

Original Paper

The Severity of Schizophrenia

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Abstract

Schizophrenia can be a severe condition was for many people but some cases can be particularly severe. My Psychiatrist put me in this category. What follows is an account of what this is like so we can gauge what people go through with the illness at its worst. This is followed by an account of what can help with even this and the ways the psychiatric system can help. Clinicians, friends and family should benefit from this as it provides hope even when the illness is at its worst.

Keywords

schizophrenia, personal experience, severity

Introduction

Schizophrenia can be a severe condition was for many people but some cases can be particularly severe. My Psychiatrist put me in this category. What follows is an account of what this is like so we can gauge what people go through with the illness at its worst. This is followed by an account of what can help with even this and the ways the psychiatric system can help. Clinicians, friends and family should benefit from this as it provides hope even when the illness is at its worst.

Methodology

This is a personal account of the severity of schizophrenia. It is based on my own experiences of how severe the illness can get and what has helped me deal with it even under extreme conditions.

My story

It started by thinking people could read my mind about 9/11 and might be passing information back to the CIA. At first I was able to hold down a bar job which I really enjoyed doing but with the paranoia going on I had to find a way to avoid people and live on my own. That meant not working again but being on benefits that option was no longer available.

Something had to be done so I was lucky enough to experience some severe depression as my family home and business were lost through bankruptcy and had split up with my girlfriend and had to give up

my studies. All of this was a potential source of therapy which might have helped with my mood and schizophrenia and could have soothed the symptoms of fear.

All of this was stressful enough and I had a nervous breakdown but once the schizophrenia started the levels of stress went through the roof. To begin with however it started out in a more moderate form but ended up being particular severe. On top of the schizophrenia other things in life added to the trauma of the schizophrenia and made it even worse.

Looking back I should have stuck at the job as being distracted is one of the ways of dealing with schizophrenia and as I enjoyed it did manage to help with mood. Yet I could not ignore the fact people were reading my mind. I tried testing this out when in the cellar I asked the people in the room above to stamp on the floor and then I heard a stamping noise. This convinced me the mind reading was real.

Eventually I was thinking that it might be dangerous to stay at the job so I gave it up and this cut me off from society and other people greatly. It was not just the job but I had to avoid friends and neighbours who once again might be passing on information about me.

Living at home meant I still had some social contact through my family and having close emotional relations with my family helped with my mood and being around them was distracting. Yet there was a problem that my family home was going to be taken off us as it was tied to a business which was slowly going bankrupt and so eventually I had to move out.

Moving house is one of the most stressful things you can do and this added to the early experiences of the paranoia as I didn't know where I would end up. I talked to a local housing association in our local town and they found me a modern flat on the outskirts. This time I landed on my feet but this did not stop the paranoia of people reading my mind.

Moving away from my home village meant I was on my own more and although my mother came to visit me once a week this wasn't enough to prevent being paranoid and I had to find another way of making social contact and this proved very difficult though I tried a number of things which didn't work.

I needed a way of getting back into the society instead of being cut off with the paranoia and tried a number of things. My family suggested going to church but being an atheist this wasn't a viable option. I thought trying to find another job might be an answer and joined a local job club but by this time I couldn't concentrate as the symptoms were deteriorating and had to go on the sick.

Another solution was to join a night class but having done so much study already this felt like a backwards step and that just left joining a sporting club which in my case meant an archery or a gun club but doing this a couple of nights a week wasn't going to be long enough to deal with the 24/7 paranoia and as with going home once back at my flat the symptoms started again.

Thinking people were reading my mind about 9/11 created a new problem. Living at home 24/7 meant I was thinking more about 9/11 and there was little distraction to focus on something else and I began to feel guilt about it and frightened as to what might happen to me. Each time I was thinking I was

culpable I heard a banging noise coming from my neighbours.

Something had to be done and I began to think of what I could do around the house to distract me from what I was thinking and the noise I was hearing. I tried watching television which might have helped me stay in touch with the wider society hopefully watching soap operas in particular which imitated social contact but I began to feel I was being talked about on screen so this had to stop.

I tried staying up during the night to avoid the noise thinking my neighbours would be asleep but the noise persisted and I got the impression that they were staying up 24/7 just to persecute me. I tried combining this with another possibility was playing computer games, listening to music and watching movies on disc and did not get paranoid about them as I knew what was in them.

Again although I was safe from other people by staying indoors the strategy of being at home was just making things worse but by this point I was so caught up with the paranoia that reverting back to finding work or joining a social club was no longer viable and I had to stick it out at home in the hope that the symptoms would wear off.

Another alternative was to try and get out of the house to avoid the noise but without proper finances the options were limited. I tried going to the local university library but couldn't stay down in there and eventually I realised I had to stay at home. I felt trapped at this point and again something had to be done around the house.

I tried various other coping strategies like listening to music to distract myself and wearing headphones to avoid hearing it yet the noise was still audible. I couldn't afford a television licence so another potential source of distraction was lost and I found I couldn't wear headphones all day long so that left playing my music loud. This annoyed my neighbours and I was threatened with eviction.

I was losing sleep by staying up late and so the symptoms started to be physically draining and this made the fear I was experiencing even more tiring and I became less resilient to the problem. This went on for long periods as the banging noise came to take over my life as it went on all the time and became even more tiring. Looking like this kept me away from people even more as they would wonder what was going on.

The problem here was that there was still some social contact and if my mother caught me looking emaciated she too would have realised something was wrong and would have made me see a doctor and that meant things had to appear normal. To this end I was still doing house work and looking after myself which suggested things were still ok.

To this end I was still able to eat as I had to keep my strength up and this was helped by the fact my mother made some food so I didn't look emaciated. Having my mother in my flat was a distraction so the banging noise receded and wasn't noticed and I went on an anti-depressant which helped with sleeping. So again things appeared normal but this wasn't to last.

Being cut off from friends and family meant I was on my own to cope with the noise and although it seemed real there was a thought at the back of my mind that this could be perceived to be

schizophrenic and that I might end up in an insane asylum full of dangerous lunatics. This though began as a worry as I was so caught up by the symptoms I didn't pay much attention to it but gradually it became magnified.

Early on in the illness I asked my parents that I thought people were reading my mind and I was hearing people repeating my thoughts. My mother reacted by saying do you know how that sounds and that I want you to tell a doctor exactly what you have told me. At this point things began to look like I was in some danger of being locked up.

All the same I had to see the doctor at this point and she said it might be schizophrenia and that word was a bomb shell but being so caught up with the symptoms the overload this caused meant that the suggestion was not on my mind most of the time. Yet it planted the seed that something was wrong with me and the doctor might have been right.

I tried my best to ignore the paranoid thoughts and kept them at the back of my mind and this made it easier to cope with day to day living and I managed to look after myself properly despite the severity of thinking I was responsible for 9/11. Yet the delusion was still there so I was in a constant state of anxiety but this was easier to cope with than confronting the delusion head on.

To do that meant acknowledging I was responsible for 9/11 and that meant I might be culpable and heeled responsible for it. This was so frightening it was better to keep the thoughts at the back of my mind but that didn't stop the thoughts intruding in my conscious thinking and it was at these points the banging noise started and I began to realise I could be in much danger.

This moderate levels of fear were gradually being added to being afraid of being committed and locked up added to the stresses I had being experiencing with the symptoms and again things gradually started to get worse. The levels of being frightened were being increased again and that needed coping again and this is true for all cases of schizophrenia and can prove effective in some people.

Living on my own away from home meant I was facing the paranoia on my own. I still had family contact and was able to go home one a week but that meant going back to the flat so the therapeutic value of having a break from the noise and resting didn't make much impact on the anxiety caused by the banging. All the same I tried hanging in there in my flat waiting to go home again which helped up to a point.

It went on so long it comes to dominate all my thinking and I needed a way to stop thinking about it. I tired reading books as having been to university this was something enjoyable and interested in but I found I could not concentrate so that left doing the housework. The problem was when cleaning and dusting I could still here the noise but having my flat clean and tidy helped me with my state of mind.

As the noise went on but nothing seemed to happen to me and I stuck out listening to it for a years and a half. Nothing seemed to be happening to me except the banging noise and that should have produced a feeling of safety as if it could go on forever with nothing else happening to me. All the same there was no let up and so the punishment seemed inevitable at some point and I was going to need help

coping with it and eventually nothing was able to help with it.

Eventually my ability to cope on my own was being reduced and being on your own all the time is stressful anyway. I asked to home once a week. Going home was a source of strength and close family contact to rely on was soothing. With family I felt safer and stronger and more able to cope with the fear. The banging noise followed me home however so I still felt in danger. This time there was nowhere to run this time.

The paranoia and fear of being locked and the stresses of emotional isolation began to combine and as they became more prominent in life things began to gradually deteriorate to the point I wasn't coping with them. This however was only the beginning and as life problems began to add to the paranoia and this was eventually combined with deterioration with the illness.

Having to move house is one of the most stressful things you can do and I had to come to terms with the fact I had to leave university which to me was a *raison d'être* and cope with the emotional problems form having separated from my partner and in between thinking about the banging noise and 9/11 I had to try to cope with this as well though as the awareness of my paranoia began to take over my life these problems remained at the back of my mind as well.

After a years and a half of living away the banging noise had gone on for a huge length of time and I began to think as there were no coping strategies something else had to be done. Nothing in terms of punishment had happened to me to there was no reprieve or sign of being let off for 9/11 and I began to think something had to be done as I couldn't go on living like this. I decided I would try and go home and live with my parents.

This was not the only motivation however since as there were no let-up in what I was hearing and thinking it began to occur to me that I was still in a lot of trouble and eventually I panicked. I needed to be in safe place rather like the safe place imagery involved in treating schizophrenia if I was to start to cope and calm down and being in my family's home could effect this. At this point the deuteriation in the symptoms was arrested but it wasn't to last.

My family were going to lose the house with it being tied to the business and that meant moving house again and moving out of my safe place. The thought was to stay in my home village as I had happy memoires there of school and were I had grown up. This however was not effective this time and it was my family's home that had created the feelings of safety not the place I was in and so there was less resilience to the on-going symptoms.

So being at home couldn't last as the family business was going bankrupt and that meant finding accommodation as close to my parents as possible. I was able to move round the corner. The problem was that the new house was like a slum and this added to the problems of feeling stressed and I couldn't bear to be in the place. I began to think I had made a mistake moving back to my home village but it was too late by then.

I began to realise I might have made a mistake moving out of the flat in my local town as in the new

austere surroundings the symptoms began to worsen compared to what I had experienced before. Being in a close knit community of a village if anyone observed my unusual behaviour of staying up late and looking withdrawn I might be subject to the stigma of being schizophrenic. Again this made things a lot my fearsome and stressful.

Once again the banging noise had started and I could not motivate myself by keeping busy and looking after the house as it was such a slum. Living with it made me very unhappy and couldn't get motivated to read or listen to music. There were no social clubs in my home village and my family were very busy with work so there was even less distraction and going home was no longer possible as home was not there anymore.

This time round the delusions were becoming more prominent in addition to the banging noise and my fear levels were on the rise again. I couldn't eat or sleep properly and had no way of keeping myself strong enough to find ways of dealing with them. Cut off from society and media meant the only thing that was happening all day was thinking delusion thoughts and hearing things from the neighbours. Once again things were going downhill.

The anxiety of the delusional thoughts being at the back of my mind was being replaced by the fear caused through being more aware of them. This was now in combination with the banging noise which suggested some form of punishment was going to happen to me. The noise kept me focused on the thoughts so any way of distracting myself became much more difficult.

At this point the fear became too much to cope with and I had to get away from what I was hearing so that I was so focused on the thought. That meant getting out of the house and away from the neighbours knowing on the walls. I began to wander the roads to get away from people and to get away from the neighbours who were observing my thoughts about 9/11 and trying to play on my nerves by knocking on the walls.

This turned out to be a case of out of the frying pan and into the fear as out on the road my mind was not as concentrated on the sounds of banging but began to be distracted by the stigma of the village community knowing as was out in the night and the danger I was in by being exposed to the elements out there. All the same the banging followed me everywhere I went and was still causing much fear.

At this point I was wandering the roads and this is where the severity came in as I was physically and mentally exhausted. Sometimes I was out all night long and in all weathers which included a blizzard one night and feeling cold and hungry I was completely emaciated and lost a huge amount of weight. Being tired physically was added to by the fear and was emotionally shattering thinking I had caused and was going to be punished for 9/11.

Getting back to the house meant I would crash out asleep but once awake the same paranoias started again and I was locked into a cycle of day to day sleeping in the house and then starting to wander the roads again. This provided little opportunity to rest this time and the longer it went on the worse it became and being out and about so much meant there was little distraction in the ways I was coping

with it in my previous flat in town.

The severity became apparent in other ways as with sleeping it gave me nightmares which stopped it being as restful as it might and I thought I was being broadcast on the television and radio. This occurred when out and about and with all those millions of people watching and listening the scale of paranoia of this thought was just as frightening as being responsible for 9/11 and again this made things worse.

Another problem with wandering the roads was I began thinking I had caused all the unemployment and this in turn meant I was responsible for a lot of social problems. If people were reading my mind about this when out I might have been assaulted or mugged or worse and so didn't feel safe doing this and it might have been safer staying away from this in my own house and in a community untouched by these problems.

When out in the darkness I began to see graphitti here and there which reminded me of the dangers I was in and this was brought home by seeing cheap shops and charity shops which reflected the problems of the underlying poverty. The statistic on unemployment I had learned at university compounded the problem as there was so much of it and again this became something that was very frightening.

All the same I was so caught up by thinking about 9/11 that I let the rest of these thoughts go over my head as my reaction was to think about them later once I tried to get the worry about 9/11 sorted out first. Though this was not altogether possible as even at the back of my mind they still had an effect of heightening the fear I was going through so again things were starting to get serious at this point.

The thought of punishment started to get more prominent as I believed that in addition to the banging sound other symbols that something was going to happen to me began to appear. I particularly remember thinking that people were painting their doors and windows in a way that was suggestive and had associations of being culpable for the atrocity and had a thought going through my head that anyone planting sunflowers were signifying the same thing.

It may have been possible that the voices may become sympathetic to my plight and being out in the dark was causing much suffering but again there was something stopping anything that might have helped with this outcome. People started wearing jumpers with snowy colours in them which I took as a sign of rejection that and sympathy was not going to be forthcoming. This grasping at straws was ineffective and there were no other straws to grasp.

All the time the same process of being spied upon for 9/11 and people discerning my culpability for it through reading my mind and even the symbols like being broadcast on the television was like the banging noise in my town flat went on for years. Again nothing was happening to me and I wasn't being held responsible but again there was no let-up in the paranoia which suggested eventually something would.

All of this became visible to my family and one night I had walked off into the hills to escape the

people in the village they called the fell rescue out to look for me and I ended up in the national newspapers so that everyone in my home village now knew there was something going on that was not normal. Again though hiding indoors meant that I could keep myself safe by not coming into contact with them.

Now my family began to wonder if there was a problem with schizophrenia involved and contacted social services for advice. I could see where the symptoms were going at this point but didn't want to be sent to the loony bin as the stress of that would just make things worse. I had some reprieve from this as social services said they wouldn't force an incarceration as I hadn't done anything wrong.

The next step here was to contact a general practitioner to find out what exactly was going wrong with 'schizophrenia.' Here it was explained it was just an illness and was a result of a chemical imbalance which was not my fault. My family understood this and tried to explain it to me that I was in no danger from the medical profession here but it didn't expel this image of an asylum and so the fear remained.

Eventually I began to realise about the label schizophrenia which was frightening enough and began to calm down a bit, realising it was just an illness. The problem was the symptoms seemed real and there was no insight so I just said I wasn't schizophrenic and not ill. I wasn't afraid of the word but that still left me open to acts of violence by anyone who thought my behaviour was mad or reading my mind about being responsible for 9/11.

Eventually my mother got in touch with a psychiatrist through a friend of the family who worked for social services and explained my mad behaviour. At this point a social worker was called out as I was in danger from the people and the elements with the wandering round at night. At this point having observed my frightened look and tone of voice, together with my appearances of exhaustion a psychiatrist was called.

The illness was so severe that when the realisation of the scale of what I believed I had caused with 9/11 together with the other symptoms of placing myself in danger from the nights wandering the roads and stigma that I went into shock. And the illness has kept me there ever since as I saw no point in coming out as the state of shock is the bodies way of protecting you from the what has caused it in the first place.

Another impact of the delusions was just as bad and the impact on my nervous system was shattering. I had a nervous breakdown but was able to conceal this from everybody as going into shock meant it was not visible. Occasionally the experience of the breakdown comes back to me and I felt what it was like but on the whole my thinking on this was that it was better concealed and ignored.

The illness was severe in another way as thinking I had killed all those people caused intense emotional pain and damage to my self-esteem and feelings of being a worthwhile human being. As per the Maslow tree being unsafe and in fear meant that I was unable to access the emotional and esteem tiers very often but when they did become apparent it added to the severity of the problems I was going through.

That left the last resort that to avoid punishment and the constant experience of anxiety which was physically very difficult with all the adrenalin and pain it was causing meant the only alternative was to commit suicide and it was depressing to be driven to this point. I tried a few ways of doing it but didn't have the strength to go through it. That left no options for dealing with the illness and I ended up passing my life away so that eventually I would die.

The low point came with being sectioned and taken to hospital which involved my parents signing the consent form so I would be taken away which was then enforced by the police. I didn't feel any safer going to the asylum as when wandering around at night as the other inmates might be violent. On top of this I thought I was going to be locked up away from home and family and once 'committed' I would never get out.

All the same some things took the edge of the fear as I had previously encountered the idea of schizophrenia as an illness and from my earlier contact with a general practitioner together with reinforcement from my family suggested I might have a medical condition. This was underlined by the fact it was a psychiatric doctor enforcing the section and that I was taken away in an ambulance. I didn't know what to expect from the section.

Once there things became a lot clearer as the place was full of people with symptoms of depression and schizophrenia and were being looked after by the doctors and nurses. It wasn't bedlam but quiet and restful and there were no signs of being locked up by men in white coats, straight jackets and padded cells. This realisation grew as after a while the patients weren't being violent towards one another and had been admitted voluntarily. I began to feel a lot safer.

Another thought that occurred to me that everyone in hospital would assume I was ill with schizophrenia and so wasn't at risk from any further violence from the stigma and when I got used to the people and the idea of the illness I could talk to them as well as my family. This ended the stress of social isolation and I managed to off load a lot of the social stress by talking to the nurses who had good social skills as well as being intelligent.

Another factor which helped made things easier was the good material conditions of the hospital compared to the slum I was living in. This helped greatly with my mood and as with the excellent social contact I began to cheer up and take an interest in life again. It was nice to meet new people and found the atmosphere of being on the ward quite congenial. Once my safety needs had been met I was able to open up emotionally.

When put on medication which had a strong sedative I was able to sleep at night and so felt a lot more refreshed in the morning. After that there was warmth shelter and proper food provided and all this helped keep my strength up for dealing with the symptoms. My level one needs as Maslow described them were being provided and this resource helped me deal with the level two problems of fear.

The medication was unable to help with the problems of fear but had stabilised me so things didn't get any worse. That would have left things severe enough but I eventually realised that when talking about

the illness I began to realise I had some insight. It occurred to me despite all the signs I was going to be punished and the surveillance from the spying neighbours passing information back to the CIA nothing had ever happened to me, after all those years.

Often I didn't know what to do with that realisation as the thought of being held responsible still entered my head frequently and did seem to be real when I was thinking about it. There was only so much insight I could have but it did provide a periodic rest from the illness when I was thinking like that and this allowed me to enjoy the safety and socialising which the hospital environment had to offer.

Having insight meant I was able to open up and talk about the illness and I found my family and the nursing staff were very sympathetic to what I was going through. This meant I could offload a lot of my problems and ease the stress I had been under having to deal with them on my own. This opened the door to being more resilient with the fear and could be combined with all the other therapeutic factors of being in hospital.

As things improved it eventually became apparent that I might be discharged though this occurred gradually and the hospital admission took thirteen months but with the remaining symptoms things were still severe enough to require some additional support. That could not fall on my families shoulders as they didn't have the time but an alternative presented itself by moving into sheltered accommodation in town. It was not possible to go back to my home village with the history of the illness there.

The stress of moving house again was eased by having been in the hospital environment which meant living life with lots of friendly people around you. The sheltered housing consisted by living with other patients, each having their own separate bedsit but accessed by a shared corridor which meant we could keep our doors open and wander in and out of anyone's when we felt like it. The staff added to the social environment and were good to talk to as well.

I soon began to feel at home there and became part of the mental health community outside of hospital and that meant I wasn't so reliant on my parents to provide emotional support, which was a great relief to them. I no longer felt the need to escape the place I was living in and didn't need to be at my family home which had been lost through the bankruptcy. As things calmed down and my family resettled after the loss of the business life began to return to normal.

Of course I still had bad episodes of paranoia but they were cushioned by long intervals where I could enjoy life again. Schizophrenia is stress induced but many of the factors causing the stress and the stress of the illness itself had been reduced and things became more manageable. I got over the separation with my girlfriend and time was a healer here and began to realise I had a new life after the business had gone bankrupt.

All of this was empowering and I began to make plans for the future. I wanted to get back into education as this was always my first love and found that there were a lot of courses being taught by

my local further education college at my local mental health day centre. I took up learning some information technology and it was interesting to see what computers could do. All of this was in a safe and supportive environment and I found I could concentrate this time.

The good times were not set to last however and one of the problems with schizophrenia is that it is prone to relapse and in my case this meant the new symptoms became just as severe as the old one. Yet there was a link between the two as I had started to have very acute pain hallucinations which were linking into the older symptoms of being responsible for 9/11. It seemed the pain was being caused as punishment for the atrocity I believed I had caused.

Living with this proved very difficult and again without being able to commit suicide I had to find a coping strategy but nothing could stop the feelings of pain once they started. Yet there was some hope that as my community psychiatric nurse put it that if you hang in there advances in medication were being made all the time so it might eventually have an answer. This together with the fact I kept trying all the different pain killers from my local doctors surgery.

I began to record the frequency of these new symptoms but was disheartened by the fact they kept happening every few days with the longest interval having been two weeks. I began to live in fear of the next bout of pain and wasn't able to make the most of the in between times to live life as normally as I could. Again I started thinking of getting through life as fast as I could to avoid the symptoms of this relapse.

Living with the pain wasn't the same as living with the fear that characterised the onset of the illness and although living in the sheltered housing project helped with my mood and anxieties I never became resilient to the pain as I had to the extremes of terror which marked the severity of what had already happened. This was a different ball game altogether and proved just as disabling.

One thing I was frightened of here was going out and about as if the hallucinations started there was nowhere else to run to and it was easier to deal with them at home. This cut off the social contact and educational interests I had developed at the day centre but that still left people in the project to talk to even though once again I had become housebound with the condition.

Support from my family helped with the emotional side of being in pain so much and the provision of proper social and material conditions meant I didn't slide back into the stresses in life which had made the condition of schizophrenia so bad before I was admitted to hospital. Sometimes I could still leave the house to go shopping for things with my family and if I had symptoms they could bring me straight home again to try and deal with it.

I was eventually put on a drug called clozapine which had the strongest sedative and could use this to get to sleep. If the pain started late at night I could knock myself out with it and the hope would be in the morning the pain would have gone. During the day however getting back to sleep was much more difficult as I had already slept so long on the sedative the night before. All the same if getting through the time was the goal the extra sleeping was useful.

I wasn't strong enough to cope with the pain and unlike the fear there was no way round the problem. I was subject to the full force of it and there was nothing to take the edge off it as had happened during my admission to hospital. Once again the thought of suicide raised its head but the pain from that would have been just as bad and I could cope with either. I was left depending on the medical system for help though the hope of this didn't detract from the symptoms.

As time went on the periodic pains kept recurring and I was beginning to think they would never go away. All the same the only solution even then was to get on with things as best as I could as I had no choice in the matter and it seemed that having tried different medications with it nothing was going to work. Getting depressed by this realisation was overtaken by the imperative to just get through things as fast as I could.

The condition at this point never had me back in hospital as I made it clear that the same thing could happen there as well as at home and it made no difference where I was as nothing was going to ease it. I wasn't suicidal or depressed and looked healthy otherwise so the psychiatrists weren't too worried. All the same I had frequent contact with them about this new symptom so they could observe all this.

The only coping strategy that did suggest itself was to stay in bed under the comfort blanket and try to get a grip on myself until the pain wore off. This was marginally effective and I managed to inspire some hope that there was something I could do to get through these times until the pain wore off. This was a way of grasping at straws again and whether it really worked I did not know.

The low point came with this one night when I started to link the pain in with the delusions of 9/11 which up until this point had taken a back seat to the new symptoms I was experiencing, though this was out of the frying pan and into the fire. The more I got to thinking about the paranoia the more it seemed logical to think the pain I was experiencing was some kind of punishment and something had to be done about it.

The more this worked on my mind the more I came to link the too and the voices started to suggest this into the bargain. The levels of fear began to build again so every time I was in pain I began to feel frightened again. This escalated until one night I began to panic and felt I had to turn myself in to the authorities and even be punished as I could not cope with the feelings of pain anymore.

Late at night I began to set off on a three mile walk to the local police station which was three and a half miles away. That night it was raining and I was wearing nothing but my pyjamas though I didn't feel the weather or cold as I was so caught up with experiencing the pain. Once I got there and told them what I was thinking they immediately recognised the schizophrenia and were very sympathetic. I was given a lift home.

Eventually after a number of years I had some more luck with the illness and was referred to a local acupuncture clinic for some treatment using alternative therapies. After all the psychiatric medications and pain killers had failed this was to be the last resort but thanks to God it worked. The treatment took a number of months but the therapist soon realised that there was an area where the pain was located

and prescribed the right combination of needles.

Ending the pain was more a relief than ending the fears caused by the paranoia during the first phase of the illness prior to being in hospital and allowed me to destress once again and this helped with easing the symptoms of the paranoia. At this point calm descended in my life and I was able to pick up where I was with life at day centres and the project before the relapse. I was still wondering if another relapse would occur as is common with schizophrenia.

As it turned out without all the stresses the illness began to clear up and subside and this provided a time in my life where I relatively symptom free and effected a virtual recovery. I had never expected this and began to make plans for the future as it would eventually mean living outside the mental health system. This was the happiest I had been with the illness and provided a well earned rest. The information technology I has learned would come in useful for getting a job.

All the same the illness as ever began to relapse again but this time I was fortunately free of the pain hallucinations though the same old paranoias of being responsible for 9/11 began to resurface in my mind. It became so frightening that I could move and was often frozen in fear this time. Again this prevented going out and enjoying life as if I froze when out there might be no help.

The answer here was to stay away from people again but fortunately I had enough insight to know that the people I was living with in the project would just think I was schizophrenic and so wouldn't be passing information back to the CIA. That meant hiding away indoors again and I spent ten years locked in a room escaping the surveillance and mind reading of the people outside.

I still felt at home in the project and there was no need to escape it by wandering the roads again so there were no dangers of being out in the night or exposed to a violent stigma. The project was a therapeutic environment and the social contact was distracting so there was some help with the relapsing symptoms and the illness never associated the place I was living in with the suffering so it didn't become another trap or torture chamber.

During the earliest phases of the illness I had wanted to go home as this was very soothing but the years I had spent in the mental health system got me used to group living and I now associated the project with being at home. Again I avoided any depression and although I was confined indoors there were plenty of my new friends around which made the place more identifiable as home compared to the other houses I had to live during the onset of the first symptoms.

The problem was the illness had become more frightening and the insight into it had gone which was something that underpinned the recovery which had occurred by being in hospital. I was given some diazepam to cope with it (something which can be difficult to get given its addictive qualities) but it turned out there was a small group of people in the world for whom it is not effective and that I was in this group.

At one point when the illness was in crisis again the Valium did work as the fear was more physical in form. I was at my mothers and I had the revelation I was going to be tortured and in my panic I started

hyper ventilating and going into shock. My family realised the severity here and quickly rang for help and when she finally got here (as quickly as she could) she recommended hospital as an option again. Fortunately when given the Valium I calmed down speedily so this outcome was again avoided.

The symptoms of being too frightened to go outside were not going to go away in the way the previous relapses had done and it was recommended to deal with the fear by some graded exposure and someone to go out with me. This took a lot of persuasion as I didn't think it was going to work but friends and family together with the medical staff put a lot of pressure on me to try this and eventually I gave into it. I don't know everything and there was enough sense to it that it might work.

The idea that graded exposure to people reading my mind which was causing varying amounts of anxiety might mean I could overcome them step by step. The paranoia wasn't causing the same levels of fear all the time and varied from anxiety to terror. Dealing with the anxiety first it might be possible so the theory ran to dealing with the terror at the end of the process. A trusted support worker was put in place to provide reassurance and confidence with doing this.

When it was now possible to question the mind reading which had been going on for so long and I had to marry the experience of being around them with what I delusionally thought was happening in those situations. Where people really reacting to my thinking about 9/11 or was I just imagining this. The support worker devised a strategy to test this out and the hope was that once again it might generate some insight.

Sitting in a café she told me to observe the people around me and see if they were reacting to what I was thinking. Watching them I saw they were not looking at me and were engrossed in conversation not aware of anyone else sitting around them, including me. But the paranoid thought was still there and I felt I could detect some subconscious vibes from the other people who were still reacting negatively to my presence.

All the same this was causing some anxiety but having someone with me acted as a source of strength and I eventually started to calm down in the situation and think and talk about something else with the support. I began to realise that if I emptied my head about thoughts of 9/11 there was nothing in my mind for them to read and so they couldn't be passing information back to the CIA.

At this point I realised what I had to do to help calm down and this together with the support enabled me to overcome the feelings of anxiety I was experiencing and because the illness was only an anxiety disorder most of the time and the feelings of terror which were buried in the subconscious due to the system overload it became more possible to get out and about. The ten year confinement at the project was ended and this was much to my surprise.

At anxiety levels most of the time the fear could be dealt with and I became much more functional again. I was able to eat, sleep and looking after myself physically and took up doing courses at the day centre again all of which provided much distraction and enjoyment in between the next bout of terror which kept on happening from time to time. This functionality didn't stop the extreme forms of terror

and was too much for the graded exposure to work too.

All the same the stress levels began to reduce again and the bouts of terror began to be less frequent and life on the whole despite the periodic problems became much more normal and liveable and though not in a complete form of recovery things weren't too bad. This was a relief for me and my family and I just had to get through the crisis episodes willy nilly in the hope that they might one day get cured with medication or otherwise just go away.

Conclusion

The severity of schizophrenia involved a number of factors and not just the delusional symptoms involved. Much depends on the content of the delusions and how frightening the paranoid beliefs are and in my case this was so severe because of the scale of what I believed to have happened by causing 9/11. This was added to by hearing ferocious voices saying I was going to be punished and what a bad person I was which engendered suicidal feelings. This together with the dangers of stigma, incarceration and wandering the roads added to the danger and left me physically exhausted of the strength to cope with this. Later the pain hallucinations and spending ten years locked in a room added to the experiences of trauma which is what has made the illness so severe. In conclusion it can be noticed that even given these levels of symptoms support can be provided which can help you deal with them.