whom this time of the year represents intense loneliness, acute depression and despair and those thoughts that suggest ending it all might just be the best solution....

I'll leave it there for now. A lovely man called Christopher Hutchins, an English writer I greatly admired, died 12 hours before I wrote this, with cancer. Check him out on Google if you don't know him. Well worth researching,

For me however, there's been too much death already in this issue of FORWARD. Time to move on.....

Bipolar Disorder - an Inconvenient Truth being published by FORWARD PUBLISHING a not-for-profit social enterprise at the end of January 2012

ISBN 978-0-9570415-0-9

SOMETHING NEEDS TO BE DONE

Captains of industry, corporation heads And bosses of all of the rest of the UK businesses need a wake-up call. A majority of them clearly still don't understand the impact of mental health issues in the workplace. Excessive workloads and performance targets and harassment and bullying are being blamed for the 30 per cent jump in mental health illness across the UK this past year...

BIPOLAR

PSST...PASS IT ON

If you wanna give a good friend a cost free Christmas gift send me their email address with the word SUBSCRIBE in the Subject box to ashby300@hotmail.com and it will be activated immediately.

Unsubscribing is just as simple. The word UNSUBSCRIBE in the Subject box and sent to ashby300@hotmail.com will deactivate your free subscription immediately

FORWARD IS LOOKING FOR A UK NEWS EDITOR.

necessary however given FORWARD PUBLISHING's aims and objectives as a not-for-profit social enterprise, the successful applicant needs to be either/and/or an addict, an alcoholic or a person with mental health challenges - in recovery. Hands-on communication education guaranteed send an email to ashby300@hotmail.com briefly explaining who you are and why you would like the job. Be as formal, or as informal as you like

FORWARD IS SEEKING SEVEN MORE TRUSTEES.

Trusteeship with a not for profit social enterprise is very much about receiving an invitation. Seven invitations will be sent out before Christmas. If you receive one, we hope you will make our Christmas by accepting. We follow an ethical policy of selective sponsorship and funding. A website is currently under construction. A

bipolar book - **An Inconvenient Truth** - is a work in progress set to be published at the end of January 2012

FORWARD'S CONTRIBUTION TO GLOBAL ANTI STIGMA CAMPAIGNS

**- a readers' competition where you get the chance to put us right...
...and win a prize....**

FORWARD is firmly behind the anti-stigma campaigns across the USA, Canada, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand as well as the UK **Time-to-Change** campaign

Our commitment is to replace negative, discouraging language with acceptable words and phrases which support and encourage those who seek recovery through self-help training and personal management skills and 12 step recovery programmes

And we would like you, the reader to help us with this

Every week between now and the end of February 2012 we are inviting any reader to submit any word or phrase in each issue which you think could have been replaced with a better word or phrase.

And the most convincing and compelling submission for each issue will get a gift sent to them by snail mail -a copy of the remarkable book, *Impressive Depressives*, published by the UK's leading bipolar charity, MDF the Bipolar Organisation. , All submissions to ashby300@hotmail.com please

OK. That's today's sermon over and done with. Alotta Chic and Earth, Wind and Fire went into this issue which was designed by Bob Houlston, Rob Broughton, and Neil Walton and edited by Phantom, FORWARD'S new locum superhero....

Enjoy this issue,
whatever,
innit

jonathan ashby
trustee & senior editor

FORWARD PUBLICATIONS
a not-for-profit social enterprise

A CHRISTMAS TALE

by Rob Broughton

Once upon a time an elderly woman looked forward to Christmas for a very special reason.

She was "Mother Christmas." She had a red dress with a white trim and it was her task to give out the presents on Christmas morning in the residential home where she lived.

Miriam, as she will be known for the purpose of this story, was in her 70's. She had lived all her adult life in psychiatric hospitals. The reason for her original admission is unclear.

She had a male friend who had lived with her in the hospital who had died approximately one year previously. She was moved to a residential home for older people with mental health problems.

Miriam had been diagnosed with Bi-Polar (manic depression) when 20, according to records. She had been taking medications for the condition since diagnosis.

The medications were no longer effective and had major side effects. She had very extreme mood swings which resulted in huge "highs" when she couldn't sleep, talked incessantly and was unable to relax followed by extreme lows.

During the "lows" she would sit with her head almost on her lap, not speak and be in a "semi-comatose" state for days at a time. The "highs" were becoming much less frequent.

"Lows" were apparent most of the time. She took very little interest in life, hardly ate and didn't even want to do her job as "Mother Christmas", something that was a major highlight in her year.

When she was well enough she would decorate hats that she insisted she kept to show her social worker who tried them on. She had no family involvement.

One day the social worker arrived for a visit. Miriam sat in her usual chair in her usual place. She was bent over and non-communicative. The social worker noticed a lost looking young female care worker standing nearby. She had the expression of someone who wants to do something about something but doesn't know where to begin.

The carer was about 20 at the time and new to the job. She had no previous experience of the work. She was sweet and keen but without some of the skills she needed. She had been taught the practical skills such as personal care etc, but found the level of Miriam's apparent distress difficult to deal with.

People had tried to speak with Miriam for some time but without success. She would chat when she was "high" but now she seemed unreachable. There can be little more alarming than the feeling that we should act to alleviate some one's distress but we seem powerless to do so.

The social worker pulled a chair next to where Miriam was seated. She spoke softly to her. There was no response at all. She continued to speak with Miriam about things that she knew interested her. There was no response. The social worker took Miriam's hand in her own and began to tell her things.

Bits of gossip, chitter chatter and news of people she knew in the home. The one sided conversation continued for the best part of an hour. Occasionally Miriam would weakly squeeze the hand of the social worker.

After some time the social worker turned to the young carer, who was watching intently, asking her to take over while she had to go off to do some paperwork. There was no paperwork that needed her immediate attention but it was a tactic to involve the young woman who asked, "What shall I do?" with a slightly uneasy voice.

Inside she was trying to hold down the fear she felt at the idea of failing, of not being able to help.

The social worker asked her to sit in a chair on the other side of Miriam. The social worker continued to chat to Miriam. Then she got up to move away.

"What shall I say?" asked the carer. "Just chat to her about anything that

comes in your head", came the reply. The young woman began to speak and as she did so she became more confident. It soon became quite easy, she thought, and she became more comfortable with the task.

The social worker re-appeared after a short time and sat back down in her chair. The young carer continued to chat. The social worker announced to Miriam that she would have to go now as she had another visit to make.

As the social worker stood up to leave, Miriam held her hand out to the young care worker who took it in hers. It was a small but significant breakthrough. The kind of small change that opens the way for a greater improving change that can educate and refine the way we interact with our fellows.

After this, staff decided specific time would be allocated for the talking with, sitting with, and just being with people. The young carer became the main ambassador and mentor of this activity in the residential home.

Sometimes it seems as though there is nothing we can do when faced with great and complex human need. Sometimes the first steps towards a solution are small, simple and within most peoples' capability
More at <http://edgarbroughton.com>.

A DAY IN THE BIPOLAR LIFE *of juliette bowden*

Friday 17/10/08

Feeling quite down. I am aware that I have begun to isolate myself by not returning phone calls and ignoring texts.

I didn't join the coffee lot for the usual Friday morning arrangement. Debra has become quite aggressive which is really irritating me. She can be so dogmatic. I'm having thoughts of tablets and drinking with pockets of early buzzing. My driving has become a bit fast coupled with the obligatory loud music.

On Sunday we've got a festival so I will be feeding seven. On Tuesday there will be nine for lunch followed by thirteen next Friday. I want to do it but Keith talks about me doing too much.

What does he want? Me functioning 'normally' (whatever that is) or me being anti-social and insular. Why then am I separating myself at the same time?

The study is a tip – maybe that's why I don't want to be at home at the moment. I hate the fact that Alison is so unsettled. She's someone who needs to be busy and earn a decent salary. It's difficult for her and millions others at the moment.

I also realise that Keith is worried about his job which makes him even more twitchy than normal. I am not visiting shops but I must get an outfit for my girls. I have been saving money on myself by wearing what's in the wardrobe.

So, do I shop with them one to one or altogether? Alison's engagement invitations are ready to be written and sent. The arrangements are all in hand. I shall phone Alison's future mother – in –law and fix a date when we can meet for coffee or lunch. There've been so many festivals lately that I've been deprived of me – time so I've escaped to the Grim's Dyke.

Walking back from Tracey's I was blown away by the leaves on the ground and the trees that met above in an arch. The yellow on the ground looked golden. I wanted to drink all the colours and views. The leaves were laid out individually. I wanted to stay there longer than I was able to.

In my mind's eye I have captured it forever. It will be a place to recall at a moments of stress.

The force of nature is so much bigger than me and it is there for all to see. It carries on regardless and in spite of human acts and situations. I shall drown myself in its beauty and entirety. I brought home two stems that had been lying on the paving slabs beneath my feet. They had called me because they wanted to be picked up and nurtured.

They had just been too beautiful to be trampled on. The leaves are exquisite. The lush shiny green and smooth waxy texture is wonderful. On one there is a perfectly formed red berry. Surely, if nature can produce such wondrous gifts then I can find the strength to deal with 'minor' situations.

The world is bigger than me

BIPOLAR DISORDER 'SHRINKS BRAIN'

People with bipolar disorder suffer from an accelerated shrinking of their brain according to UK researchers

Imaging studies carried out four years apart showed loss of brain tissue in the areas controlling memory, face recognition and co-ordination.

The findings, published in [Biological Psychiatry](#), back observations that people with the disorder lose brain function over time.

Bipolar disorder, is characterised by periods of depression and mania and affects half a million people in the UK.

When people have mania they are typically elated, overactive and need less sleep. They may also suffer from delusions or hallucinations and are at significant risk of suicide.

MRI scans of the brains of 20 patients with bipolar disorder and an equal number of volunteers without the condition showed that everyone loses a small amount of tissue over time.

But in those with bipolar disorder, the loss of grey matter - where nerve signals are processed - was greater than in the control group. The researchers at the University of Edinburgh also found that those who lost the most grey matter had the most episodes of mania and depression and the biggest decline in brain function.

Study leader Dr Andrew McIntosh said the study could not show whether the loss of brain tissue was a cause or consequence of the disease."It may be that repeated episodes of illness harm the brain and lead to the decline," he said.

"Another possibility is that the brain changes are caused by stress or

genetic factors, which tend to lead both to more frequent illness episodes and to greater brain loss.

"No matter which way round it is, it emphasises in my mind the importance of maintaining people in remission and the importance of getting them the best treatment."

Professor Guy Goodwin, head of the psychiatry department at Oxford University said the findings showed that bipolar disorder was a "brain disease".

"It supports the idea that cognitive function is impaired in bipolar patients in middle age and this probably helps to account for problems in a full return to work and evidence that patients with bipolar disorder underachieve."

Dr Philip Timms, honorary senior lecturer in psychiatry at King's College London, said the findings raised many questions.

"The important one is are the brain changes causing the disorder or is the disorder - and its associated stress - causing the brain changes?"

Marjorie Wallace, chief executive of mental health charity SANE, said: "Bipolar disorder is a cruel affliction carrying a high risk of suicide and this research appears to underline the importance of preventing relapse, which is already recognised as one of the most important goals in the long-term management of the condition."

KEEPING CALMER WITH LLAMAS

A highly successful UK llama project has now come to an end.

The funders of the project Shelley Brough and Josephine Bowen from Staffordshire County Council's Community Well-being Fund recently met the 16 project participants and the llamas at Quest Day Opportunities to visit National Forest Llama Treks in Barton-under-Needwood once a week to take part in various outdoor activities including feeding, grooming and walking llamas, caring for

other small animals such as bunnies, gardening, growing plants and vegetables, as well cooking healthy meals with the home-grown vegetables

To find out more information call Anna at National Forest Llama Treks on **01283 711702** or **07970 601373** email her on thellamalady@hotmail.co.uk or visit the website on www.nationalforesllamatreks.co.uk

UNHAPPY BIRTHDAY SCHIZOPHRENIA

It is 100 years since the term schizophrenia' was coined.

In 1911 Swiss psychiatrist Paul Eugen Bleuler coined the name to describe a distinct condition.

Bleuler's term derives from Greek and translates literally as splitting the mind. He'd intended it to describe a separation of functions between personality, thinking, memory and perception.

Unfortunately schizophrenia is often misinterpreted as meaning a split or multiple personality which is actually quite a different and very rare mental illness.

A century on from Bleuler's important work there is more understanding of the condition and its effects but there is still a long way to go.

Many individuals and families affected are still faced with stigma and discrimination. As part of the 100th anniversary of the term schizophrenia Rethink Mental Illness have launched an awareness raising campaign called Unhappy Birthday. For further information visit www.rethink.org/unhappybirthday

20,000 BIPOLAR FRIENDS and they're just a click away

by Phil from Cambridge MDF

Imagine sitting in a self-help group with 20,000 members. A group that is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks of the year. T

Then you've pretty well got the idea of the national MDF Bipolar eCommunity. I've been a member for several years now and have found it an incredibly useful place to ask for and receive information, to make online friends and sometimes just to 'hang out' and have a chinwag.

It is part of the MDF's main website at www.mdf.org.uk. Just follow your nose to the eCommunity. All you need to sign up is a working email address and a user name.

It's all confidential as with all online forums, it's wise to safeguard your identity and use a name that's anonymous. Don't worry, not all of the members will be there at once! At a busy time there might be about 60.

At my first sign-in of the day at 6am I tend to be all on my own and perhaps answer one or two posts from other people. To make it easy to come on board the eCommunity is divided into separate sections.

Most people start by introducing themselves briefly in the 'Newbies' forum. You might then want to join in the 'General Discussion', which is about everything that is *not* bipolar and can be quite light-hearted and amusing.

For more serious discussions about bipolar there are the 'Bipolar' and 'Medication' forums in which people really get down to the business of supporting each other by giving information, sharing experiences and just giving good old 'online hugs.'

Friends and family are welcome too, and have their own forum. It can get a bit awkward, though, when one person is in one forum and their partner is in another disputing what they say! For really heavyweight or controversial discussion, we have the 'Contested' area.

People can be quite intense there – but still respectful. I'd be lying if I said the eCommunity has always been a nice place to be. About three years ago it was closed down because there was a lot of swearing and unpleasant behaviour going on.

It was reopened when a moderator was appointed to look in a few times a day and make sure that everyone was being a good 'citizen' of the community. That person just happens to be me! With so many potential members, the available resources are vast. If you want to ask, for example, Do I have to tell DVLA?

What's lithium really like? Am I the only one to get oversexed when I'm high? there are lots of friendly people who can give you the facts.

More importantly they've 'been there and done that' and speak from experience. There is no obligation to join in more than you want to and you can leave silently when you like.

BOOK EXTRACT PART II

*In last weekend's edition of FORWARD we published the first of three letters which make up the first chapter of FORWARD chief correspondent Neil Walton's second bipolar book **A Section for Laughing***

Here's the second letter written when Neil had been waiting for six months to be rehoused by the local council in Tottenham, north London, and still hadn't been offered a placement despite being informed that it may only take about six to eight weeks to be re-housed...

Dear Cliff baby,

Here's the second installment of, "What do you mean you can't get me flat on my doctor's doorstep?"

So I phoned the jerks in charge of not re-housing the homeless and they told me that a property had just become available. Hoorah! It was in the N4 area of north London. Finsbury Park to be precise.

"That's further out than I wanted to be," I said. "I was hoping for a place nearer to the hospital I have to attend, and closer to my doctors and friends, not somewhere that was six miles away from all of them."

The lady replied haughtily, "We can't get you in a flat on your doctor's doorstep. We don't work like that." I got the feeling that she wasn't looking at the whole picture, or cared, more to the point, and I did say, closer to my doctors, not actually in his surgery after all.

Cow! I was fuming when I came off of the phone. As if I hadn't been through enough already.! The very next day I received a letter which informed me that I'd been offered a place but turned it down!

A meeting had been set up for me at the Housing Unit and, as far as I could tell, they wanted me to go to the unit, change over my housing benefit details, pick up a set of keys, and sign for a place I hadn't seen, there and then.

And this was coming from a vulnerable adults housing unit! I felt as if I were talking to someone who'd heard what I'd said, but wasn't actually listening.

On the day of the meeting I was in a distraught frame of mind but I decided to adopt a passive front, back and sides. Even so, underneath I was girding my loins for a slot on the Six o'clock News.

As it turned out, the woman I met was really understanding and helpful, but when I mentioned my key worker she looked bemused. "I have a bipolar disorder," I added. Confusion filled her air space. "It's a mental illness. I filled out a 16 page medical report." She then informed me that this information wasn't on their computer. Why wasn't I surprised!

During the course of that exchange my key worker arrived. He looked at me, and I looked at him. He rolled his eyes at me, and I rolled them back, as I had a pair of my own.

Meanwhile Doris at the desk picked up my file and went in search of a manager. So, after worrying myself to death over an entire weekend, it turned out that the whole scenario was a complete bollocks-up from start to finish.

What I'd been offered, was a place for someone who didn't have any mental health issues. I breathed many sighs of relief, but what incompetence! I am a very, very patient man. Me? I could actually watch paint dry, two coats, but even on my medication, this organisation was pushing their luck.

A few days later, my key worker called me with some good news. This would become known as the other, other strategy to gaining a new address. It was a slipstream course to becoming re-housed much, much, much, much quicker apparently - hmmm!

Why, it was all in the title of the brochure. Haringey's Fast Lets Scheme. As we were at the six-month mark already I didn't take it seriously. It went on to say that there were homes for immediate letting.

Did I jump up and down with joy at seeing the words, fast and immediate letting? Ermmm, naaaa.

There were four offices in Haringey where you could pick these lists up from and, as my key worker's base was near one of them, he offered to grab me a copy while he was on his rounds.

I was so glad he went and not me, after the hassle that I'd already put up with, he arrived at the office to find it had been shut down! I reached for the Diazepam, which was cunningly disguised as five cans of draught Guinness!

A few days later I had hard evidence of up and coming one bedroom flats and it all looked and sounded bloody marvellous. *'Fast Lets is a rapid letting service for homes which are ready to move into immediately.'*

Well I laughed and read on. I laughed quite a lot that day, and the next day, and well into the evening too. Here's their positive pitch: *a list of homes is gathered once a fortnight. You can pick up a list of one bed flats from one of four offices in your area. This event takes place on a Thursday, and if you see a place you like you simply call the Fast Lets bidding line on Friday. The person with the most points on their file gets the flat. Easy breezy!*

Okay, now let me take you through the reality of the situation. First of all, I had to establish where the nearest office was to me. This would ensure I could maintain a constant fortnightly vigil of the building and make sure it hadn't been closed down due to apathy or suicide attempts by the staff.

Then I needed to find out which Thursday and Friday of the month this cataclysmic event fell in the calendar. I needed a specific date; something concrete to form a basis from which to be disappointed from at ending up in a rabbit hutch where a corpse had been found recently.

Once armed with this knowledge, I could choose a place and get straight on the phone to the housing unit or the house of taped messages and disinformation as it came to be known, and stick a bid in. However, getting the above information from the Fast Lets helpline took me five agonising days to acquire.

On the fifth day I got straight through to a human person, with a head and a talking hole and everything. I had an orgasm on the spot, which was a bit embarrassing as I was standing at a bus stop at the time!

I asked on which fortnight the list began and was informed that it came every week now, and I'd probably be given an out of date brochure. After slamming down the phone, I went out to find the nearest camping retailers and ordered a hurricane tent!

A day or so later, an updated brochure fell on the mat. With renewed hope in my heart, and glee in my gut, I ripped open the envelope ecstatically, hoping to find some helpful information that would speed up the process of getting out of a house where I wasn't wanted.

But no, what I found was this. I was so pissed off with what I read, I made sarky comments on the booklet to cheer myself up and here they are...

The information includes a photograph of the property. [Not always especially if the properties are on Broadwater Farm] You cannot view the property before applying for it. [Hmmm!] There are four offices from which you can obtain a list of properties. [Yeah well we've already established that we're one down on that score]

You can make a bid by simply calling the Fast Lets bid line number. [You might as well start playing Russian roulette, with yourself, using a

single barrel 12 bore!] *The bidding lines are open for two days of the week. [Whoop-de-fucking-do!] Lines are usually very busy between 9am and 11am so try after that. [The page isn't big enough for the amount of expletives I want to use!]*

Listen to this piece of horseshit... If you can't get through to us by phone you can write your bids on our bidding cards supplied, and place it in the Fast Lets mailbox. [You might as well stick it down the nearest drain hole]

And their final piece of information did nothing to boost my hopes of ever getting a place at all. Sometimes there may not be any flats available through the Fast Lets. [What was the point of getting out of bed?]

The hold ups and anxiety didn't end there either. My original claim became live on the 27th of June 2005 but I wasn't re-housed until over a year later. After putting in a successful bid, a date was set for me to meet a housing officer at the property but I had to call them back as they'd given me the address, but neglected to give me a door number to aim at.

I arrived in plenty of time for the appointment, but after around hour or so, I was still there by myself. A pen to paperwork cock up was blamed for a no show of the housing association rep. Finally after a 13 month wait I was through the door of my new address.

The housing officer said that I was lucky that I got a place in such a short space of time; some people have waited for 18 months or longer! Anyway, it didn't matter now, I was in and all of the hassle and worries were behind me. I was a fool to think this!

My key worker was really helpful and he took a lot of stress out of the move into a new home. Once my benefits were in place, which took two months, and I felt settled in, his job was done and he discharged me from his caseload. If I needed any further help I could refer myself back to the community housing group, which was comforting to know.

I kid you not, the very next day a letter dropped on the mat informing that my rent was in arrears by hundreds and hundreds of pounds. Un-fuckin'-believable! It took six weeks for my self-referral to become live, and by then I was receiving letters seeking repossession and court dates. I felt as though I was walking around with a target on my back. It took a strained and angst-ridden three months to find and rectify the problem and it came pass that my rent was being paid, but to the wrong landlord.

And where had this bollock been dropped? Oh yes, at the housing benefit office! I wish you could sue for stress I'd be minted by now.

I was more than relieved when I finally moved into my new flat. It was better than I could have wished for. It was spacious, clean, and newly painted and all of the utilities had been checked over, with the exception of the boiler, but it was serviced within the first week of my residence, and it passed with flying colours.

Now, you might assume it would continue working for at least the next 12 months - ooh no, no, no, not if you're a Walton. True to form it waited for an out of season cold snap, then it packed up, but the repair procedure was straightforward enough.

I made a call to the housing association, they in turn phone a service company and they called me to make an appointment to view my dying boiler. At the very worst I reckoned it would take two weeks to put right, assuming the service parts were available.

An engineer was booked, but failed to arrive. Okay. Maybe he got caught up with a job that took longer than he thought, or maybe he didn't get the message to come my address?

On the Wednesday of week one, I received a call from the service company apologising for the absence of their man, as he'd phoned in sick. Fair enough, there wasn't a lot anyone could've done about that. They promised that another engineer would call to assess the boiler on the following Monday between 1 and 5pm. He turned up, and the problem was put down to a computer circuit board failure. The guy ordered one on the spot and then left.

Ripper, we were moving forward at last. I was still no nearer to a hot bath and warm radiators but I thought hey, what's another week, the part will arrive and someone will come and fit it. What a prat, that's what you get for being British I guess, ever hopeful

The circuit board arrived on the Wednesday of the third week and it was attached to a different Mr Fix, I relayed my explanation of the events leading up to the no hot water situation and he broke out his tools.

He made his check of the boiler and said, "Naaa it's not the circuit board mate, it's the fan and the motor that's packed up, my guess is the last bloke that came out saw what the problem was and couldn't be bothered with it as they're a real pig to fit." Grrreat! Man two ordered part two and left leaving me with part one.

At the start of week five the new combination part arrived at my flat ahead of man three and, when he turned up, I recited the whole sorrowful saga of what had and hadn't happened to my boiler.

And then I pointed to the ever growing collection of new parts, four more pieces and I reckon I could've assembled a new boiler myself!

After 35 days without hot H₂O I was hoping to hear this guy say, "There you go mate all done," but I didn't. Instead I heard, "Ooh that looks nasty." Closely followed by, "It's not your fan it's your plug socket, it's become depolarised, I can't touch that I'm not an electrician."

Well slap my thighs and call me Brenda, wouldn't you just bloody know it. I mean, how the hell does that happen for God's sake? I could understand it if I'd been fiddling about with it, but I hadn't been anywhere near it since the day I moved in.

Then I remembered my E.C.T. sessions, of course it was my fault. Naturally I asked what type of side-effects I could expect after being plugged into the National Grid for 10 minutes but there was no mention that the experience would leave me with the power to fuck up a plug socket just by walking past it - even if I was bipolar!

Is it dangerous, was my only question? What a bloody stupid thing to ask, of course it was dangerous, it was in my flat! I moved the questioning up a notch, "Okay, how dangerous is it," I asked as the guy ran down the hallway?

"Just don't touch it," he shouted as he slammed the front door. Being British I grasped the situation by the throat, I took a close look at the potential fire hazard, and then ignored it and made a pot of tea.

But I must admit, I did wonder how the placing of a box of cat food in front of the dodgy socket would protect me against electrocution - obviously this was the most up to date safety measure for the householder and their pets!

Week six proved to be the most productive by far. The fourth member of the boiler squad turned up in the shape of a sparks, and he repaired the socket in 10 minutes flat. With this complete I immediately asked for his hand in marriage!

EMAILS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor

I would like to propose that bipolar should be considered an 'order' and not a 'disorder'. I already refer to my 'condition' as Bipolar Order and it feels a much kinder name. I suggest this as an idea for two reasons:

1) Talking about Bipolar Order is much more empowering than talking about it as a 'disorder'.

2) I suggest the term order as I theorise that when we first go mad, we are in fact glimpsing something real. And if it is 'real', then we can determine an 'order' for the things that many people experience.

I personally believe we are seeing the chaos that existed for the 'thing' that started everything off with the Big Bang. We see a universe of possibilities. I will

avoid the term God as that is too much for some people to contemplate; just simply provide your own name or definition that you are happy with.

I posit the view that all Bipolar people are simply having a form of spiritual awakening. Imagine being told the first time you have an event; "Yes, this is a strange thing to experience, but many people have had these types of experiences before. Let us help you through this.

You are not mad, you have simply glimpsed the 'madness' of a force in the universe that is yet to be scientifically recognised. Neutrinos anyone?

Nick Leigh, Camden Town, London

Dear Editor

During the mad cow epidemic the UK government could track a single cow, born in Appleby almost three years ago, right to the stall where she slept in the county of Cumbria, and they even tracked her calves to their stalls. But they are unable to locate 125,000 illegal immigrants wandering around our country. Maybe we should give each of them a cow.

from a rural reader in southern England

Ed Dear

Must compliment you on your idea for the competition. Something for us to think about. All good wishes.

Susan Garcia Martin B. Cohen Centre for Wellbeing, Mental Health
Community Co-ordinator, Deansbrook Road Edgware, London HA8 9BG office:
020 8238 5830 mobile: 07887 643326

Well, I don't know how you do it...

Forward looks great. You are a frigging star production. I particularly enjoyed Jan Horgan's piece 'Going to the toilet'. Bloody funny. If life isn't fraught with enough stress then, when you're about to explode, you have to face the rigors of the PUBLIC TOILET! Wicked. **Amazed of Spurs land**

TODAY'S HUMOUR

From Tony Bale

A man wakes up in the hospital, bandaged from head to foot. The doctor comes in and says, "Ah, I see you've regained consciousness. Now, you probably won't remember, but you were in a pile-up on the motorway.

"You're going to be okay, walk again and everything but, well, something happened. I'm trying to break this gently but the fact is, your wily was chopped off and we were unable to find it."

The man groans, but the doctor goes on, "It's not all bad though, you have £6,000/\$9000 in insurance compensation coming and we have the technology now to build you a new wily that will work as well as your old one did - better in fact!

The thing is, it doesn't come cheap. We're talking \$1,000 per inch."

The man perks up at this. "So!" The doctor says, "It's for you to decide how many inches you want. But probably something you'd better discuss with your wife. I mean, if you had a five inch one and you decide to go for a nine incher, she might be a bit put out.

"But if you had a nine inch one before and you decide only to invest in a five incher this time, she might be disappointed. You can see how it's important she plays a role in helping you make the decision."

The man agrees to talk with his wife.

The doctor comes back the next day.

"Okay!" he says, "Have you spoken with your wife?"

"I have," says the man. "And what is the decision?" asks the doctor.

"We're having granite kitchen work-tops," says the man...

TODAY'S THOUGHT

WHAT A DAY FOR A DAYDREAM...

What do we see when we daydream about the future?
Is everything much better than it is now,

or are we still struggling with the same issues?

Are we dreaming about what we really want or about what we think we want? Do we see the whole picture or just a piece of it?

Do our daydreams match our goals?

Actions we take today affect how we live tomorrow.

If we know what we want -- if we listen to our heart's desire, write down our goals, and keep them in mind with every action we take we create our dreams.

We turn our wishes into goals and our goals into reality.

thanks to Hazelden.com for inspiration

WORLDWIDE HELPLINE CONTACT INFO

UNITED KINGDOM

MDF THE BIPOLAR ORGANISATION: www.mdf.org.uk

RECOVERY IN-SIGHT CENTRE: The Recovery In-Sight Social Enterprise (RISE) offers peer support, training, research & advisory services **01923-297122 / 01923-239489** or <http://www.recoveryin-sight.com> or contact@recoveryin-sight.com Bipolar support groups in Watford & Stevenage. **01707 284808** or **01923 239489** The Recovery In-Sight Social Enterprise (RISE) **01923-297122 / 01923-239489** or <http://www.recoveryin-sight.com> or contact@recoveryin-sight.com

RISE: **01923-297122 / 01923-239489** or www.riseuk.org.uk/

MIND: Info line **0845 766 0163** or www.mind.org.uk/

RETHINK: 0845 456 0455 or www.rethink.org

SANE: 0845 767 8000 or www.sane.org.uk/

SAMARITANS: Helpline: 08457 909090 (UK) or 1850 60 90 90 (Republic of Ireland) 24/7 or www.samaritans.org/

PAPYRUS: 08000 68 4141 or 01978 367333 Voluntary organisations committed to the prevention of young suicide and the promotion of mental health and wellbeing. www.papyrus-uk.org/

CHILDLINE: 0800 1111 Free and confidential, 24-hour helpline for children www.childline.org.uk/

SURVIVORS OF BEREAVEMENT BY SUICIDE: 0870 2413 337 9am-9pm daily. Aims to provide a safe, confidential environment in which bereaved people can share their experiences and feelings, so giving and gaining support from each other www.uk-sobs.org.uk/

CALM: 0800 585858 The Campaign Against Living Miserably is a Department of Health initiative to help alleviate suffering caused by suicidal thoughts, mental illness and drug dependency. Helpline open to anyone. 5:00pm to 12:00am Saturday to Tuesday. Calls are free and confidential and don't show up on landline telephone bills www.thecalmzone.net/

BIPOLAR ABERDEEN: 01224 573910 or www.bipolar.uk.com/

EUROPE

ENUSP: European Network of (ex-) Users and Survivors of Psychiatry www.enusp.org/

MENTAL HEALTH EUROPE: Mental Health Europe currently has about 67 member organisations in 30 European countries and 72 individual members www.mhe-sme.org/

USA

INTERNATIONAL BIPOLAR FOUNDATION www.internationalbipolarfoundation.org/

NAMI 1 (800) 950-NAMI (6264) or www.nami.org/

WORLD WIDE

MEETUP.COM - Enter relevant search terms such as bipolar, manic etc. to locate groups in your area www.meetup.com

WEBSITE DIRECTORY

Read our deputy editor **BOB HOULSTON'S** comprehensive mental health website at: <http://www.houlston.freeserve.co.uk/zzzz-wr-forward-02.htm>

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