

# Kirsty's story

## Down in the darkness: A child's story

By Kirsty Strain

Kirsty: now...and then



**When you're a child, life should be filled with dreams and imagination; with fantasy and fun. There is a feeling of flight in the spirit, as concern doesn't fully exist yet. Something can happen in the life of a child that takes this away, that removes all sense of freedom. In my case that 'something' was M.E.**

I first became ill at the age of nine and from that point in my life, I began a journey I could never have possibly imagined. Much of my memories are confused due to the severity of my ill health at times but what I remember I would like to share with you.

My illness began with severe headaches and nausea, fatigue and dizziness, followed by muscle aches, exhaustion and the inability to concentrate. Like many others, I suffered a disturbed pattern of sleep and abdominal pain. Gradually I deteriorated; years passed and I was no further forward. I saw many different doctors and therapists and none could give me an answer to my suffering. I was prescribed various prescription medications, including beta-blockers, for what my GP insisted was chronic migraine.

### Why is this happening to me?

At the age of twelve, I was advised to visit with a child psychologist for depression and anxiety. I'd begun to suffer severe low moods and had experienced a

number of panic attacks. I was drifting further and further out of everyday living and had begun to feel so weak in the morning that my mother would have to dress me for school. By most lunch times she'd receive a call to collect me because I was just too ill to attend. This began to have an effect not only on my education but also on my emotional wellbeing. I felt anger and frustration about what I was going through and the effect on my family, but most of all I was confused as to why this was happening to me.

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### Too ill to fight – and still no diagnosis

My mum became angry and frustrated that no true

explanation could be found, I had visited with neurologists, nutritionists, homeopaths, psychologists and psychiatrists but was too ill by now to fight for my own recovery. By the time I reached sixteen, I could no longer continue with my education. I became extremely depressed and often contemplated suicide. My contact with anything outside of being ill was very limited. I was allocated a psychiatrist and an occupational therapist to try to assist me with what I was told was simply a severe case of depression coupled with anxiety and chronic migraine. This I was to believe was the cause of all my suffering. It didn't make sense.

### Reiki and reflexology brought relief

I had become so ill that I was often bedbound and so weak that I couldn't even chew, drinking through a straw because I couldn't lift my head. I was prescribed a number of different

antidepressants – Prozac and Seroxat to name two – but each to no avail and leaving me with nasty side effects. My mum then decided to find help from other sources and I began to visit a reiki healing practitioner and reflexologist when I could manage it. Both therapies helped with my anxiety levels and were to provide the first steps in my journey towards recovery.

With both my parents having to work, my grandmother often had to care for me. I felt deeply upset at having to witness this elderly woman tire as she showed me such love and attentiveness. As my secondary caregiver, she gave me all she had and more and we became very close as a result. Gradually I made improvement through the reiki and reflexology to a degree. I began to visit with a physiotherapist and also sought help and advice from many other sources in order to find a way through what I was suffering. Although I still didn't have a name for my illness, I had symptoms that I hoped could be treated.

My reflexologist then suggested that I might be suffering from M.E. so my mum and I consulted my doctor with this information. She promptly sent me to a department that could offer diagnosis, but no additional help in managing my illness as I was already in consultation with the therapists they would recommend. So it seemed that the battle was still mine and my mother's alone.

I sought assistance from homeopaths, dieticians, allergy specialists, counsellors. My mum continuously read information relating to the illness and we discovered Action for M.E. This offered me hope and gave us a direction towards recovery. However, by this point I was seventeen and my childhood had all but gone.

## Regaining the will to fight

I would often lie in bed with the daylight spilling in through my window in summer time, something covering my eyes to alleviate the irritation of brightness. Listening to the laughter of children playing and the music of life pass me by, I became severely depressed. Fortunately help was available in the form of counsel from a private practitioner; a psychologist and someone I now consider a friend. While my suicidal feelings led to a spell in hospital, it was this experience that propelled me towards a deeper strength I never believed I had.

I was so awoken by my feelings of sadness that I began to convert my hatred of self and situation into a fight for the life that I had long felt unworthy of. It was this renewed strength that allowed me to finally begin to make progress with my depression and see a way forward.

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## Return to life

I began working with a herbalist last year and have seen the largest improvement in my state of health so far. At 20 I am now in full-time education, studying acting and performance. The development of a support system at college has been invaluable. I have friends I can rely on when I have an unsteady period and tutors who are well aware of the situation and do what they can to help.

I take nothing for granted, because this illness has taught me the value of living. To simply be able to get out of bed in the morning, to wash and dress yourself, to see your hopes become reality after so many years of sickness is a true blessing. I have tremendous faith and that coupled with my renewed hope allows me to believe I will succeed in my quest for total recovery. I continue to work with my herbalist and my psychologist on occasion, while my ongoing contact with AfME is another source of support. Creative writing has also been a great vehicle in my working through this experience. Suffering from M.E., awful as it has been, has taken me on a journey of learning and discovery I never could have imagined. I consider myself a stronger person because of it.