

BEFRIENDING MY BRAIN

A Psychosis Story

SAMPLE CHAPTER

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CHAPTER 3

MY WORLD BEGINS TO FALL APART

I had only been back living with my family for about a week when my health started to deteriorate. The amount of sleep I was getting every night fell dramatically. I would barely be getting an hour or two of sleep – some nights I would not sleep at all. I remember my mind was not able to switch off. Instead, it was in overdrive, filled with worries about what happened with Ellie and where it all went wrong. I also had many thoughts about the future, including finding a flat of my own and trying to embrace single life after two years without intimacy. The absence of sleep made me very alert and hyper – all I wanted to do was start this new chapter of my life and I couldn't relax. I took for granted back then how important sleep can be for mental health, and I think if I had known this, I might not have had such a setback.

Around this time, I ended up going to a barbecue in Basingstoke, hosted by Dan, one of my best friends from uni. He had a fantastic turnout, and pretty much the entire gang was there with their partners. Unfortunately, it was around the time that I was very sleep-deprived and starting to behave strangely. I remember getting the Tube to London to get the train from Waterloo to Basingstoke. I was meant to be meeting a friend in London somewhere, and we were going to get the train together. He ended up driving there, but before I knew this, I decided to buy him a panini from Costa, as I was getting my own lunch. When I found out he wouldn't need it, I made a couple of very weird and random attempts to get rid of it, which

make me cringe thinking back on them now. I got chatting to a girl opposite me on the Tube and, at one point, I ended up offering her the panini. I can't imagine what must have been going through her mind as this random bloke she didn't know offered her food – what was I thinking!?! She obviously said, “No thanks,” and was very polite about it. I decided after that, as I was walking to Waterloo, that I would give it to a homeless person on the street, but I never saw one. I ended up going into some pub and asking them to just offer it to one of their customers, and I still remember the look of utter disbelief on their faces as I walked away. I wish I could say the odd behaviour stopped there.

I accidentally got a slow train to Basingstoke, which stopped at every station along the way and made me late to the barbecue. When I got there, I think I was the last one to arrive by quite some time. Dan was chatting to me in the hallway, and I turned around to see all my friends in his living room. Normally, I would be delighted to see everyone, but I was so stressed and sleep-deprived that all I wanted to do was burst into tears. I held it together and went to the kitchen with a couple of friends, rather than going to the room full of people. The others slowly started to filter into the kitchen, and I had calmed down by this point. They all just really wanted to see me and check I was okay after the break-up. The rest of the barbecue was mostly fine, but many of my friends could tell there was something wrong with me. Most of them left after a few hours, and then the four of us that were remaining decided to go on a night out in Basingstoke. I'm extremely ashamed to admit this part, but all I wanted to do at the time was hit on girls, which was not nice of me and not fair to Ellie, as I wouldn't have liked the idea of her doing the same. The morning after, my hangover was joined by a strong feeling of guilt. I was a complete mess, and it wasn't about to get any better.

Back home, according to my mum, I was constantly talking, jumping from one subject to another without making much sense. She would often get out of bed in the middle of the night and come and find me, and we would have long talks. I also started to experience bizarre and unusual thoughts in my head. One of the

peculiar thoughts was that I was being headhunted by a company for a job, which definitely never happened – it was just an idea in my head that I had convinced myself was true. I remember a few months earlier, I had been for an interview for a job in programmatic advertising, which is where companies use the internet to track users' behaviour and then provide targeted adverts. Learning about this for the interview made me very aware that organisations could effectively follow me online, so I became a bit paranoid. I think that this knowledge, mixed with lack of sleep and the beginnings of psychosis, is why I believed that I was being headhunted.

Similarly, I also became convinced that my brother Mark was plotting against me (and reading this now seems so unbelievably ridiculous, as I know he would never do such a thing).

Since moving back home, I had decided that I was going to spend as much time as possible with him, which started off as a good thing, as we never used to hang out much. I took a greater interest in his life, including his plans to grow the YouTube channel he had started that was beginning to gain many subscribers. I genuinely wanted to help him out with this, as well as other big brother stuff, like helping him with his dating life. However, I took it too far and didn't give him space, and when he started to turn down my advice (which I don't blame him for, looking back), I didn't take this well. Somehow, I got it into my head that he had a motive against me, and it got so bad that I actually thought he was dangerous. I feel horrible thinking back about this because he is the loveliest and most caring guy you could ever meet. My parents even had to make him stay in his room in the lead-up to me being sectioned so that I couldn't see him.

The other strange behaviour of mine that I recall was writing on the furniture in my room. I think I thought I had to label everything that was mine for some reason. I also rearranged some of my bedroom, and this included some odd choices. I washed out an old plastic set of drawers from the garage, which is okay behaviour on its own. But then, during one of my sleepless nights, I decided to fill one of the drawers with spiders that I caught and put a label on the drawer that said, "Caution: Live Spiders". This is the last thing I

would normally do in the middle of the night – or at any time of the day, for that matter. I was so bored and fed up with not being able to sleep that my mind was coming up with all sorts of crazy ideas.

During the daytime, I was watching TV and listening to the radio. However, I became convinced that I was receiving messages through both of these channels, telling me to do things like go on the internet and send someone a message by email or over social media. The lack of sleep and psychosis were messing up my mind massively – I was all over the place. At one point, I even thought the weather was speaking to me. The sun kept going behind clouds and reappearing, and I thought the timing of this was connected to what I was doing at the time. So, say I would come up with a new idea as the sun came out. That would make me think the idea was incredible. And when the sun went behind clouds and the room became darker, I would suddenly get a sense of deep dread and start worrying.

It didn't take Mum long to suggest that I needed to urgently see the doctor, an idea that I immediately rejected, as I thought there was nothing wrong with me. She and Dad had to drive me back to the town where I lived with Ellie, as I was still registered with their doctor's surgery. The doctor who I saw said that the mental health team would start seeing me when we returned to our local surgery. This sent my alarm bells ringing, as I had a vision of being forcefully taken away to a "mad house" in a straitjacket against my will. My knowledge of mental illness was poor at this time, as I had only seen films like *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and formed a negative perception. I'm not proud of how I treated my family around this time. I even told Mum that she must have Alzheimer's and that she needed to be treated for mental illness, not me.

I should also mention that in July 2016, about a month before breaking up with Ellie, I had started taking medication for back pain that had been troubling me for several years. It was called amitriptyline, and it is also a drug used to treat depression. I started taking 10mg once per day for ten days, then increased to two per day. However, according to Ellie and my mum, I regularly didn't remember to take the tablets and apparently, I stopped taking them because I didn't like their side effects. The doctors we spoke to about

my psychotic episode did not think this was part of the reason it happened in the first place, but we are not convinced about this. At the very least, we believe that stopping the medication didn't help the situation overall.

There are so many weird things I did around this time that I can't actually remember them very well, and in some cases I don't remember them at all. So, I sat down with my mum to chat about them. She remembers them better than anyone, as she was the unlucky person who had to deal with me.

CONVERSATION WITH MUM

James: "So what are your main memories of this time, around August/September 2016?"

Mum: "Well, we obviously realised you were not well. It was the end of August, so it was quite nice weather. One morning you said to me that you wanted to go into London so that you could go into work and tell them you'd split up with your girlfriend. Then, you wanted to go for a walk, as it was a nice day, and find somewhere to help with your back problem."

James: "Was this after I had already been given the time off work?"

Mum: "No, it was before."

James: "So, it was a weekend?"

Mum: "No, it was a weekday, a day you should've been at work. I can remember standing by the front door and saying to you, 'Please James, please don't go, please don't do it.' You didn't go in the end, and I said that we needed to go to see the doctor, so we took you there."

James: "The one in Ware?"

Mum: "Yes. First, we went to Ware because that was where you were registered at the time. The doctor agreed that you obviously needed help, that you were delusional and said

you needed referring to the mental health team. However, he couldn't do it because you were no longer living in his area. So, we then had to take you to the GP in Abbots Langley, who referred you to the mental health team. There was a long wait for you to be seen, though – two weeks! I was really annoyed about that because I wanted you to be seen urgently. In the meantime, we just had to try and contain it at home."

Mum: "Then, there was the Sainsbury's incident where I had already taken Granny shopping in the morning before you, Dad and I went to a different supermarket to do our shopping. But you were convinced that I had already done our shopping when I went with Granny and that we were doing it all over again. You thought I had Alzheimer's at this point, and you told the Sainsbury's staff about this and that you were worried about me and Dad. This was embarrassing, as I had worked with one of them before when I was working at the Watford store!"

James: "Yeah, I remember that part and I still feel awful."

Mum: "It's okay, you were very ill. Anyway, that was that. There was also the train incident. You were on your way back from work. We used to pick you up from Watford Junction station. Dad was already on his way to Watford, but you phoned him and said you were getting off at Hemel Hempstead instead."

James: "I remember this incident as well, but I can't remember why I was going to Hemel. Maybe I missed the stop or something."

Mum: "Maybe. Dad then started driving to Hemel to meet you, but you contacted him again to say you had got off the train at Apsley, so he had to go to Apsley!"

James: "Poor Dad, I remember him shouting at me when I got in the car, and I had never seen him shout at me like that, especially since he had his stroke. I think I had made a mistake. I tried to see the funny side, but Dad just completely snapped at me, and I was genuinely quite scared. He had every right to react like this, of course."

Mum: "After this you got really fed up with us and said you were going out with your friend Chris and to meet a Tinder girl."

James: "Oh God, that's so cringe, on the same journey?"

Mum: "Haha, I'm not sure. But he said he was still at work when I phoned him. A few of your friends had got in touch with me and provided their phone numbers, as they had realised you were acting strangely and were concerned. So, when I phoned Chris, it became obvious you'd lied about going to see him. When you came back, you said you'd been trying to get a taxi and you couldn't get one. Rather than letting you go off with no specific place to go, I eventually agreed to your idea of spending a night at a hotel, as at least we would know where you were."

I remember the hotel incident. That night, I got so angry with my family that I decided I needed to spend a night away from them. I made poor Dad drive me to a local Premier Inn, where the lady at reception refused to give me a room, as she must have seen that there was something wrong with me. I went to the pub next door to the hotel and ordered a beer. Next thing I remember is two police officers asking me to come with them. They must have been informed that a man was behaving strangely and worrying staff and customers. I reluctantly got into their car, and they drove me back home and spoke to my parents. It wasn't long after this that another emergency service got involved – my family had to call me an ambulance when my behaviour became extremely concerning. Psychosis was in full force, and my world was about to completely fall apart.

PRAISE FOR *BEFRIENDING MY BRAIN*

Befriending My Brain is a brilliant must-read. I found it impossible to put down once I started it. James' journey with his mental health is extremely compelling, insightful, and, ultimately, **inspirational**.

This book offers a beacon of hope to anyone who may be struggling with mental illness, as well as their loved ones. James is the true personification of the concept that there is always “*light at the end of the tunnel*.”

– Jonny Benjamin MBE, mental health advocate and author of
The Stranger on the Bridge

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James is 32 and lives with his partner Holly in Watford, Hertfordshire. He currently enjoys working in marketing for Hertfordshire Mind Network, his local mental health charity. In his spare time, he likes to play football, go to the cinema, hang out with friends and family, and explore exciting new places with Holly.

James also likes to get involved with mental health causes in any way he can to help others, raise awareness and reduce stigma. So far, he has blogged online extensively, spoken on several podcasts, and appeared on TV and video for the Premier League in 2019, as well as for McLaren in 2022.

You can keep up with James on Twitter [@JamesLindsay23](https://twitter.com/JamesLindsay23).

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As a division of Trigger Publishing, the UK's leading independent mental health and well-being publisher, we are experienced in creating and selling positive, responsible, important and inspirational books, which work to de-stigmatize the issues around mental health and improve the mental health and well-being of those who read our titles.

Founded by Adam Shaw, a mental health advocate, author and philanthropist, and leading psychologist Lauren Callaghan, Cherish Editions aims to publish books that provide advice, support and inspiration. We nurture our authors so that their stories can unfurl on the page, helping them to share their uplifting and moving stories.

Cherish Editions is unique in that a percentage of the profits from the sale of our books goes directly to leading mental health charity Shawmind, to deliver its vision to provide support for those experiencing mental ill health.

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