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From losing everything to finding happiness

23 May 2014 | Sharon Bull

After years suffering from depression and a shopping addiction which led her to losing everything, Sharon Bull is now helping others to transform their lives.



The sound of applause filled my ears as my talk came to a close. I looked around at all the warm faces smiling back at me and knew I had finally found my purpose in life.

As I shared my story I had been encouraged by nods and sighs of acknowledgement as people saw how it connected with their own lives. All the difficult experiences I'd been through had led me to this moment - and it would never have been possible if it hadn't been for those experiences.

The turning point in my life came in 2011 when I had lost almost everything and knew I needed to make big changes. The only thing I couldn't see was how.

In 1997 I bought my first house after starting the sales career I had always dreamed of. Playing the role of independent female executive seemed to suit me and it seemed fitting that I should buy a property appropriate to my new-found status. It was mainly borrowed money, but that wasn't such a big deal then. Banks were crying out for buyers and only a small deposit was needed.

For years I allowed myself to believe material things were the key to happiness, love, admiration and friendships. I wanted people to respect me, believe in me and see me as the confident and vivacious woman that I truly didn't believe I was. Credit cards were like gifts from heaven as they hit the floor by the letterbox and the more I had in my purse, the better I would feel.

In 2008, when I had to sell up and move into rented accommodation, I had the first major warning sign that the financial rug was being pulled from under my feet. I could no longer afford the mortgage payments, alongside my loans, bills and credit card payments.

It was the continual threatening phone calls from my creditors and months of sleepless nights which gave me no other option but to throw away the cards and consolidate my £50,000 debt. The spending party was well and truly over.





But the nightmare had only just begun. 'UK in recession as economy slides,' was the headline news in January 2009 and with unemployment rising at an alarming rate, business wasn't great. The stress at work started to become unbearable and the sales team I had worked with for thirteen years started to lose its spirit. After a gruelling last quarter fighting off depression and anxiety brought on by the overwhelming pressures, I made the decision to take a redundancy package.

Over the next couple of years I tried to make ends meet by testing out new waters and between these failures, I signed on at the job centre with many thousands of others. Nothing seemed to work and it wasn't paying the bills. Behind closed doors I was becoming extremely depressed.

Depression has played an annoying game with me since the age of twenty and I had never fully understood the reasons behind it. For a while I managed to hide the severity of the situation from family, close friends and my creditors. I was both ashamed and too proud to admit defeat. But eventually my drinking, lack of sleep and continual food binging began to show.

Towards the end of 2011 I packed my bags and reluctantly waved goodbye to my independence. I had no choice, it was the only thing I could do. With a doting Mother to take me under her wing, I considered myself very lucky and realised without her help I could have been dead or at least homeless and on the streets.

It was the following two years that miraculously transformed my thinking and ultimately turned my life around. I grasped what is really important to me and reignited some of my childhood passions.

As a teenager I loved to walk and most weekends I would head off to the Derbyshire woods with my younger brother and a picnic basket - but these sorts of simple pleasures had disappeared as I grew older. Walking, exercise, mindfulness and meditation have each played their part in my recovery and are now all rooted firmly into my daily lifestyle.

But above all, I realised that I had a gift and could help others - especially by sharing my story, which I discovered that people seem to find inspirational. Perhaps this is because it lifts the lid on the toxic effects our society can have on people's lives - and the huge pressure we put on ourselves as we tirelessly strive to live out the perfect lifestyles seen in magazines, adverts and media. It also helps to break down the stigma attached to mental illness and how our perceptions of others can be far from their reality.

My [work to help others](#) has now been three years in the making and I can honestly say I have never felt better about myself, because now I am simply being me. Helping others has always been important to me and the heartfelt comments, feedback and response I have already received is the clearest signal that I am finally on the right path.

I have always taken full responsibility for my debt and whilst I could have taken the bankruptcy option in 2008 I chose not to. I am still paying my creditors but I vow and declare one day it will be paid and with the full understanding that self esteem, happiness and love cannot be found with the swipe of a credit card.

Sharon Bull - Chesterfield, Derbyshire, UK
www.smtoni.co.uk

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