

Spirituality Special Interest Group

**Suffering and spirituality: implications
for mental health**

**‘Valuing our vulnerabilities’
(an invitation ...)**

Dr Glenn Roberts MD, FRCPsych

— THE —
ROYAL COLLEGE



— OF —
PSYCHIATRISTS

**‘Our vulnerability’
who are ‘we’?
members ...
of a College,
and a profession, we
are doctors
seeking to practice
with compassion**



Valuing ... 'vulnerability' ???

Reconsidering vulnerability ... Brene Brown, and many others

TED Ideas change everything



and so I want to talk to you
and tell some stories

01:26 / 20:02

The power of vulnerability
69,803,041 plays | Brené Brown | TEDxHouston • June 2010

She observed that, ‘vulnerability is at the core of shame and fear and our struggle for worthiness, but it appears that it is also the birthplace of joy, of creativity, of belonging, of tenderness, of love’

Engaging with a paradox:

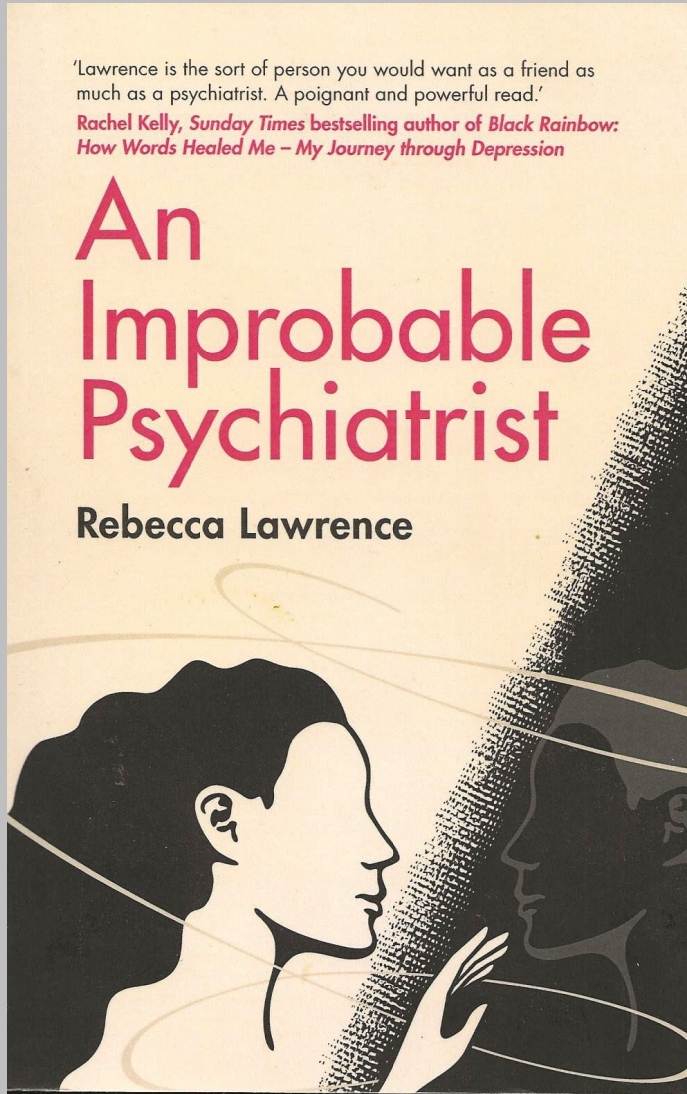
how can we reconcile

**the fear and
shame of
vulnerability**

with

**the 'value'
and 'power' of
vulnerability**

Opening paths and building bridges ...



re-visioning
our relationship
with our own experience
... as a foundation for
how we relate
to one another

A personal question – my 2 CVs

PERSONAL

- Lonely and troubled early life
- Lifelong struggle with periods of depression
- Helped by medication
- Divorce and family breakdown in my early 40's
- Weak, embarrassed, ashamed
- Discovering the value of working on my 'Recovery'
- In later life - finding a path to health and healing through contemplative practice

PROFESSIONAL

- 35 years as Dr in NHS
- 25 years as Consultant
- Past Academic Secretary RCPsych Rehab. Faculty
- Examiner and Lead on 'Recovery' for RCPsych
- 80 + publications
- Co-creator of prize-winning health educational program on early psychosis for schools
- National awards for clinical excellence, and research

2 CVs ... but one person

How do they fit together?

- Mutually exclusive ...
disqualification?
- Mutually supportive ...
dual qualification?

How are we live and work?

As 'divided selves' or integrated wholes?

Can't sleep.....
Can't concentrate....
I'm moody.....
Lost interest....
Can't cope.....
Feel suicidal!



Can't sleep.....
Can't concentrate...
I'm moody.....
Lost interest...
Can't cope.....
Feel suicidal!

I'm sorry to
hear that Doctor



John -I think
I'm depressed



Bugger!



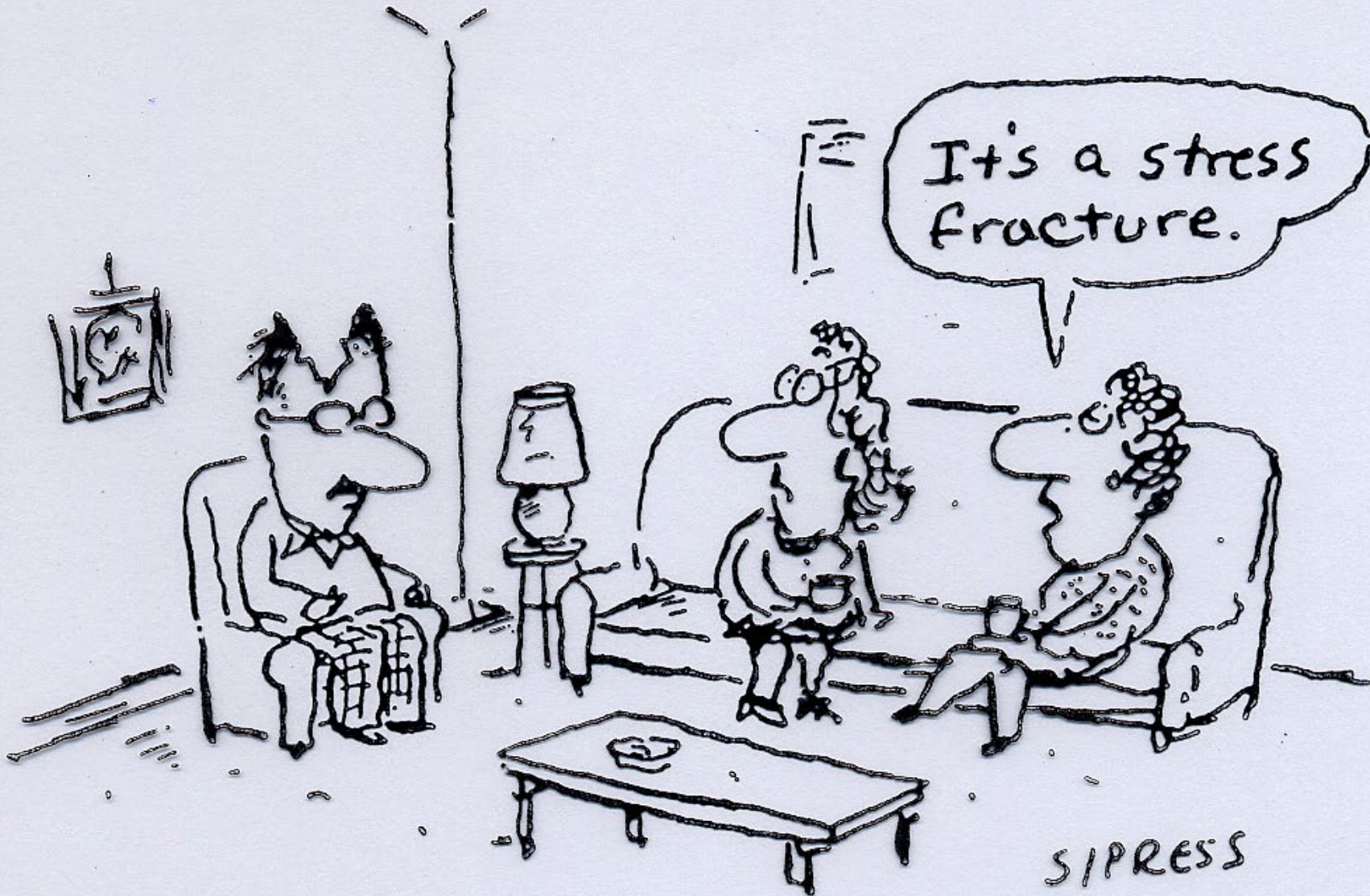


Daily Inquisition

**CHRONIC
SHORTAGE
OF PAEDIATRIC
PATHOLOGISTS**

**GET THE EVIL
PATHOLOGISTS**

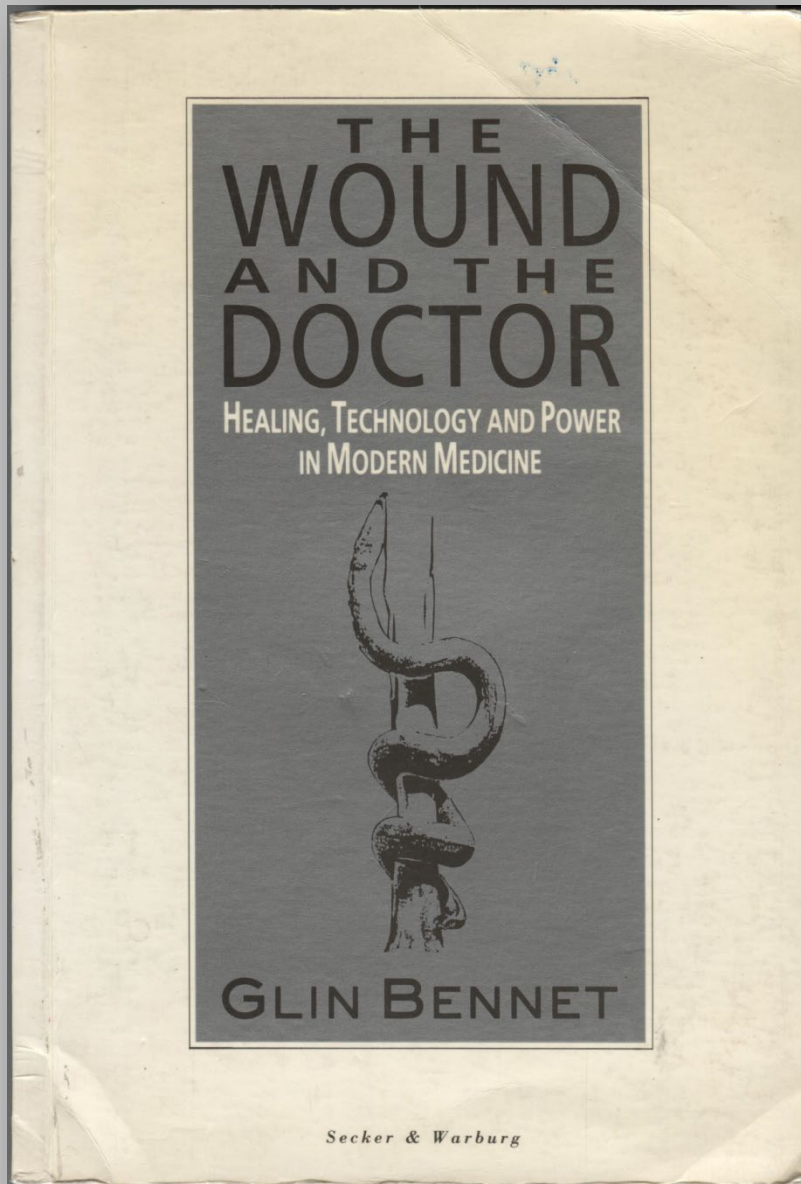




‘I called it a breakdown; my therapist called it a spiritual awakening’

Brene Brown





What is needed?

'A reappraisal of doctor's relationships with their colleagues, their patients and themselves'

....but how?

1987

**Opening paths and building bridges
between:**

our personal and professional selves

experience of practitioners and patients

**learning from the past to cultivate our
future**

An Improbable Psychiatrist is a powerful and insightful account of mental illness, told through the dual lens of a doctor who later became a patient. Rebecca Lawrence shares her story of being a doctor and a psychiatrist while living with bipolar disorder. She details her experience of being on a psychiatric ward and receiving electroconvulsive therapy, then training as a psychiatrist and navigating the challenges of work, loss, and family. Through her inspiring story, Rebecca aims to reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness and provide some comfort to others. Told through engaging and captivating prose, this book will pull you into Rebecca's world and leave you with the powerful reminder that, with the right support and treatment, it is possible to live with severe mental illness. Ultimately, this is a story of hope.

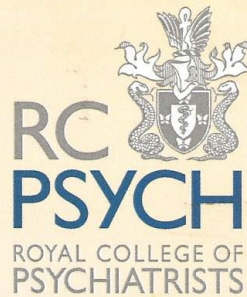
Rebecca Lawrence is a consultant psychiatrist and writer with bipolar disorder. She was first treated with medication and electroconvulsive therapy in her twenties, and subsequently trained as a psychiatrist – despite advice to the contrary. She has blogged and written about her experiences, in both *The Guardian* and *Prospect Magazine*.

'A compulsive read and a bold, important book.'

Professor Louise M Howard OBE, Professor Emerita in Women's Mental Health, Section of Women's Mental Health, Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience, King's College London

'A compelling work that holds a unique place in the mental health literature. Lawrence's gut-wrenching honesty is riveting.'

Dyane Harwood, author, *Birth of a New Brain – Healing from Postpartum Bipolar Disorder*



Cover image: Dmitry Kovalchuk/
iStock/Getty Images Plus
Cover design: Andrew Ward

 **CAMBRIDGE
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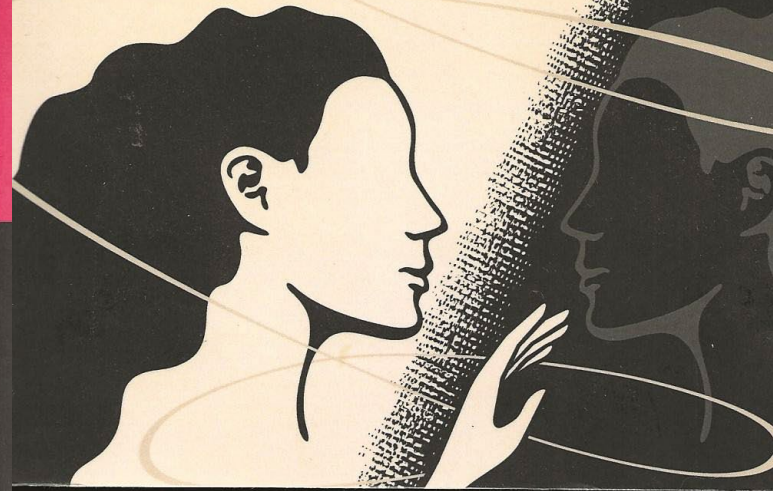


'Lawrence is the sort of person you would want as a friend as much as a psychiatrist. A poignant and powerful read.'

Rachel Kelly, *Sunday Times* bestselling author of *Black Rainbow: How Words Healed Me – My Journey through Depression*

An Improbable Psychiatrist

Rebecca Lawrence



Back to the beginning ...

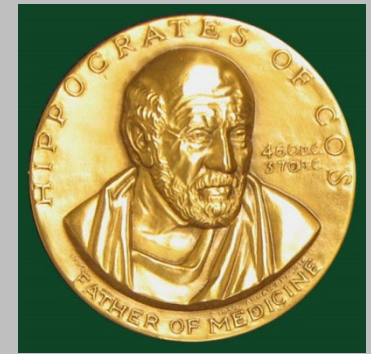
**where have we come from
and what story are we living in?**

Our inheritance from

Hippocrates, Asclepius and Chiron

Hippocrates of Cos 460-370BC

'The Father of Medicine'



Hippocrates was born on the island of Cos, off the southwest coast of present-day Turkey. His father was a physician-priest in the dream temple (Asklepion) and his family could trace its lineage back to the legendary Asclepius.



Asklepion at Cos



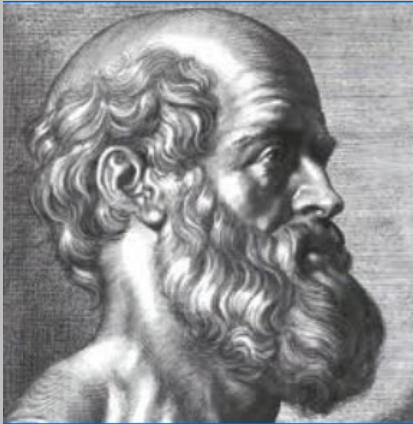
Asklepion at Epidaurus 4th Century BC

'Treatment'

- Rest, exercise, diet, health springs and mud spas
- Sleep in the temple and dream interpretation
- Spiritual guidance from physician priests

... And snakes to lick your wounds

Hippocrates' Oath



“Ὄμνυμι Ἀπόλλωνα ἰητρὸν καὶ Ἄσκληπιὸν καὶ Ὑγίειαν καὶ Πανάκειαν καὶ θεοὺς πάντας τε καὶ πάσας, ἴστορας ποιεύμενος, ἐπιτελέα ποιήσῃν κατὰ δύναμιν καὶ κρίσιν ἐμὴν ὄρκον τόνδε καὶ συγγραφὴν τήνδε·



‘I swear by Apollo, the healer, Asclepius, Hygieia and Panacea, and I take to witness all the gods, all the goddesses, to keep according to my ability and my judgment, the following Oath and agreement:’

Asclepius

- Born of Apollo and a mortal woman
- His mother was killed by his father for, mistakenly, believing she was unfaithful
- Cut from her belly on the funeral pyre
(Asklepios = 'to cut open')
- Given by Apollo to the Centaur Chiron to raise
- He became 'the blameless physician' (Homer)
- Later accused of greed and killed by Zeus for improper conduct - with a thunderbolt

Asclepius
God of medicine
and healing





Chiron the wise teacher,
inspiration and mentor

Chiron

- Conceived through a violent union of Chronos (Saturn) raping the sea nymph Philyra, disguised in the form of a horse.
- At birth his form so disgusted his mother that she abandoned him
- He was found and raised by Apollo and schooled in poetry, the arts, sciences and mysteries and unlike his rowdy kin, became the wisest of Centaurs



Chiron was accidentally wounded with an arrow dipped in Hydra blood. As an immortal he couldn't die but the nature of the poison meant his wound would not heal. Through his struggles to relieve his own suffering he became the master of medicine and the original wounded healer

Our founding stories

Contemporary medicine therefore has deep in its ancestral roots, stories of forefathers who had creativity and boldness, but who had struggled personally with the depths of human suffering.

They were traumatically conceived, illegitimate, despised, rejected, abandoned, raised by strangers and punished for going astray. Creatures and people whose wounds were their wisdom.

From whom we have an inheritance of empathy, wise counsel, spirituality, ethics, integrity and care ...

And the marks of these early stories are with us today ...

Medical Practice – an ethical foundation



2024

The duties of medical professionals registered with the GMC

Patients must be able to trust medical professionals with their lives and health. To justify that trust you must make the care of patients your first concern, and meet the standards expected of you in all four domains.

Knowledge, skills and development

- Provide a good standard of practice and care, and work within your competence.
- Keep your knowledge and skills up to date.

Patients, partnership and communication

- Respect every patient's dignity and treat them as an individual.
- Listen to patients and work in partnership with them, supporting them to make informed decisions about their care.
- Protect patients' personal information from improper disclosure.

Colleagues, culture and safety

- Work with colleagues in ways that best serve the interests of patients, being willing to lead or follow as circumstances require.
- Be willing to share your knowledge, skills and experience with colleagues, whether informally or through teaching, training, mentoring or coaching.
- Treat people with respect and help to create a working and training environment that is compassionate, supportive and fair, where everyone feels safe to ask questions, talk about errors and raise concerns.
- Act promptly if you think that patient safety or dignity may be seriously compromised.
- Take care of your own health and wellbeing needs, recognising and taking appropriate action if you may not be fit to work.

Trust and professionalism

- Act with honesty and integrity, and be open if things go wrong.
- Protect and promote the health of patients and the public.
- Never unfairly discriminate against patients or colleagues.
- Never abuse patients' trust in you or the public's trust in your profession.



The Staff Of Asclepius





Aesculapian snake (*Elaphe longissima*) aka, 'The Camden creature'
Nr Camden lock, also near London Zoo!

Qualifications: MB Ch B

Medicinae Baccalaureus, Chirurgiae Baccalaureus

Bachelor of medicine, Bachelor of surgery

Surgery from *surgerie* (middle English)

from *chirurgery* (archaic English)

from *chirurgia* (Latin via Old French)

and *kheirurgia* (Greek)

Linked to **Ch**iron also know as Kheiron

Whose name meant 'skilled with the hands'



RCPPE

The Chiron Medal to Encourage Excellence in Training



But do we, could we, value our personal experience of 'wounds' in our training? Could we learn from and integrating our personal experience into our professional practice and identity?'

A path / bridge to the future ...

a path from alienating suffering,

... to understanding and (self) acceptance

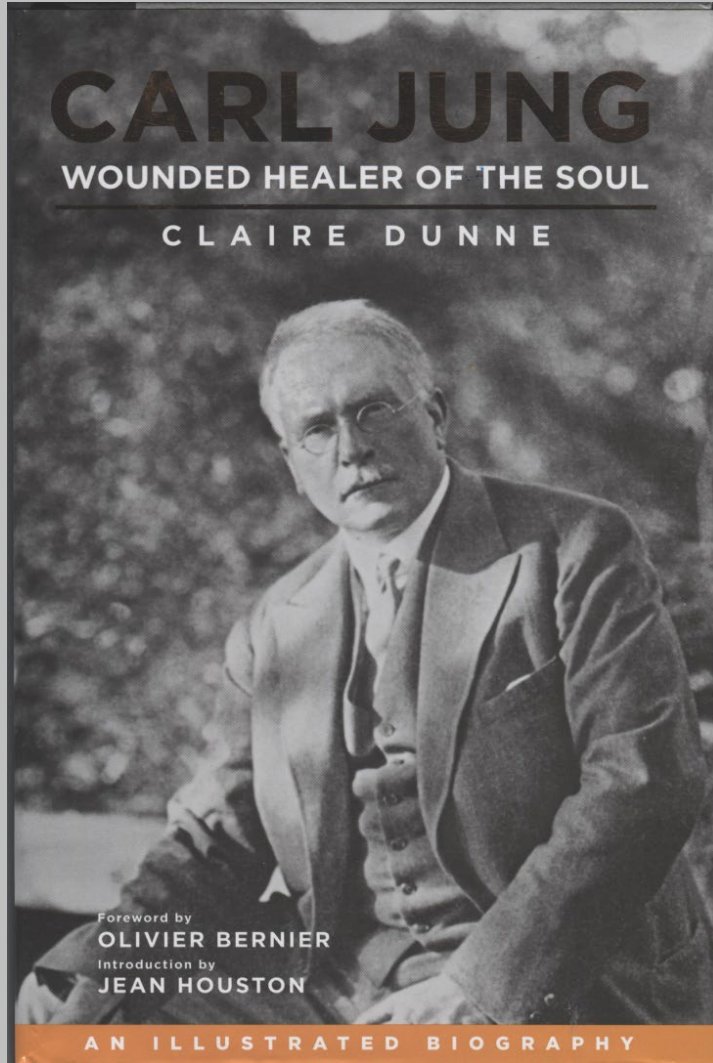
... to appreciation and integration

... to care, capability, confidence and skills

a life-long path of recovery and maturation

a spiritual path or dharma road

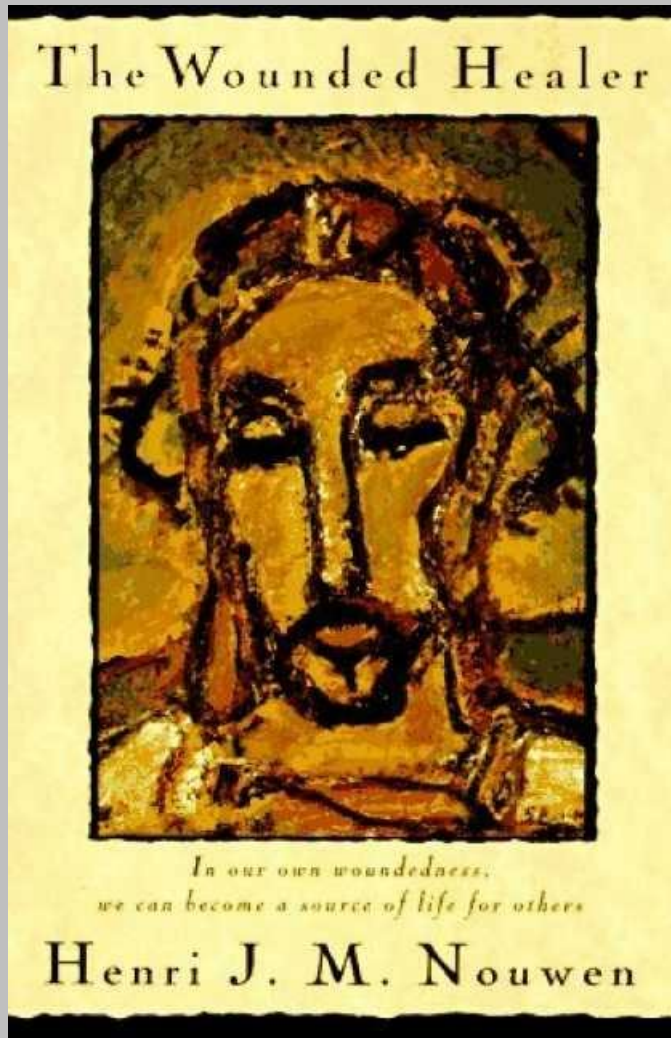
A path of valuing vulnerability



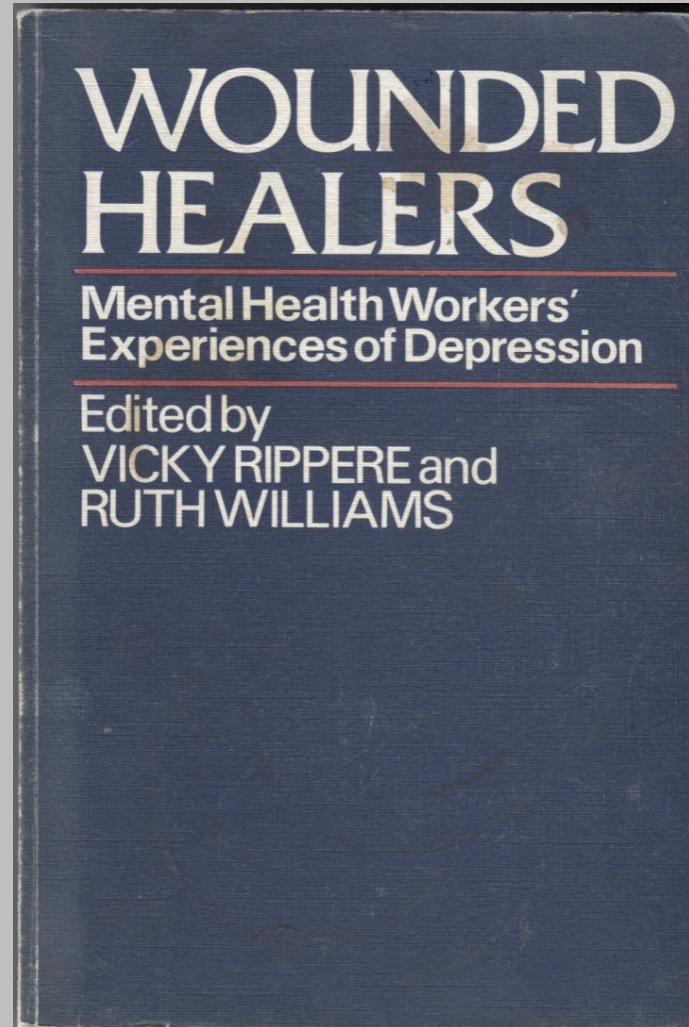
‘The doctor is effective only when he himself is affected.

Only the wounded physician heals. But when the doctor wears his personality like a coat of armour, he has no effect.’

C J Jung,
Memories, Dreams, Reflections (1961)



1972



1985

‘In our woundedness we can become a source of life for others’

'Woundedness' ... is common



43% staff with personal experience
64% of staff are also carers

ROBERTS, G., GOOD, J., WOOLDRIDGE, J., BAKER, E. (2011) Steps towards 'Putting recovery at the heart of all we do': workforce development and the contribution of lived experience. The Journal of Mental Health Training, Education and Practice, 6, 1, 17-28

How do we regard our wounds?

Wasteful and embarrassing weakness or potentially, an education in being human?





CR215

Person-centred care: implications for training in psychiatry

Person-Centred Training and Curriculum
(PCTC) Scoping Group

Special Committee on Professional Practice
and Ethics

COLLEGE REPORT

Revision of the RCPsych Curriculum - centred on PCC

but on what does Person-centre care depend?

PCC = CPD + CPD

(Person-centre care is dependant on a
combination of continuing professional and
personal development)

for, 'practitioners are persons too'

‘Personal development for practitioners’

How ?

learning from personal experience
... from self and others



The Recovery
Movement
arose from the
Service User
Movement

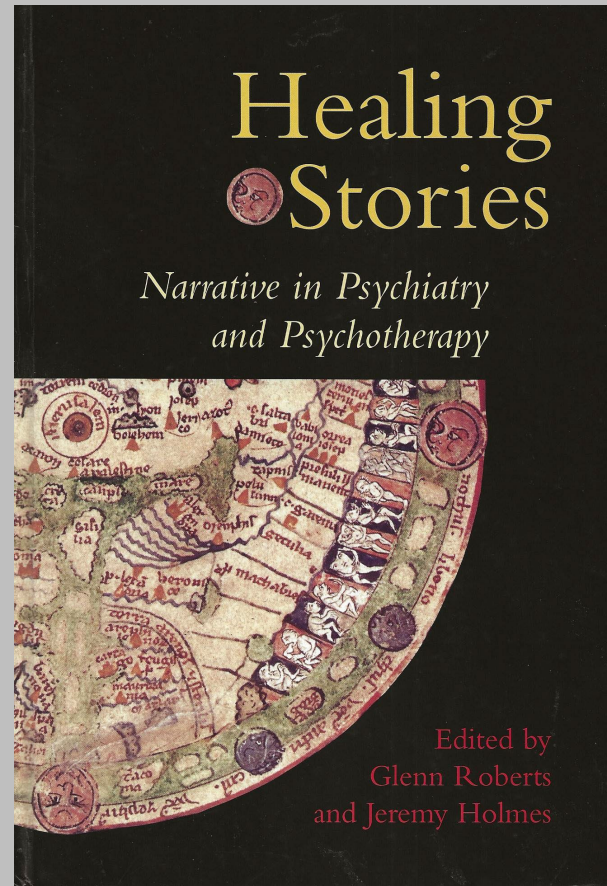
And their
'Gift of Stories'
1999



A Gift of Stories

Gathered by Julie Leibrich

1999

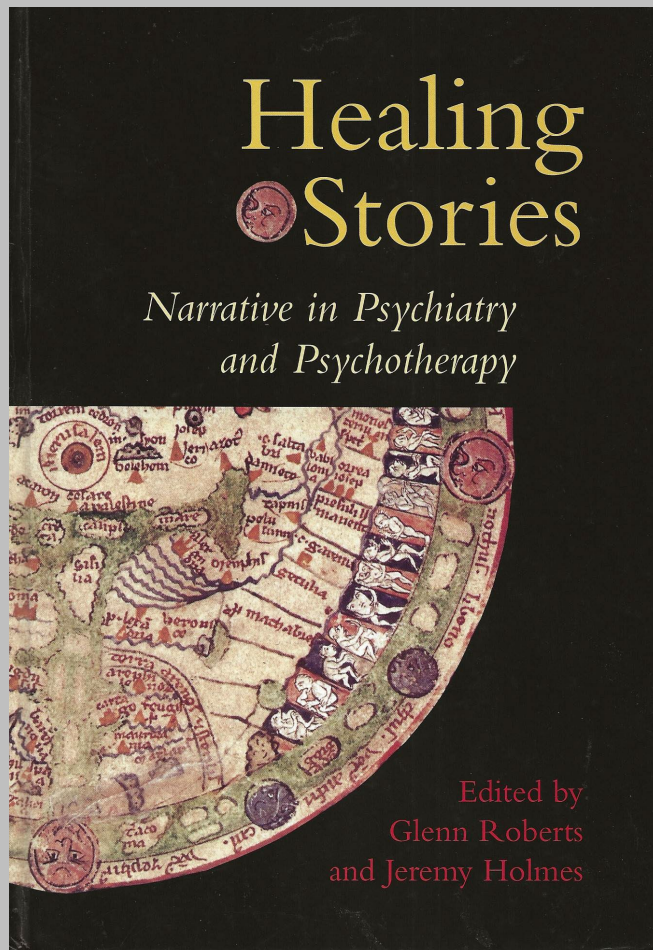


Healing Stories

Narrative in
Psychiatry and
Psychotherapy

1999

Sacred tales: the stories we live by ...



6 Sacred tales

Andrew Sims

In the first draft of this chapter the word *sacred* became *scared*. Perhaps it is only when the subject of the story is very frightening indeed, affecting our health and our lives, that it can become truly sacred.

Tales and tails

In this chapter we will look at some of the stories behind the sources of energy in modern British health care. I see us, like the observers at an old-fashioned battle, standing on a hillside looking at and recognizing the prominent individuals as they approach us. We have difficulty identifying them as they leap into our view, and we may only be able to recognize them by their tails as they disappear once again. So, as the new National Health Service was unveiled before us in the early 1990s, we knew that we were to be confronted with *purchasers* and *providers* but it was not so easy to see at that stage how *market forces* would come to distort certain services. We have come to realize that it is 'only by their tails that ye shall know them'.

We have tried to follow a thread, or a tail, that runs through the tales of medicine, and, more specifically, of psychiatry. It is not only the beliefs and expectations of patients that affect the outcome of the therapeutic interaction. The values, the life agenda, and the guiding story of the psychiatrist also have overriding significance. It is 'only by their tales that ye shall know them'.

Where do the stories accepted by psychiatrists lead them? In the 19th century, the background belief and assumptions of Dr W. Crochley S. Clapham, a *protopsychiatrist* in Wakefield, Yorkshire, resulted in his weighing the brains of 'Roman Catholic', 'Protestant Dissent', and 'Church of England' patients at post-mortem, and coming to conclusions on the differences between them (Clapham, 1876): 'In the three great divisions of Christianity as professed in this country . . . it is curious to find that not only have the Roman Catholics heavier brains than the Protestant Dissenters, and these again than those of the Church party, but also that the Cerebellum, Pons, and Medulla, as compared with the entire brain, are proportionately larger in the Church of England cases than in the Roman Catholics . . .' In the 20th century, Kay Redfield Jamison (1993) has extensively studied the relationship between manic depressive illness and the artistic, especially poetic, temperament. Both these studies, one that seems so bizarre to us and one that seems so reasonable, could only be undertaken because of the background structures of the authors' very different worlds, and thus over what they were prepared to allow their enquiring eye to wander; their guiding myths.

For ... 'It is not only the beliefs and expectations of patients that affect the outcome of therapeutic interaction. The values, the life agenda, and the guiding story of the psychiatrist also have overriding significance.'

Stories from 'improbable' guides ...



A bout of depression left Mike Shooter on the brink of committing suicide

Depression

Mike Shooter, president of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, has suffered bouts of depression throughout his career. Helen Crane, a journalist who has been hospitalised with severe depression three times, spoke to him about how being a patient has helped him be a better doctor

**President of the
Royal College of
Psychiatrists
2002-5**



MARK THOMAS/

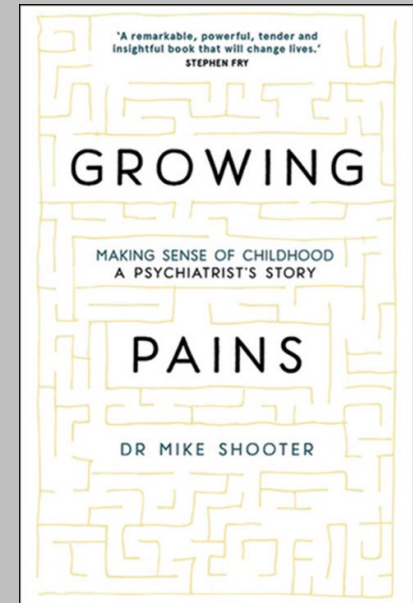
A bout of depression left Mike Shooter on the brink of committing suicide

Dr Mike Shooter



2022

“Doctors are no less vulnerable than anyone else, and their own illness’ may make them even more sensitive to the needs of everyone else,”



2019

Surprisingly successful ...

Adrian James: How a recovered patient won the Royal College of Psychiatrists' Presidency

[SAVE & READ LATER](#)



09 January 2020

Dr Adrian James will draw on lived experience having received treatment for depression across two spells, the latter lasting two years.



Patients harbouring scepticism towards the psychiatry profession may have cause for encouragement this week following the surprise election success of Dr Adrian James.

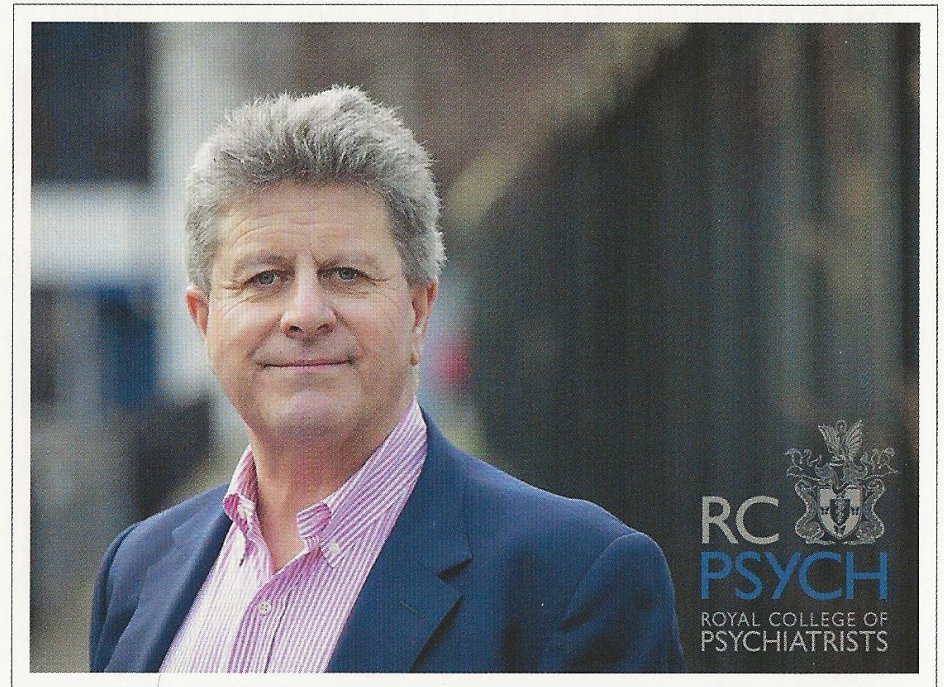
"I will champion diversity and the needs of marginalised groups."



STRENGTHENED by STORMS

Stories and reflections from people working in Devon mental health services

Giving value to the personal experience of practitioners could help to reduce stigma and encourage greater conversations on mental health and mental illness so as to humanise the culture of the health care services we work within.



Adrian James

President

Royal College of Psychiatrists

Personally Speaking

*Stories from Psychiatrists
... on learning from Life's experiences*

gathered by Glenn Roberts

Our 'gift of stories'

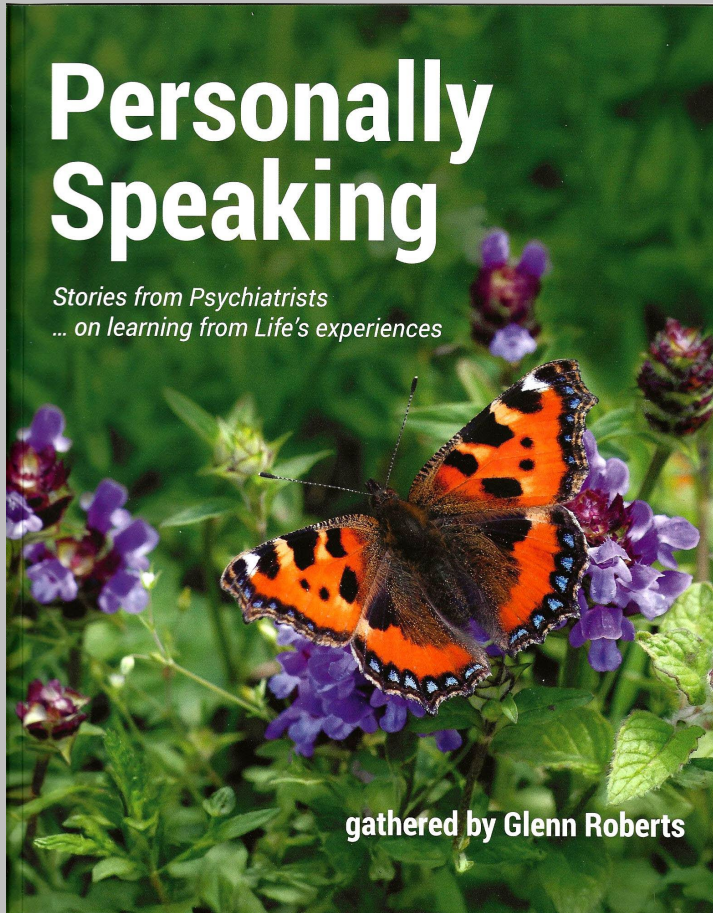
**Stories from Psychiatrists
... on learning from Life's experiences**

22 authors

18 personal, contemplative reflections,

including those from
Mike, Adrian, Chris, Gwen and ...

What's it all about ...?



‘It’s about leading psychiatrists, demonstrating, through intimate autobiographical stories, how **the heart,** **the art,** and **the soul** of psychiatric practice are **fundamentally relational ...** ... starting with themselves’

Psyche (ψυχή) translates as 'Soul'



Psyche (ψυχή) = soul and iatreia (ίατρός) = healer / doctor
Psychiatrist = 'Doctor of the soul'

An invitation: to reconsider our honourable heritage of ‘the wounded healer’

Dual qualified ... by training and experience

- integration rather than splitting as a valued path to maturity and skill in navigating human distress

Emphasising developing qualities not just qualifications

- empathy, courage and compassion for self and others, companionship with those who seek our help

And having learned from our wounds

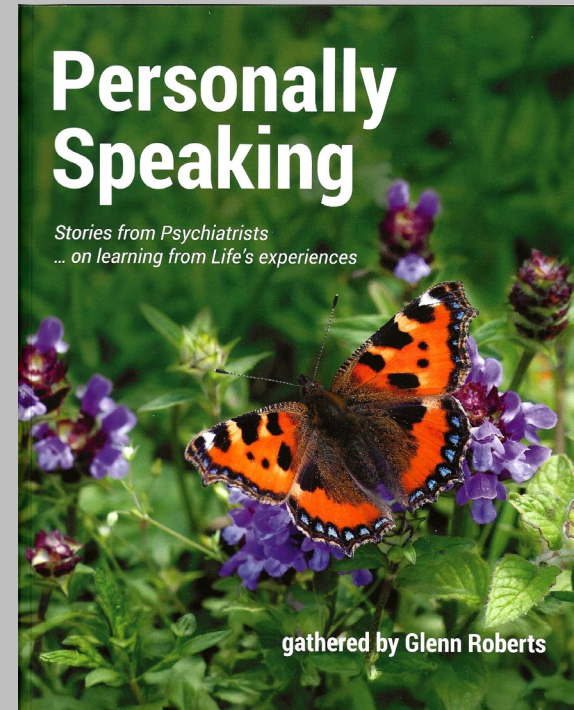
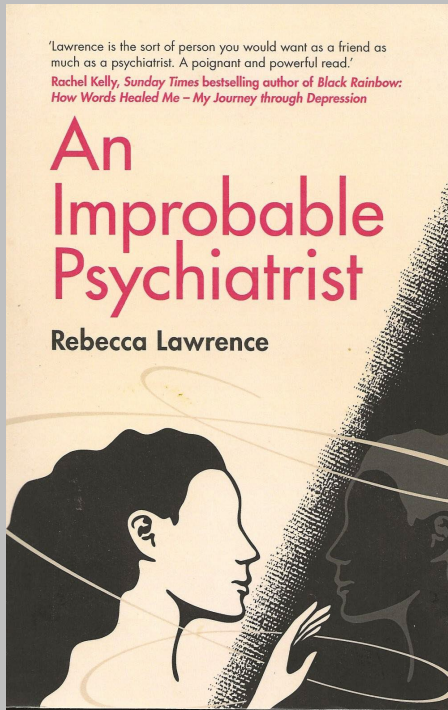
- be increasingly able to respond with kindly care and wisdom as experienced guides and mentors to others

And in taking up that path, we may find
hope and support

from the 'warmth
and humanity' of
our Gift of Stories,
our 'sacred' and
soul-full tales',
... stories of surviving
and learning
from experience

how to care for and value our
vulnerability ...

'Let wisdom guide'



Thank you ...



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