

LINDA

Linda's targeting of problems involved relating differently from her learned pattern of avoidance of closeness and being seen for fear of criticism and loss of control. She practised, within her therapy, challenging her 'perfectionist trap' and letting go a little, experimenting with trust. She learned to trust another human being as well as her own internal world of healthy emotion. In creating this healthy island for the healthy self to arise she discovered her own creative soul.

She has generously written the following account of her therapy.

'I came to CAT therapy very confused and muddled; I often used the adjective 'screwball' to describe myself because that is how I felt. I couldn't understand why my life had turned into such a horrible mess. Yes I was acutely aware that my childhood had been very difficult as my father suffered from a severe mental illness, and I spent most of my childhood helping and supporting my mother. Plus I had been teased terribly at school but I had managed to scrape through fairly unscathed, well so I thought!

'It was not until my late 'teens I developed anorexia and depression and I have struggled ever since. Depression is debilitating in itself, but for me it was the grips of anorexia that caused irreversible damage to my body and controlled my very existence. So many people think it is all about being fashion conscious and following model examples. And the remedy: 'just go and eat cakes, burgers, chips, in fact anything stodgy'. Everyone was just concerned about weight gain, even medical teams. I don't dispute that this is an important aspect of the illness, but I had become 'Linda the anorexic'. I no longer knew what or who I was, in fact I am not sure I ever did. One thing I did know was that I found relating to people extremely difficult and I seemed to have no emotional connection with anybody. After all, my family did not understand me so nobody could. I had become a recluse. Living with my parents, and holding down a part time job, that was it!

'After a few meetings with the CAT therapist it became obvious there was a lot of ground to be covered; issues from the past that I had not understood and dealt with. From this I had developed many behaviours to protect myself, and I discovered I was still using these now. Slowly as the sessions progressed I began to let down my guard and my confidence grew in opening up. It felt like such a release, so freeing to pour out all the things that had whirled around in my head for many years. My highly critical internal dialogue was contributing so much to my own lack of self-worth and reinforced beliefs of my being stupid and mentally incompetent which perpetuated a sense of hate towards myself.

'Laying my past out bare for another individual to see was difficult and I was surprised to discover that I was still accepted. The reformulation letter I received depicted some very interesting behaviour that I had not been able to explain. The first area was: *I don't know how to trust anyone sufficiently to develop an adult relationship.*

'The procedure I was caught up in was that I would set out to attract and gain approval from others, making sure that I got noticed. As long as I was in control of the interaction I could cope. But as soon as I felt others were looking for something more in a physical way I would become fearful and run away or reject their advances. This would then lead me to feel remorse and become self-critical.

'The second area that was predominant was: *I have learned to cope with my fears alone but cannot contain them.*

'This procedure related to my father's illness. When I was young I took on the responsibility to protect my mother, supporting her through the difficult patches. Dad's illness was never talked about within the home for fear of making the situation worse, and never mentioned outside for fear of people judging us as a family – to avoid the stigma that always accompanies that type of illness. So I had to stay strong, and contain all the emotional feelings that I had, alone. Unfortunately endless doubts crept in and disrupted my self control. The final result was that I avoided situations and developed defences including health problems that then restricted my world.

'Many other aspects appeared within my sessions but the main areas we worked on were finding new ways in which I could relate to others, where I could express the real Linda and not have to be someone that I imagined others wanted me to be. In other words I could be normal with normal worries and it was OK to express how I felt. What was different is that we did not concentrate on my illness, we only talked about my health if I was feeling down.

'It made me realise I was not just "Linda the depressed anorexic". My symptoms had deep underlying issues connected to the avoidance of unmanageable emotions from childhood trauma, having a dad who was

so mentally ill. I just could not handle these feelings in any other way. This understanding in itself was like music to my ears; someone was treating me as a real person, not a statistic, was looking through the illness and was seeing the real me. I remember one of my biggest fears was that I too was just mentally unstable and that there was no hope. Now someone was showing me I was a person.

'As we worked together I began to realize not only did I have a soul, but also a heart and could experience useful emotion. I discovered that I was able to express this through my creative skills of photography and poem writing which just seemed to flow out of me freely; this was one aspect of the essence of my soul and "the real Linda".

'Another area we worked through in the sessions was, that no one or no thing is 100% perfect. Something I was always looking for - a "true perfectionist" - but of course this would always fall short leading to disappointment. So we discussed the words "GOOD ENOUGH"!! Which I will admit is really quite hard to do.

'However I think one of the most important aspects that I learnt throughout my time in CAT was that I am allowed to have a voice, and I do not need to contain all my problems, fears and emotions inside. I discovered that I had been acting like a shaken up canister on the verge of exploding and this had had a detrimental effect on me as a person and the way in which I was living my life. I learnt there are a lot of people out there, and some of those "are" trustworthy genuine people who will accept you for you, and any problems that you have. My task was to find people like this to collaborate and share stories with. As the saying goes, "a problem shared is a problem halved" and that is so true!

'On my last session I wrote a goodbye poem as my way to express my sincerest thanks for the time and work we had covered over the 24 sessions. I regarded my therapist as a friend I was lucky we had built up a great rapport and he encouraged my personality to shine through!!

My goodbye!

I don't know what to say ... a dear friend you have become
But again I face the world alone as our work is said and done.
Our meetings have been insightful, I guess some I already knew
But it has been a privilege and honour to come and talk to you.

One thing I have realised my responses can be straightforward
Not always such a drama queen and I've gone way over board
With 33 years of self doubting and harsh criticisms to my name
It was easy to believe I am no good and hold my head in shame.

I was worried I would develop an illness similar to that of my dad
And with such evil thoughts, it's easy to see why I thought I was bad.
So Steve having you there to confide in, over the last 24 weeks
It's given me chance to air my thoughts, a total freedom to speak.

I never realised the importance that opening up would set me free
Instead I've battled alone in silence, which in fact it was hurting me.
Have realised I live with a delusion of seeking out that perfect thing
Even knowing it doesn't exist, it's the let downs in my life that ring

So how do I move on, to that new place, the one on my map?
Where you have stated 'Good enough' the one I discounted as crap.
I wish we'd spent more time, looking at ways that I could do this
And now not having you there to talk to, I am really going to miss.

I'm worried what'll happen as I have yet to find that replacement friend
And with all my thoughts and troubles my life is so tough to mend
But now at least I can accept why my family can't heal my pain
It's to be someone on the outside, which is fresh like the pouring rain.

I hate those words 'goodbye' it's like you've gone and passed away
Yet even though you're still alive you cannot feature in my day
I've not agreed to everything that we've said, as that would not be me
I like to have a challenge, a laugh and joke, as you've come to see.

It's been good to meet someone that accepts me for the person I really am
And not repulsed by my sinister flaws it's almost like having a fan
I'm slowly realising that I don't need to be ashamed for the way I act
I shouldn't need to go and hide; people should accept me for that.

I just want to say 'thank you' for understanding all about my past
To share my deepest thoughts and also to enjoy those many laughs
But your acceptance of my personality struck a chord in my soul
Given me confidence to reveal another side, to be proud and whole.

(Linda, 2009)