

Book Reviews

A Fight to Be: A psychologist's experience from both sides of the locked door

Ronald Bassman

(Tantamount Press; 2007; US \$25; ISBN: 978-0-9796266-0-9)

Ronald Bassman is a unique survivor of psychiatry who later earned his PhD in psychology. This is the author's journey from a diagnosis of so-called schizophrenia at age twenty-two to being a chronically 'normal' community member free of psychiatric drugs for more than three decades. In this beautifully written and inspiring personal narrative he takes us through his two psychiatrisations, his horrific psychiatric treatment – combined insulin comas and electroshock – to his current work as a psychologist and activist.

The reader is first drawn into Bassman's encounter with madness, then engaged in a thoughtful and intellectually credible examination of what we know and do not know about the mind, consciousness and spirituality. Bassman writes: 'My ascent from madness to my present state of clarity and self-acceptance was and is a journey whose responsibility always resided within me. However, as I try to describe and share with others what wisdom I acquired to aid them in their own work, I acknowledge one element that I do not understand or take credit for, something that is named or interpreted according to one's unique beliefs and values as luck, fate, karma or God's blessing. I believe that as long as a person is alive, some seed of hope, some

possibility is there waiting to be fertilized. Hope fights the fear, nurtures the courage and inspires the vision and the work required to resist giving up and accepting that your goals are unattainable. Deep in the recesses of our being there are safe sanctuaries, secure hiding places for never fully lost dreams. But sometimes they are hidden so well that we can no longer reach those parts of ourselves. The help we need may come from expected or unexpected sources.'

A Fight to Be is a remarkable interweaving of the professional and the psychiatric patient identity. Such dual insider perspective lends credibility to the author's observations about current attitudes and practices. De-constructing formulaic biological models Bassman encourages readers to think critically about diagnoses, psychiatric drugs, psycho-therapy and the limited research and credibility assigned to alternatives. Instead of pursuing simple explanations of madness, the author re-inserts mystery and complexity into this distressing, often tragic, yet at times marvellously creative human dynamic.

Find more information on
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