

## Ten Years a Free Man

by

David Williams



A self help ebook

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**First Printing: 2016**

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**ISBN: 978-1-326-50848-7**

**Red Button Theatre Publishing**

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## Introduction

I am the author of a Mental Health Memoir titled 'Amsterdamned' published by Chipmunka. This book details my ascent/descent into Madness in 2005. In January 2006 I was diagnosed with Bipolar Affective Disorder or Manic Depression in old money.

January 2016 I will be celebrating 'Ten years as a Free Man'. Intrigued? Well, place your money in the slot to get my e-book which will provide you with 10 tips on how you can find your own place of freedom within the stressful confines of conditioned existence.



Thank you for your purchase . I have invested ten years of my life into this self help ebook. I can't really believe it myself but I have managed to avoid the traps of life that many fall into, wife, career, kids, mortgage. In other words, responsibilities. I don't take responsibility because I am essentially a carefree teenager at heart. It hasn't been easy but it has allowed me valuable insight into the way things work or rather don't work. I actually think that if you were able to take a decade out of your life, job, career, then you would make a far better job of it than I have for despite my claims to being a free man, I wonder if in fact I am. You will find some homespun Psychology and Philosophy in this self help ebook because I am a big fan of the Mind, Body, Spirit section in bookshops and libraries. I have read a good few of them.

In January 2006 I was 39 years of age. It was my fortieth year and it began with a diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder. I remember many, many years ago that somebody said to me "You might be a Manic Depressive". I can't remember what I had said or done to make this person suspect that I might be but I mentally noted the observation and carried on with my life which at the time was like swimming through treacle. A Mental Health Diagnosis can either make you or break you. I accepted the diagnosis and began on medication, an antipsychotic/mood stabiliser called Quetiapine. This was a helpful drug in the short term because it allowed me to rest and sleep. The side effects were

weight gain and lack of motivation to do anything. I gave up this drug on August 22<sup>nd</sup> 2008 and have been psychotropic drug free ever since. I no longer use substances. I gave up cigarettes on April 28<sup>th</sup> 2006 and I am roughly 5 years alcohol free. I gave up alcohol because I could not moderate its use and I found that my Bipolar symptoms would appear large after over consumption. I do however enjoy a good cup of coffee but don't we all.

So here I am on the eve of my 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday and I am pleased that I have managed to avoid the stresses of the modern world but am also concerned that I might slip back into old habits. Applying for a job, having to go for an interview, having to provide references. There are so many things about modern living that are not conducive to good mental health. Perhaps you cannot identify them, for perhaps you intuitively know that there is something fundamentally wrong with your life but you feel unable and unwilling to change. As humans we are very reluctant to change. We like our creature comforts, we like our routine. We like safety. If we live safely, then we live longer but at what cost. I have lived very carefully this past decade.

It is New Years Day 2016 as I write this. I began to see a Consultant Psychiatrist on the 18<sup>th</sup> January 2006 and I tried to sign on for Incapacity Benefit at Job centres in Aberystwyth and Cardiff at about the same time but it took until April and the intervention of would you believe it, a Conservative Welsh

Assembly Member for me to receive any wrongly named 'Benefit'. She wrote a letter to the Job Centre on my behalf and they weren't best pleased that she had. I had paid into the system for 18 years. Eighteen long years when unbeknownst to me I was Mentally Ill. So not only was I newly diagnosed a 'Loon' I had to wait four months for any 'fools gold'. That didn't do much for my Mental Health, I can tell you. If it wasn't for the love and support of my long suffering family, I don't know what I would have done. Once again I was coming up against the 'System' or as the Hippies would call it 'The Man'. I might as well admit it! I had been psychologically crushed by my experiences of Psychosis the previous year, and it has taken this long for me to observe it with the benefit of hindsight and a degree of objectivity. I am still low on confidence and it is as if I am pathologically allergic to competing. My intention is to continue as a writer, paid or unpaid. It is the only thing that sustains me and gives me satisfaction. Turning my words into creativity and hopefully advice that you might find useful. I can hazard a guess that you are dissatisfied to a greater or lesser extent at the moment. You might have made a list of New Year's Resolutions. Our minds are very reluctant to change but Buddha said 'there is nothing as constant as change' so change we must. The changes that happen are often not perceptible at least by ourselves but our friends tend to notice subtle changes. As organic beings we are constantly evolving and

changing strategies so even though you might feel you are stuck in a rut, be assured that your mind is working on answers. It might take years, it might take ten years as it has done with me! “I don’t have ten years”, you cry. “Well, how do you know, if you don’t try” is my reply. My situation was forced upon me, you hopefully will have choice and decision making on your side but perhaps this fills you with fear. Procrastinator? Yup, join the club! We all are.

My Ten Years of Freedom have allowed me much time to read, contemplate and use social media. As someone who used substances to alleviate a mood disorder I have an addictive, all or nothing personality. My Psychosis was all, the ten years since have been nothing. I have withdrawn into a hermit life. I cannot afford such trauma again. It will kill me next time. So in that respect, I forgive myself for spending so much time on Facebook and Twitter. I find the experience gentle and cathartic. I can control interactions whereas I often can’t in real life. I find dealing with real people very difficult! It is easy on Facebook.

For £1.99 you will receive 10 tips on how to regain some freedom into your life.

That’s 20pence a tip. Bargain?

We shall see.

## Chapter Tip 1

### Get rid of your TV

The first thing I did after diagnosis in 2006 was to get rid of the Box in the Corner. You might have a Flat Screen on a Wall but believe me if you wish to restore a degree of sanity and clear the fugue in your mind, please think very seriously about getting rid of your Television. How much is a licence now? I have been visited once by the TV Licensing people, perhaps because there is still an aerial on the roof. Two Goons from Bristol came in and the youngest of the two looked at my computer and asked "Is this a live feed?" so another example of the system believing that you are guilty. You have to fill out an online questionnaire every two years stating that you do not own a television or watch live programmes. There is talk of asking everybody to contribute a licence fee whether you watch television or not! This is the thin edge of the wedge for me. There is so much propaganda on the BBC, they even want the people who opt out to pay for it. I realised that all the news I had watched over the years had had a serious impact on my mental health. I believed that the world was as bad as it is portrayed on the news. If you want to become



paranoid and fearful, just watch 24 hour news. I was somebody who became very affected by Global tragedy. It was as if I personalised everything! An attack on others was an attack on myself. So this has to be my biggest tip. After ten years without television I cannot imagine that I will ever have one again. I am house sitting for a relative as I write this and she has Freeview with 186 channels or so! Utter tripe! I just do not have the patience to sit there any more. Not having a Television can potentially make you more active or like me it can turn you towards another addiction, the computer and social media. I do see this though as the lesser of two evils. Please consider it. You might rediscover reading library books or talking to your neighbour which are another two tips.

## Chapter Tip 2

### Get rid of Direct Debits and Standing Orders

Another Get Rid? This man wants me to suffer. You're suffering at the moment. If you are working, then you don't have time or patience to keep up with your finances. You pay your inconvenient bills with convenient direct debits and standing orders. The trouble with that is that they mount up and in the case of Standing Orders, the Utility Company or whoever is leeching off you has the right to vary the payments that come out of your account. I had this experience with South Wales Electricity. I phoned them up after finally sitting down and seeing how much I was actually paying. I asked them whether I was actually paying for the whole street and for a time I was paranoid that somebody had broken into the meter and was diverting it. I even went to an Ombudsman which is another word for chocolate teapot with my complaint. There was nothing for it but to change suppliers. I changed to Npower! Talk about from the frying pan to the fryer. They were a nightmare. Hassling letters and when I came back to Britain after my incarceration, they sent me so many threatening demands that I broke down in tears. They pushed me too far so I kicked them

into touch and moved to British Gas who I am with at the moment for my Gas and Electricity. Now instead of Direct Debits and Standing Orders I have a Key for the Electricity and a Card for the Gas. I have a Card to pay for my Water which is on a meter. I have made damn sure that it is I who is in control, not the bank or the utility company! You might be paying a smidgen more for your power this way but it is you who is in charge about how much you want to spend. When you are at work, these things are a nuisance and you file them away at the back of the mind but they will catch up with you. Don't end up in tears like me! Turn around and take back your power literally from the Utility Companies. May the Force be with you!

## Chapter Tip 3

### Get Rid of your Car

“What? My wheels, my motor? You’re off your head, you’re not touching that”.

How much are you paying for your Car Insurance? How much is your Car Tax?

Petrol? New Tyres? Servicing? Can you really afford it?

“It’s how I get to work”. Perhaps you should change your work or work from home. How much do you pay for parking? Along with the TV, the Car, the Voiture, The Automobile is the biggest divide and conquer mechanism on the planet. The car gives you the impression of freedom! That’s why so many 17 year olds are desperate to learn to drive. If you like Top Gear or are a Petrol Head, then you will find this tip especially difficult but I would ask you to consider the planet and the environment. One less car off the roads means less pollution. Kids can’t play football in the streets any more because there are so many cars breaking the speed limit. Cars like TVs and Direct Debits and Standing Orders are about convenience. Well let me ask you when was the last time that you did something that was inconvenient? I know I know, you go to work, that’s inconvenient enough. Have you thought about walking or cycling or even using Public Transport? These are all more healthy and sociable options than just sitting in your bubble, stuck in a traffic jam.

## Chapter Tip 4

### Think Simply, Live Simply

Do you have a garden? Do you have an allotment? One of the best decisions I made within my ten years of freedom was to volunteer on an allotment project. My title was Volunteer Buddy Befriender to those with a history of addiction and offending behaviour so ideal for me. In reality I was just out and about every Wednesday and Friday in the fresh air getting my hands dirty in the earth, helping to build things, working as part of a team, talking, eating biscuits and drinking tea. It really was a turning point for me. The nine months on this project from January to September 2013 gave me the confidence to push on and complete a further course of study. I met people who I am still in contact with on Social Media. Volunteering can be life changing! If you get the right opportunity you don't want to work for money again. "But how will I pay my Direct Debits and Standing Orders' '. Go Back to Tip 2, do not pass go, do not collect £200.00 pounds. I am not a specialist gardener but the older I get the more interested I have become in Gardening. Herbs in a small kitchen garden! Strawberries, Raspberries, Mint! I have a tiny garden but I grow things. Mostly plants and flowers but things you can eat. That saves you money and isn't that what this is all about really! Ways to save money by living simply!

## Chapter Tip 5

### Walking

In 2011 I walked 26 miles in one day from Stonehenge to Avebury. It was a fundraising walk for the Alzheimer's Society. To allow me to complete this without too much difficulty, I had to put some training in. I started walking the Taff trail. I walked to Pontypridd and caught the bus back! I caught the bus to Ponty and walked to Merthyr! Cardiff to Merthyr is 26 miles. I did not do the whole stretch completely but I had done enough prior to the day to raise my fitness and stamina level! I am not a runner but I love walking! Recently I walked from Aberaeron to Newquay and back again in one day along the Ceredigion Coastal Path. This was back in September! It was so refreshing and revitalising! It has got to the stage now where I actively look for opportunities to walk rather than drive anywhere. Walking is perhaps the one thing that is actually free to do apart from the cost of your footwear. Pick a good day! Pack a small backpack with bananas, nuts and a bit of chocolate! Bottle of water and away to go! Never have I felt as free in my ten years of freedom as when I am walking. The 'Flaneur' of legend can walk anywhere and take in their surroundings and then he can undertake Tip 6 when they get home.

## Chapter Tip 6

### Write

You are a writer in some shape or form. If you are a reader, you are a writer.

You had enough practice in school didn't you, maybe University, but there you had to write. You were forced by the system to write and it was hard work and when you left, you vowed never to do that again, **but** I bet you were good at it.

I'm sure you enjoyed it! Writing is cathartic! Writing gets those nuisance things out of your system 'feelings'. It might sound clichéd but I cannot remember when I didn't write. I don't write for others. I write for myself! I write to understand the world and my place within it. For me, writing is freedom.

Have I encouraged the creative juices yet? I have written short stories, poems, humorous verse and an autobiography. Personally I prefer non fiction but I know that many like fiction and particularly science fiction. Find what you like to read and then write it. It sounds simple and it can be! Don't be too ambitious to start off with. Write for yourself! Take a notebook with you to places. Have a notebook on your bedside table! Do you dream? Write down your dreams as soon as you wake before you've forgotten them. This can be extremely entertaining and revealing and set you off on all sorts of writing adventures because here you are working with the unconscious mind, the part that we like to keep hidden from the world, the part that we are encouraged to

keep hidden from the world. Free the Mind! Don't forget, you are over halfway there now to being more free. I am writing this because I have lived it.



## Chapter Tip 7

### Get to know a neighbour

We have been encouraged since the days of Thatcher to think about the individual at the expense of community and there is a desperate need to reconnect. We yearn for community but very often because of fear, distrust, paranoia, the urge for a quiet life and no interference, we opt for not getting involved with neighbours. They can be a nuisance but choose your neighbour wisely and by neighbour, I don't mean necessarily someone who lives in the same street. You are looking for a sage, a guru. A wise man or woman with whom you can share a cup of tea and put the world to rights and by that I don't mean gossip. I mean talking about the world and how the individual can make it a better place. How can we, as the little people, make an impact. By beginning that conversation it starts the ripple effect. Probably one of the best things in the last ten years to have happened to me is that I have got to know a neighbour. He is 78 years young to my 49 so he has 30 years extra wisdom packed into his little frame and he is happy to share it with me. Another Buddhist phrase is "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear". Over the past five years, over cups of tea, we have made time for each other. We have dropped our guards. We have trusted each other and I hope that we have helped each other. I now count him as a very dear friend. Before you go and

grab the first neighbour you can find, allow this process to happen organically. I had much resistance in my body, my weariness of others but I needed to connect and eventually that need to connect became stronger than the urge to distrust.

Don't force anything! I learnt to ask less questions. If you sense that this connection is not working don't waste time. Dis-engage and go and find another or let another find you. They will.

Since writing this we have fallen out. A teacher is not always for life.

## Chapter Tip 8

### Reacquaint yourself with your local library

When was the last time you went to the library? When? Do you have a library card? It's free, you know. I have always loved libraries. I remember going to the newly built Wrexham library as a child and reaching for the Tintin and Asterix books. I have been critical of the new Cardiff Central Library because of the amount of money spent on it but it is still a Golden Treasury and I am indebted to it. I have spent hours, days, weeks, months probably reaching into years now on a quest of self improvement through learning. Probably like yourself, school didn't do it for me because it was learning by coercion. It was competitive. You don't know what you are doing at that age and why you are doing it but you do now. You are older and wiser and your thirst for knowledge knows no bounds. My neighbour is self taught. Leaving school at 14 he has educated himself and I have more respect for him than a learned professor with bundles of letters after his name. I am indebted to the Psychology section of Cardiff Central Library because it was here that I set out on a quest to find out what was wrong with me, because long before diagnosis, I knew that there was something wrong with me, because I was suffering. I had a nervous breakdown at the age of 21 and was hospitalised for two weeks. All those teenage years of

not knowing what I was doing had taken their toll. The diagnosis back then was 'Highly Sensitive'. The Psychiatrist in North Wales probably didn't want to saddle me with the label of Manic Depressive as he knew that that would mean a lifetime of medication. I then went into denial and started abusing substances for 18 years. Not continuously because I had to earn the money required to abuse substances. Why did I abuse substances? To escape my emotions and my feelings. You can't escape them. You have to confront them. In libraries, computer use is free. In the bright, shiny new Aberystwyth library you don't even have to be a member and fill out your details. You just click the mouse and you are away. Surfing on the world wide web. Don't delay, go and sign up today. Use it or lose it because they are closing them down.

## Chapter Tip 9

### Find and cultivate interests and hobbies

This is a tip from my neighbour, because I am not very good at it but he swears that this is what will sustain you. He cooks, he paints, he plays petanque. He attends lectures, he devours history. He loves languages. You will have your own suggestions to add to this list. The old adage 'Find your Passion' but we tend to leave that until we have retired but by then we might have lost or compromised our health in search of financial security to allow us to pursue our passion so do what I did and retire at 39. Don't wait until you are 65. I am not actually dreading my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday as much as I thought I would. I see it as an opportunity to use and distil these ten years of freedom. I know that I need to cultivate more hobbies and interests because apart from my neighbour and the library I am rather limited in my horizons. This can be another danger, that we rely too much on one source of stimulation. So, what new hobbies and interests will you cultivate?

## Chapter Tip 10

### Meditate

I know that you have been dreading this one but you, like me, need to find a way to control those intrusive, self destructive thoughts and don't tell me you don't have them because we all do. People give meditation a try and then give up citing the fact that they still have too much churning inside the mind to concentrate fully but this is a process of de-junking and it does get easier. I do not have a regular meditation practice but I do recognise the value of the practice. Although I haven't tried it, apart from a taster session, I am told that Yoga is also very good and is linked to meditative practice. I have been to drop-in sessions and on a weekend of meditation. I have CDs and books! Don't we all! When I have slipped back into old and destructive thought patterns I have returned to meditation to calm me down, to the art of loving kindness. The simple idea of sitting with closed eyes and listening to your breathing is revolutionary. It brings us closer to death and the idea of it, because I am convinced that much of our problems as humans stem from the fact that we are constantly running from the idea of death. We keep busy because we don't want to think about our own mortality! We can begin to do that by meditation.

## Epilogue

During my ten years of freedom, I was summoned to appear before ATOS, the Government body that decides whether you are fit for work. I attended four times and on the fourth occasion they decided that I was no longer eligible for the enormous Incapacity Benefit of £92.00 a week. I dropped to £72.00 a week and signed on for Job Seekers Allowance but being sent on courses and forced to apply for unsuitable jobs started triggering the mental health condition so I decided to voluntarily withdraw from that and save the Government and the Tax Payer £20.00 a week so since July 2014 I have been surviving on £50.40 a week, Working Tax Credit. It is more than enough for somebody who has learnt to downshift in those ten years. I am not interested in money. I am interested in Spiritual Wealth. Yours and Mine! That's why this little Gold Mine is only £1.99. I have to charge something. My Publishers have told me that I have to. Despite my moaning and rants on Social Media, I am a happy man because I have found a place of sanctuary and solitude amidst the insanity of modern living. This kind of life made me mad because I couldn't find a cheap, helpful guide on how to make life easier. Thank you to my guides and teachers of recent years! I hope that you will find a way of implementing my Top Ten Tips into your own life in some way. Start small! One tip at a time!

## **Update**

It is now 16 years that I have been a free man and I read back over my homespun tips with a little embarrassment. I have recently fallen out with the neighbour who had offered such wisdom and good advice.

Nothing is permanent. Nothing lasts forever. By and large I have stuck to the 10 tips outlined here although I have had use of a vehicle for some of the six years that has ensued since I wrote this. I still don't have a television, I still walk as much as I can, I still do some gardening but I still don't have any hobbies.

I am still out of 'work' although I continue to write. The job application, CV, interviews and references still prove to be obstacles that I am unable to surmount and at 56 who is going to employ a man who is addicted to freedom and to speaking his mind?

Good Luck and if you believe in a Deity, God Bless.