

Club News

Concert

The concert on September 30th was the fifth annual concert at Birdbrook church given by Diversity with the reception held at Moyns Park. It was attended by one hundred and ten people and was a great success.

The Lithium Club Summer Garden Party

The annual Garden Party will take place on Saturday June 2nd, 2007 at Birdbrook Hall.

Tennessee Williams

The June/July Newsletter contained a list of famous people in the past who suffered from a bipolar condition. The American playwright Tennessee Williams (1911 – 1983) was one of them. He was born in Mississippi, the son of a travelling shoe salesman who was an alcoholic and a bully. His mother ended up in a psychiatric hospital and his sister Rose, to whom he was devoted, turned out to be a schizophrenic. As he grew up he discovered that he was gay. In those days to be gay and white was little better than being black.

I would like to tell you something about his manic phases and, in a subsequent article, about his depressive periods.

Being a shy person the manic side of him very rarely showed itself in physical violence. When it did, it happened when one of his plays – in which he was always emotionally deeply involved – came under attack. In his Memoirs he describes an incident which occurred in the auditorium.

“I leapt up to confront the chief instigator of the disturbance. I didn’t know what I was saying or doing, but I heard myself shouting, ‘We’ve all put our hearts in this play. If you don’t like it, I am the man who wrote it, talk to me!’ Then I found myself confronting a young man of about twice my height, his face inflamed with frustrated fury. At once everyone was around me, trying to hustle me out of the fracas. The important thing is that I wasn’t scared, although he might have plastered me into the woodwork, so to speak. It seems that I am dangerously impervious to what might happen to me when I am insulted and confront the insulter.”

Williams’s homosexuality is important of our understanding of him. His Memoirs are full of his sexual exploits. Wherever he went, as he moved restlessly from place to place, he prowled the streets in order to pick up eligible young men. (“He was a handsome blond kid of about twenty two with a creamy skin and a very seductive backside which he was eager to offer.”) But he also had longer relationships and I will come to these next time.

The following remark is very revealing: *“Violence! All my old psychiatrist, be especially Dr Lawrence Kubie, the Frenchman, told me that I had it in me, and right he was about that. Except that my violence is all verbal!”* By ‘verbal’ he meant his writings and it was in these that he worked through his obsessions.

His best known plays are *The Glass Menagerie*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *A Street Car Named Desire*. The last named was his favourite and won the Pulitzer Prize. In it, incidentally, Marlon Brando first played the part of the brutish brother-in-law of the heroine who was raped and driven out of her mind. Most of his plays are concerned with the plight of misfits in society, whether they be gays, black, mad, elderly or lonely. He wrote over sixty of them, as well as two novels and a stream of poems and short stories, and he wrote as he lived, with ferocious intensity.

Would he have had the same insight into human nature and the gift of creativeness if he had been 'normal'.....?

Peter Carpenter

Giving up the Car Keys

Are your manic episodes usually characterised by reckless driving? This is the case for some people and not for others. One male client put it succinctly: 'My highs almost always go along with some problem involving my car.' If you do have a poor driving record, your early warning signs may signal the need to stop driving for now. Mania – much like drinking alcohol – makes your driving unsafe for yourself and others. You are especially high risk for an auto accident if you are in a manic state and are also drinking and driving, as some people do.

This is yet another arena in which it helps to have others' input. Your significant others can collaborate in helping you make good judgements about whether you can drive safely. While you will resent that our spouse or siblings have access to the car and you don't, remember that it is only for the limited time until your manic or hypomanic symptoms have cleared. Your doctor's input will also be valuable if he or she knows your driving history.

Avoiding Major Life Decisions

When you have one or more early warning signs, avoid making decisions that could affect you or others' futures, particularly if these decisions involve meetings with people who have a degree of 'fate control'. Now is not the time to ask your boss for a raise or a change in job duties – you are likely to come across to him or her as demanding and entitled. If you are an employer, delay your decision to assemble your employees to inform them of major structural changes in the company. Likewise, avoid making decisions about your family life that could lead to long-term consequences, such as getting married, divorced, deciding to have children, deciding to buy a new house, moving to another city or switching your children to a new school.

It's hard to make these agreements with yourself, and even harder to implement them when you feel so good, so optimistic and so elated. The decisions you feel pressed to make when you are getting manic seem like great ideas at the time, even though to others – or even to yourself when you're well – the ideas seem unrealistic and extremely risky. Try to think of the pressure to make these decisions, along with your feeling of greater mental clarity, as a part of your illness (especially if you also notice other symptoms, such as distractibility, racing thoughts or an increase in your sex drive). People with bipolar disorder almost invariably make their best life decisions when they're in the remitted, euthymic state, and they usually regret those decisions they made while manic.

The Bipolar Disorder Survival Guide
David J. Miklowitz, PhD

How does sleep deprivation affect bipolar disorder?

Adjusting sleep patterns is one way clinicians are experimenting with treating bipolar patients. Since sleep disturbances are one of the first symptomatic indicators of a bipolar episode, understanding how alterations in sleep affect the patient may prove useful. Studies have shown that total sleep deprivation and partial sleep deprivation during the second half of the night (usually after two or three am) can temporarily relieve unipolar and bipolar depression. Despite the fact that some patients suffer a relapse after sleeping again a certain portion of patients report the ensuing depression to be less profound.

Unfortunately, any alteration in sleep patterns can also precipitate mania. Some experts advise patients that even one night of unexplainable sleep loss can be the early warning

sighs of an impending manic episode. Always talk to your doctor and inform your family if you are going to experiment with sleep deprivation to combat depression.

Why am I up, why am I down?
Roger Granet, M.D. & Elizabeth Ferber.

Water

The last time someone told you to take a long hot bath when you were depressed or agitated, you may have regarded the advice as a simplistic solution to a major problem, and, in many cases, it is just that. But many people use water such as a shower, bath, whirlpool, hot tub or pool as a soothing part of their daily routine. Hygiene isn't the only reason; it genuinely makes them feel better. Try taking time out during the day if things get hectic or if you are feeling discouraged to give your body the benefit of the calming properties of water. A man in the study considers water to be '*a great harmoniser and balance adjuster*'.

I had not really considered the therapeutic effects of water on my mood until several years ago. Before that, a morning or evening shower was just one more hurried part of my daily routine. Then, on my birthday, a cold snowy day in January, I was trying to think of something nice I could do for myself. I decided swim in a heated pool would be just the thing. I called a local motel with an indoor pool and they said that while they usually only open their pool to motel guests or those who have a monthly membership, since it was my birthday, they would make an exception. For six dollars, I spent a delicious afternoon going between the pool and whirlpool, lazily watching the snow fall on the glass roof. I felt so good afterward that I purchased a membership and give myself this treat several times a week. I relaxed and got my exercise at the same time.

Many community based recreational centres and motels allow easy, inexpensive access to water facilities. In my community, the local mental health centre has reserved time at a motel so people who feel self-conscious about being identified with the centre can go swimming when the facility is open to the public. If this is something you think you would enjoy, explore the possibilities in your community and see if an opportunity exists or if you can fit a membership into your budget.

You don't have to go to a pool or have a membership to enjoy the benefits of water. Your own bath tub or shower can suffice. Inexpensive whirlpool units give you a sense of luxury and relaxation in your own tub. One woman in the study said: '*A hot bubble bath is relaxing and relieves tension. I will sometimes play good music and light candles in the bathroom while enjoying a bubble bath.*' A man said that he has a rubber duck which he enjoys in his bath. It gives the bath a sense of levity.

Living Without Depression and Manic Depression
Mary Ellen Copeland, M.S

We love to hear from patients, carers or other supporters of our charity on any topic relating to either the newsletter or matters concerning the work we do. So please do take part in our competition as well as writing to us on any topic that particularly interests you. We are always happy to publish articles sent into us when requested to do so by the author.

Compiled by J A J Rook
26.10.06
Edited by Dr A D Broadhurst