



# The Madness of Our Lives: Experiences of Mental Breakdown and Recovery

*Penny Gray*

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'The Madness of our Lives is a worthy contribution to the literature on first person accounts of mental distress and illness. Its strength is in the range of experiences it canvasses, and in the freedom given to interviewees to tell their own stories. This is a highly readable and informative book.'

- Metapsychology Online

'The Madness of our Lives consists largely of transcribed interviews with people who have undergone "madness" and to a greater or lesser extent achieved "recovery". It usefully opens both of these terms up to scrutiny. The book is harrowing but hopeful. It is also frequently moving and through-provoking. In giving advice to people who have experienced madness; the book performs, firstly, a powerful political/ethical gesture. Those interviewed by Penny Gray recount painful experiences of being misunderstood, derided, bullied, abused - in their personal and professional lives and, not least, during treatment; there are numerous accounts here of unsympathetic or negligent GPs and mental health practitioners. This is shocking and compelling material, which needs to be aired.'

-Journal of Mental Health, April 2007

'This book comprises a collection of eleven first hand accounts of breakdown and recovery. It is both a fascinating and insightful read with an equal emphasis on recovery and breakdown. The book is aimed at a wide audience of those who have experienced a breakdown themselves and those who care for someone who has experienced breakdown including those in the mental health sector. It certainly would be of interest to all of these groups and the reader would take away a better understanding of the diversity of causes, diversity of experiences and diversity of means of recovery. Importantly, the book is an opportunity to give voice to those who have experienced breakdown and recovery.'

-The Journal of Critical Psychology, Vol.7, Spring 2007

'This is a superb book documenting the 1st hand accounts of people who have experienced mental health issues. It not only is fascinating from an anthropological perspective but also in respect of their service experiences, each of which varies. This book should be compulsory curriculum reading for anyone studying or working in this sector. The most valuable lesson that it provides is that one mental health service user's experience is not necessarily another's and therefore services must be person-centred, creating services for people, and avoiding the urge to make the people fit the services.

The book would also be of interest to anyone interested in narratives following poor health or disability.'

-The Encephalitis Society

'Since counselling is fundamentally about listening to clients, this book represents a refreshing return to first principles. We all need to be reminded to listen well and to wear our theory lightly. If we need a reminder that people are active self-healers and the best we may be able to do is to accompany them (and not get in the

way), we could take this book as essential reading.'

-Healthcare Counselling and Psychotherapy Journal

What precipitates mental breakdown? How do people experience such extremes - and how do they see others' interpretations and interventions? Most important, how do people recover from these episodes and get their lives back? These are some of the questions addressed in this anthology of first-hand accounts of mental breakdown and recovery. Eleven very different stories together shed light on what triggers mental breakdown, what it is like to be 'mad', whether treatment helps and how people reclaim themselves and their lives.

Based on tape-recorded interviews with people who have been through a mental breakdown and come out the other side of it, *The Madness of Our Lives* breaks the silence around mental distress and offers hope and optimism to mental health service users and their carers.

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