

# Chapter 19

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Break-up of my relationship with Richard – Therapeutic relationship with Nick Rose – Move to flat in Littleworth – CPN from Thame – Solicitor's opinion

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One thing that was finally settled was my relationship with Richard. I eventually decided to move my property from the house, as there seemed no point in leaving it there when I was not living there. My brother-in-law Keith hired a van and helped me to get my belongings.

Sometime after, I went to the house. Out of courtesy, since I was not living there, I did not use my key but rang the bell. The door was opened – by a young woman. She and I looked at each other, then I turned and walked rapidly away. I could hardly believe it.

So this was the explanation for his frequent absences while I was not only caring for his mother, but being heavily criticised by him for my lack of concern for her. What would his mother think of her dear son? She would no doubt have some excuse. It was, of course, the explanation for his infrequent visits while I was in hospital and his absence on the second night that I was home after my first admission. I remember Steve Johnson saying, ‘This is indicative

of something, Veronica' – indeed it was.

I was extremely distressed by this discovery. It made me feel so completely betrayed. How could he do this to me? – and as for that woman, I am afraid that my feelings about her were less than Christian. She was, I was sure, someone who worked with him and she would therefore have known that Richard had a partner. She must have seen me at his work social events. She knew full well about me. I really think that starting to go out with someone you know to be in a relationship is thoroughly despicable. Of course, it may be that Richard told her that our relationship was breaking up, but until she saw evidence of it she had no right to interfere.

I continued to meet Richard, but he did not break up the other relationship. I therefore told him that he would have to decide between us. When I first met him to find out what his decision was, he simply prevaricated. The second time, I told him clearly that I would make a decision if he did not.

'If you said you thought we could make it, I'd stay with you,' he said. What was that? A threat? A promise? As far as I was concerned, he was trying to make me take full responsibility for the relationship and that was something I was not prepared to do. I told him I took it as a no. It was the last time that I saw Richard, but I did get a letter from him in which he told me that he was 'settling down' – he could not even bring himself to tell me that he was getting married. I was devastated. For years I had felt humiliated by his evident view that I was not fit to marry – then he walked away with that woman and married her. I was very deeply hurt, in a way I could hardly express. I felt so deceived and distressed. It made me feel utterly worthless – Richard had betrayed me, showing little concern about it.

He did send me a substantial cheque, with no argument. The last few years had certainly brought out the worst in him but I had not stayed with him for ten years for nothing.

Following my withdrawal from our house, I lived in a series of different bed-sits, none of which worked out, until my cousin Jenny, as ever, came to my rescue and had me live with her. A little while later, Nick involved a social worker. I was not sure about this development. I had quite enough people involved in my care as it was. However, the social worker proved to be very helpful in getting me somewhere to live. Nick was prepared to write a letter to the effect that I needed my own accommodation for the good of my health. This was certainly true, as I discovered when I moved into the flat. Having somewhere to live of my own, even though rented, did wonders for my morale. Heather, the social worker, helped me to fill in forms and established that South Oxfordshire was obliged

to accommodate me rather than Oxford city. I was therefore given a large one-bedroom flat in Littleworth, just next to the village of Wheatley. There were only six flats in the block and they were on a country road between two villages, Wheatley and Horspath.

Prior to finding this flat in Littleworth, I was offered a flat in Abingdon. Tim Woodward came to talk to me about it, as it was his community area and it was possible that I may be offered him as my CPN. Having discussed this, however, we decided that it would not be appropriate as it would interfere with our friendship, replacing it with a professional relationship that would not allow anything personal.

I moved into the Littleworth flat with nothing but a futon, a bedside lamp and a coffee table. There were no carpets on the floor or curtains at the windows. The church I went to in Thame came to my rescue when a friend put a notice up explaining the circumstances and asking for any unwanted furniture. Because I was not so well at the time, she gave her own telephone number so that she could sift out inappropriate offerings. As a result I received two single beds, a table that was just the right size for my sitting room, crockery and some table linen, all of which were really useful. Not a single person asked for any payment, but I wrote to each thanking them.

It caused some confusion, my living in Wheatley in the South Oxfordshire district. My CPN came from Thame in South Oxfordshire, but Nick Rose covered the Vale of the White Horse. In addition, Nick was my key worker at that time, a responsibility that usually devolved onto the CPN. Of course, I had been out of Nick's area from the beginning, having been admitted to Phoenix because there was no room in Wintle at the Warneford, the ward I should have been on. Nick simply kept me under his care, which was fine by me. Anyway, it sometimes took some explaining once a CPN from Thame was allocated to me.

I particularly trusted Nick because he always made every effort to ensure that I was properly informed about what was happening, either through telling me himself or copying letters to me. He always encouraged me to make my own decisions if at all possible, and to express how I felt. He was also very good at telling me if he thought that I had made a particular effort. I was used to people assuming that an admission to hospital showed weakness and lack of effort. On one occasion I was in hospital when Nick had a talk with me about how things were going. I felt that things had improved, to which he replied that he was sure that I had turned things around, adding 'you have – not me, not the team – it's you who have done it'.

Whenever I was discharged from the ward, I would leave a card

for the nurses saying how much I appreciated their help. It did occur to me that I never actually told Nick how much I appreciated him. Doctors tended to be left out of such things. The doctor who had admitted me in Nick Rose's absence, when I was at GOS, had dealt with the situation very sensitively. I last spoke to him on the telephone when I asked him if I would see him again. He said that I would not. I therefore told him how helpful he had been and how much I appreciated his understanding. In return he thanked me, sounding very pleased and really quite surprised.

I wrote Nick a letter expressing my appreciation of what he did for me. At the end I wrote a paragraph saying how good his secretary, Joy, always was. She was not one of those secretaries who considered their chief role to be to stand between their boss and anyone who wanted them. Joy would always get Nick for me if convenient, or tell me when best to telephone back. If I was distressed, she would recognise it in my voice and make sure that she got Nick for me straight away. In the event I was glad that I had written in praise of her, as soon after he told me that Joy was retiring. I was glad that I had spontaneously written what I had felt when she knew that I was not writing simply because she was leaving.

Nick Rose was my consultant for a long time, during which he came to know me increasingly well. In a letter to my CPN he once said, 'although I felt she was fairly well, I thought I could pick up the early signs of strain' and in another letter, 'I have seen Veronica on a number of occasions in a rather similar state of mind, and at present feel it is most appropriate if she continue to try and work . . .' He knew me sufficiently well to be able to interpret any signs of problems.

In April 2007 I had a meeting with Nick and my CPN, Tim, in which Nick told me that he was leaving the NHS at the end of the summer. I had opened the meeting by telling him that my father had died a matter of days before. Nick therefore acknowledged that it was not the best time to tell me, but the news of his leaving was already getting around the hospital and he was concerned that I should not hear the news from anyone else.

Before he left, I asked Nick if I could see him on his own. The first thing he said to me when we were alone was, 'The depression is *not your fault*. It is *not your fault*.' He knew how plagued I was with guilt about my illness.

In 1995 I went to a solicitor for advice on a matter independent of SCBU, or so I thought. In explaining my position, and what had happened, I said something about the situation on SCBU and my reasons for leaving. The solicitor actually said that he was more

interested in that, so I went into greater detail. He subsequently researched the events surrounding my leaving.

One of the aspects he looked into was the medical opinion of how far the work situation was to blame for my illness. He requested a report from Nick Rose, a copy of which was sent to me. Nick wrote of me:

it also became clear that Miss Burton had a rather fragile self-confidence even when well; and a temperament characterised by worry-proneness, a tendency to be over-meticulous and a tendency to have fixed and fairly high expectations of herself and others . . . I would judge that disappointment at the re-grading significantly undermined Miss Burton's confidence at the time.

This was particularly damaging in Miss Burton's case because of her double vulnerability of having low self-confidence lifelong, and having previously had a depression at the age of sixteen.

In conclusion, he stated:

All I can say with certainty is that the re-grading profoundly undermined Miss Burton's sense of self-esteem, and this was an important contributing factor which predisposed her to the very severe depression she had developed by July 1989.

The solicitor continued his research and at the end came to the conclusion that I had good grounds for suing High Wycombe Hospital regarding my illness. One problem, however, was that we were well out of the three-year period inside which the case should have been pursued. However, it seemed that we could get around that by establishing that illness had prevented my pursuing the case any earlier. In the end, though, I decided against prosecution, as the solicitor advised me it would be a highly stressful business. I had no wish to make myself ill again over it. It did help me, however, to know that the case was worth pursuing – I had always agonised over whether it was all my fault, especially at those times when I was seriously willing to blame world disasters and the like on myself.