

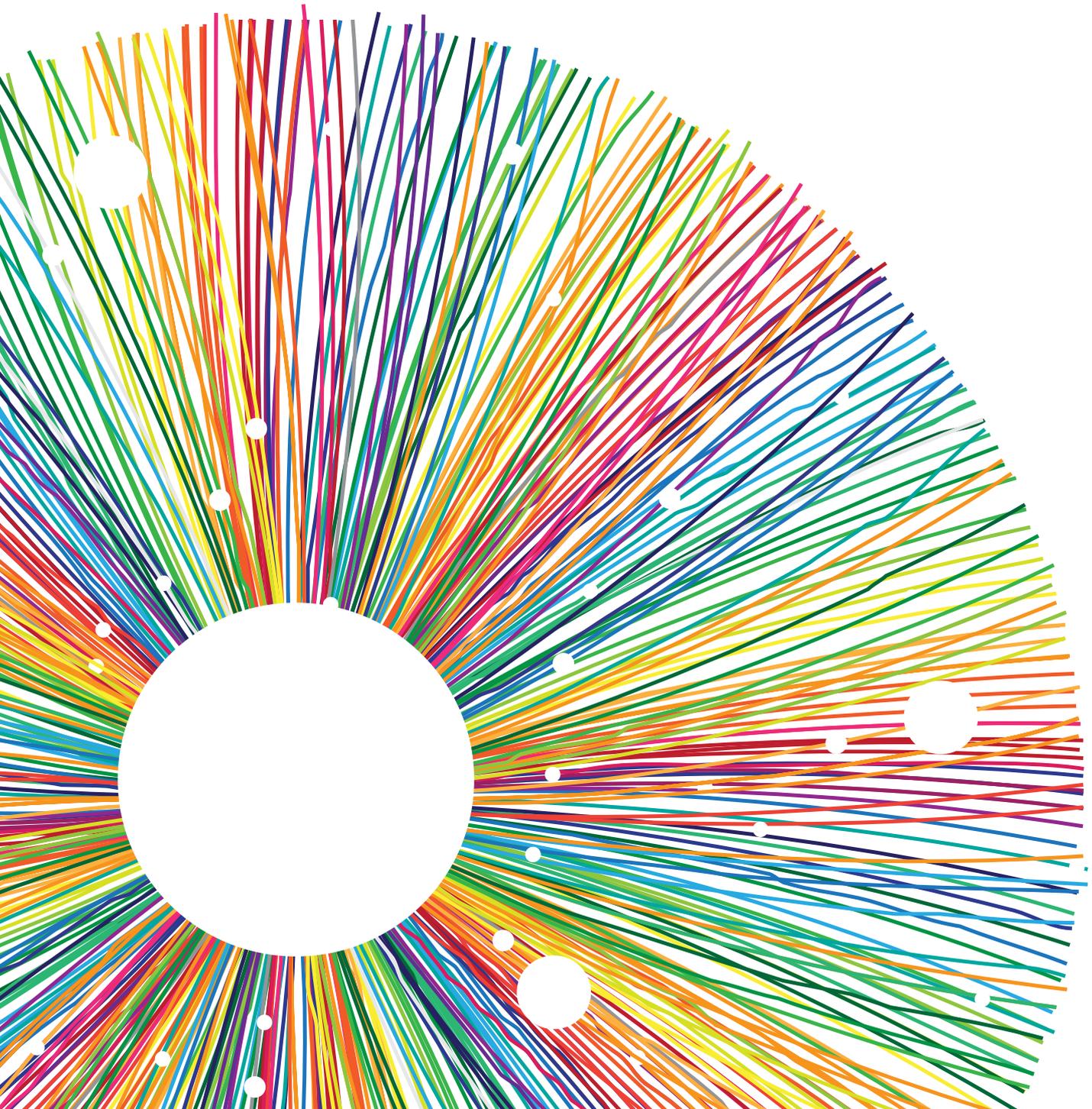
**NEURO KEY**

An Alliance supporting people  
with neurological conditions

# PRESENTATIONS OF NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY DISORDER

‘Unlocking minds and opening doors’

Open Door series by Neuro Key



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# Foreword

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Since inception Neuro Key, the working name of the Charity, Tees Valley, Durham and North Yorkshire Neurological Alliance, has harnessed lived experience as an educational tool to improve service delivery and professional understanding of not only the common threads between neurological disorders but also the complexities of the caregiving role. From enabling patients and caregivers to take part in research, deliver lived experience seminars, ensuring people who live with neurological disorders have a voice and can respond to consultations or supporting people to lead the operational direction of the Charity, we are passionate about our social purpose.

We concentrate on the value of lived experience to professional knowledge and the contribution to the evidence base to improve understanding and care in the future. By supporting people to be more confident in knowledge sharing and cooperation across social divides, we sustain a neuro-informed community to improve self-management, neuro-literacy and social capital.

Our **Open Door** series of booklets has been developed to acknowledge the challenges of living with a neurological disorder that is misunderstood, subject to media-driven or political myths and is neither prevalent nor the focus of publicity campaigns. At a time of 24-hour access to news bulletins, public figures with distinct personality traits become figures of fun and derision through social media posts. There is a bleaker side for the family members of people who seem to only be able to interact through vindictive, coercive control. Often hidden in plain sight, someone with narcissistic personality traits can cause a lifetime of psychological damage to family members or partners.

For our contribution to the Every Mind Matters campaign, the following stories are real life narratives of experiences of people who have struggled to put their lives together whilst managing the impact of a person who presents the traits of a narcissist but remains undiagnosed.

We have adopted fictional names to protect their identities.

## NEURO KEY

October 2019

## Sara's story

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From the early days of our socialisation, parental programming teaches us to believe everything our parents do is OK, normal, believable. We are taught to obey and emulate, adhere to discipline procedures so we do not incur parental disapproval and maternal instincts are the core of any family. As we grow up, we may challenge and disagree but we learn to accept that we cannot transplant our version of 'right' across generations. Everyone has a 'here and now' context that differs from generation to generation. This story is the culmination of 50 years of experience managing a parent who gave all the outward appearance of being charming and reasonable but when a child developed skills to unmask a different story from the one the parent was telling, the child became an enemy.

My father was a serving officer with the RAF for my childhood, usually postings around England every three years. However, we returned to England in 1968 after living overseas for almost 3 years. I was nearly thirteen years old.

I drifted for a year at a High School for girls, but having been part of a swimming club in the tropics, swimming was important to me. I was offered a county trial but my mother persuaded my father not to take me, that it was just a fantasy and I was not any good. I asked to go to Boarding school soon after but did swim competitively for my school. Thus, my sharp awareness of an unsupportive parent began.

My father was sometimes away for postings overseas. When he returned, even though my mother had nothing to do with me in the interim, I was used as a cover for her laziness. She claimed credit for all my endeavours such as walking the dog or digging the garden which I only did to stay out of her way. She seemed to dare me to challenge her. I remained at boarding school when the family moved north in 1972. My brother left his boarding school and he and my sister went to local schools. During school holidays, I found jobs in hospitality or market garden farms, developing a reputation for being hard working and trustworthy. I even worked at an A1 service station, left on my own to get the cash bagged ready to bank. At 16, I more-or-less left home, securing in-

house work at a local hotel and bounced between boarding school and the hotel during the school holidays, rarely being at home for more than a couple of days. I have only spent one Christmas day at my family home since then.

From the age of 15, I was not allowed to use any resources at home. I had to provide all my own toiletries and items to return to school. From meagre earnings from hotel or farm work, my mother demanded money with menaces. Comply and she was quiet for a while, object and she would be nasty about me behind my back and then come after me with a verbal pickaxe. It was a relief to catch a train and get lost in some peace and quiet with no pressure.

Once when at boarding school, having drained another bank account, my mother sold my bike to cover her tracks and I complained. She told my family I was aggressive to her. She 'borrowed' anything I left behind then claimed I had given her the items when I asked for them back. She had always opened any mail addressed to me but when bank statements started arriving she would open them and find out how much money I had and then start demanding money. Many a bank statement went 'missing' for which she denied all knowledge.

I went to college, developed my interest in sociology and psychology, graduated as a Nursery Infant teacher, met and married my first husband. Throughout my college life, mum told me I would never amount to much. At the wedding reception, she told me I would never have much. After 12

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years of marriage and a lot of hard work, I did not teach but joined my husband's family retail and catering business, became a part-qualified accountant to set up the administrative processes to run cafés, retail outlets, a fleet of delivery vans and a gaming machine business. I had two

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children and pursued a dream of setting up a restaurant. Just as the restaurant opened before Christmas 1990, I literally caught my husband in bed with a member of our staff. My mother could not contain her glee, taking every opportunity to tell people how useless I was and how I deserved it.

By this time, my brother had been headhunted to a prestigious job in the USA and my sister was working in the financial square mile of London on a huge salary. I was penniless, jobless and my marriage a train wreck. I had a never-ending barrage of malice culminating in, 'you have been spitting at me since you were 12'. I never understood this phrase properly until ten years later.

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I was penniless, jobless and my marriage a train wreck.

I needed a medical procedure during the time the marriage ended. I was out of hospital two days when I drove to my parents 100 miles away on Christmas day, thoroughly exhausted and frayed.

Following the procedure, I was told it was highly unlikely I could have any more children. I took bedding, games and food for the children because mum would not provide anything for them. At 6.50am on the day after Boxing day, my mother barged into my room and told me she wasn't going to mind my brats (aged 8 and 6) whilst I lazed around in bed.

For 24hrs, I had listened to never ending verbal abuse about what a rotten mother I was, how unruly my kids were, how lazy I was and how I sponged off everyone.... Whilst my mother went to the hairdresser, I packed the car to return home two days early. Dad stood and watched, continuing a conversation about how awful I was with money. To this day I do not know how the conversation even started but the subject of my bike cropped up. I told him they had no right to sell my bike. He told me he had supported me through college and yet, I never once said thank you. I asked how he thought that as I had not received a penny, 'may have been my name on the chequebook but I sure as hell did not get any money' I said. His face drained of colour and I did not speak

to my parents for several months. My mum's lies had been at work and in fact, I had 3 simultaneous jobs as a student to pay the bills.

Throughout my whole life, mum only worked for 6 weeks and was sacked. But, of course it was someone else's fault. Having lost my self-employment, business colleagues and some friends alongside my marriage, I secured a post heading a Business studies training unit at a local tertiary college. The divorce was nearly final when I had a car accident. My legs were badly injured but my mother refused to help, it was my stupid fault. I secured some compensation and again at Christmas, I took the kids on holiday with a friend in the hope my life could change lanes. My mother harangued me for weeks to tell me she needed a holiday and I did not deserve one.

I always had a good relationship with my aunt, she sheltered me from the worst of the divorce and together, we tried to understand my mother. I was signed off work and felt very guilty but my aunt encouraged me to live a little. When I met someone else, my aunt was the first person to know. I told the kids about a new man and having known him several months, felt they could meet him. With the divorce settlement finalised, my mother used to call me nearly every day and tell me how much she deserved a holiday. I ignored her, but unbeknown to me at the time, she used to phone my siblings and claimed an entire scenario of what I said to her, exactly what she had actually said to me. My divorce, employment and subsequent holidays were all sources of coercion for money and verbal abuse when I did not comply.

I returned from holiday, the kids met my new man and life had a new energy.

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My mother harangued me for weeks to tell me she needed a holiday and I did not deserve one.

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The chap hailed from the wilds of Yorkshire and spoke with a Yorkshire accent. He made me laugh for the first time in many years. My mother hated him on sight. A Christmas (!) visit to meet his parents and my children wanted to know when we

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My divorce, employment and subsequent holidays were all sources of coercion for money and verbal abuse when I did not comply.

were moving. We bought a house in his home area and relocated 200 miles. When my parents visited, my mother told my fiancé he was bought and paid for.

We married during Christmas 1994, an entirely subconscious decision on the date that has become more prophetic as the years have passed. My aunt sent a wedding gift via my mother which my mother

failed to acknowledge. My aunt asked me 6 months after the wedding about the present and she had to order my mother several times to give it to me. It was wrapped in wedding paper with a gift tag and my mother knew exactly what she was doing.

Having been told I was unlikely to have any more children, I was in a state of shock at becoming pregnant just as we relocated. The baby was born the following summer. I was very ill with pre-eclampsia and ended up in hospital prior to the birth. My older children begged me not to send them to grandmas. My pregnancy fuelled a daily spate of verbal abuse from my mother, telling me what a rotten parent I was, what was I was playing at and even ordered me to 'get rid of it', she was 'not going to pay for yet another grandchild'. The much-wanted baby arrived, my aunt and parents visited and as I fed the baby, my aunt cleared the residue of lunch away that I had prepared. My mum told her to put the crockery down, I had a dishwasher and she did not visit just to do my chores. She has never babysat because she did not want a grandchild talking with a 'Geordie' accent. Every chance

my mum had to nullify my life, my happiness, my successes, she grabbed with poisonous intent.

My mother celebrated her 60th Birthday just before my child's christening. My sister had also just had her first child. My mother would not acknowledge my new baby but she

touted my sister's child around the guests for the christening lunch. My husband's aunt very loudly told my mother I was very precious and the baby, a much-loved new addition to their family. In a fury, my mother collected her birthday present and left without telling anyone. My father rang me to say how nasty my husband's family were. When I challenged mum's version of events, he put the phone down on me.

I began to predict patterns of behaviour from my mum and in 1997 my daughter had an epileptic seizure the day before her GCSE's were due to start. A blur of tests and medical appointments was met by my mother with 'she's just attention-seeking'. My mother told her neighbours I must have hit my daughter over the head and it was my fault. No empathy, no help, no messages of kindness, just vitriol.

We were just getting used to the epilepsy diagnosis when my father was killed in a car crash. At 9pm, my aunt telephoned to tell me because my mother would not. My aunt was furious at her callousness. Mum had organised the police to tell me but within minutes of the accident, she managed to call my brother in the USA. At 11.30pm, the Police knocked on our door, nearly 8 hours after my dad had died. Dad was killed fetching fuel for my mother's car. She did not believe she had to pay for petrol from the housekeeping money. He left the house in a temper because mum had pestered him all day, was determined he was paying for the fuel to free up her money. He died at the exact same age I am now, believing things about me that just were not true.

My husband and I spent 2 days with my mother fielding

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Every chance my mum had to nullify my life, my happiness, my successes, she grabbed with poisonous intent.

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phone calls. For 24 hours, my mother told 3 different versions of the time leading up to and the accident itself. She never shed a tear. This was my wake up call to her absolution of responsibility.

My sister arrived to tell me I had no place there and repeated that at the funeral. She felt I was the root cause of the family misery because my siblings had been subject to a life of mum's propaganda. The funeral was a numbing experience, mum would only associate with people she knew felt sorry for her but she did not cry. I secured an RAF ensign from his last posting to place on his coffin. My mum took the credit when people complimented how nice it was. Like all these things, life was surreal in the aftermath. A month later, we packed tools and provisions in our car to spend the following day helping at my mother's so she did not spend what would have been their wedding anniversary alone. That night our car was stolen. We could not go, but my mother did not relay this to my siblings.

An inquest took place 9 months later but my mother would not tell me when it was. However, I had several phone calls from her frantic about the other driver suing her and taking all her money. She had my father's ashes interred and I found out from my aunt that I was not invited. I was offered some of my father's tools from his workshop but I had to pay for them. Just 4 months after our vehicle was stolen someone broke into our garage and stole all the tools. My mother's only comment was 'you can't have your money back'. She spent 6 months arguing with HM Inland Revenue as dad's pensions and insurances were put into a fund to pay her a pension. She felt she should be exempt from paying tax and sent me to argue her case. I spoke to the Inland Revenue and told him my mother was the most spiteful, manipulative liar on the planet. This was the first time I had uttered such words.

Summer 1998, we headed for a holiday in Canada to see

friends. On return, I visited mum by arrangement to lay flowers at my father's grave for his birthday and deliver a present. She went out for the day, knowing I was coming. I left the present at the rear of the house and put a note through the door, complementing the new furniture. Just a week before we left, mum had sent a cheque from an insurance policy from my dad. Years later, my aunt told me that mum had said I did not deserve to have her money. She gave more money to each of my siblings and bought new furniture with my share. What my mother did not know, was that my father had already told me about an insurance policy where he had named the 3 of us as sole beneficiaries for the residue once the mortgage was paid. The policy was worth far more than mum had given us. I did not speak to her for 6 years.

In that time, I gained a counselling qualification, set up a childcare business, set up an epilepsy support group, won two national awards for services to the community and graduated with a BSc in Critical Practice in Health and Social Care. One of the modules for my degree was 'Family and Social policy' and I began researching the influences on family dynamics and in particular, personality disorders. I also found the book, Toxic Parents. I gave myself permission to never defend myself against my mother's lies and coercion again.

By 2000, my daughter was self-harming and diagnosed as clinically depressed. She had a difficult college life. In 2004, she attempted suicide and subsequently diagnosed as having borderline personality disorder. With mum still haranguing me, my sister waved an olive branch, beginning a somewhat fragmented journey to recognise I had not been given a fair deal. Our conversations were fraught, usually ending in my sister feeling I was favouring our aunt against our mum. My mother got in touch through birthday cards with letters which always laid claim to how poorly she was, how she

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An inquest took place 9 months later but my mother would not tell me when it was.

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needed money, insulted my achievements or my children, cast aspersions on my ability to tell the truth and criticised my aunt's behaviour from 30/40/50 years before. For years, my Birthday presents were items she had bought herself and had discarded. When I sent presents to my siblings, mum hijacked them as if they were from her. It took me years to find out.

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## Mum subsequently sustained a life-long pathological jealousy of her sister.

Following my graduation in 2001, I began writing a psychological history on my mother, talking to family members about her childhood. Mum was considered 'highly strung' and temperamental. She had a reputation. At 5 years old she cut household bedding in half in a jealous rage. My poor grandmother sat up all night hand sewing it back together. I always wondered why we had (French) seams down the centre of the sheets when we stayed with her. My mum's father had been diagnosed with cancer and lost his job. Income was so tight in the post-war years that my grandmother had two jobs, turning the garden over to vegetables and hens, engaging in bartering to feed her family. With 5 years between my mum and my aunt, my aunt could help more but my mother was shipped out to relatives in the school holidays. Mum subsequently sustained a life-long pathological jealousy of her sister. Through her paranoia, I was the enemy too.

When I was diagnosed with chronic osteoarthritis at 33, my mother claimed I was lying or attention seeking but when my knees needed replacing, her knees did too, though no arthritis has ever been diagnosed in her. In 2004 and 2007, my knees were replaced and mum said because it was self-inflicted, I did not deserve any help.

When her propaganda did not stop me talking to my aunt, the family were told what a liar and a thief I was. The tales came back to me eventually, relatives questioning the validity

but my mother was emphatic about her truth. Once her version of events was verbalised, she firmly believed it was true and backed her version to the detriment of anyone else. One of the stories she enjoyed recounting was how I stole the family photos. The more I continued to ignore her the more my mother continued her campaign against me. She gave me the photos but when dad got cross about one of his mother in particular, my mother invented my theft to excuse her responsibility.

In 2012, I was diagnosed with a brain tumour. I wrote to my siblings to tell them so my mother could not distort the truth. While I had surgery, mum managed to convince my siblings that it was all a misunderstanding, that she loved me dearly. Threatening to stalk the hospital corridors while I had surgery, I warily and regretfully, waved a white flag and let my mother back in my life just as my eldest son became engaged. I should have known there was an ulterior motive.

She milked it for all she was worth to make her look good. However, the usual demands for money ensued and again, no help or empathy, just condemnation and loathing. I actually found

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...challenge her, she comes back at you with both barrels...

myself feeling sorry for her because she seemed incapable of liking anything or being happy unless she was destroying someone's life, mostly mine and my aunt's. My brother returned to the UK and now lives with our mother. I live many miles from the rest of my family but my siblings and I orchestrated 2 days in a hotel for us to simply sit and talk. We did not inform my mother to begin with, but my brother told her because he wanted to give her the benefit of the doubt. My mother did everything she could think of to stop my brother from being there, pretended she was ill, refused use of the car, said I was a liar and she tried to invent things I had done. My sister and I had both warned him he was in for trouble. We coined a phrase - challenge her, she comes back at you with both barrels.....

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For the first time in 40 years the siblings were together, had no demands made on us about what to think or believe and no demands for money. I had mixed emotions, been waiting for this moment for many years, but I was careful. The dialogue continues because my brother cannot grasp the psychology of our lives. My sister told him he was the favourite which he has struggled to recognise. He cannot accept our mother's reality is false because she manipulates him and he feels guilty.

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My mum was blind with fury that she could not control the messages or milk sympathy for herself.

In August 2016 my dear aunt was put on a palliative care pathway for ulcerated skin cancer. I travelled 600 miles regularly to offer my cousin some respite. Eerily, my aunt died the same day as the anniversary of my dad's death, 19 years previously. At her funeral, mum screamed at me across the

car park about the injustice my aunt and I delivered. Again, she did not shed a tear. Living near my aunt, my father's brother came to see me at the funeral, knowing what my aunt meant to me and to pay his respects. My mum was blind with fury that she could not control the messages or milk sympathy for herself. My uncle was shocked at the way she spoke to me. Mum or not, I vowed I could not continue to be treated this way and wrote to her to explain key issues from my perspective but the most upsetting, was the fact that she had not visited my aunt in 14 years. Of course she made up all kinds of scenarios to try and convince people she was a dutiful sister but I told my siblings, 'I am done, no more'.

For the past couple of years my mum has been feral, you cannot describe it any more kindly. She has been diagnosed with Normal Pressure Hydrocephalus (NPH) which is a form of Parkinson's disease. The years of propaganda, only listening to our mother's reality and being the 'chosen one' makes my brother's life very confusing and tense. As he has now retired,

he is the target of terrible verbal abuse because mum cannot cajole him about money. It is even more tenable that we are just suppliers to gratify her immediate needs and she has absolutely no emotional bond with us, her children. With the NPH, she is constantly combatting her need to be the centre of attention with the need to gain an upper hand by controlling information but an ageing mind stops her. She takes to her bed, fully clothed for days at a time in a strop when her demands are not met or her version of events is challenged. She refuses to wash or launder clothes but spends a lot of money every month buying new ones. The impact of mum's self-neglect and stealing from my brother ruins his daily life. She opens his mail and lies so much she cannot tell fact from fiction. She controls his movements according to her wants and perceived reputation, woe-betide him if he strays from that.

Recently, she tried convincing my brother she has cataracts from a visit to the Opticians. She has needed glasses for years but won't wear them. My brother investigated and was told no, she does not have cataracts. When my mother discovered what he had done she verbally abused him for days. She has tried getting my brother to pay for things, dissecting the average shopping list to tell my brother what she will no longer pay for, including dishwasher tablets. She refuses to use crockery and eats straight from tins, packets or cartons. When he brings shopping home, she takes what she knows he likes. If he uses the phone to make a GP appointment for her, she wants to charge him for the phone call. I am able to predict my mother's every move and explain so my sister can understand how pathological her behaviour is. She tries to stop my brother from challenging or appeasing mum but he feels guilty and relents to her coercive control.

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...suppliers to gratify her immediate needs and she has absolutely no emotional bond with us, her children.

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Mum uses money as a quick fix, when she feels she deserves something wild horses would not stop her from getting it.

At 63, 62 and 55, the siblings now have a relationship that mum cannot control. She tries of course but I have no contact with her whatsoever. For years I felt guilty because domestic violence was a normal part of our home life. I left home to try and protect my siblings, believing I was the problem. It still hurts to know they simply felt abandoned. I did not realise but my mother capitalised

on it. Only recently, I could explain to my siblings that whilst not condoning domestic violence, I did not see our dad as perpetrator, but victim. They thought the opposite. Mum uses money as a quick fix, when she feels she deserves something wild horses would not stop her from getting it. She has spent every bank account empty. When she has run out of her money, she applies an unrelenting level of manipulative verbal abuse to try and get money from other people. The violence was dad's frustration that she never learnt to be reasonable and despite the rows, he could not control her spending.

Her coercion over money caused his death.

Mum derived huge status from being an officer's wife. When dad retired from the RAF, Mum struggled to salvage her status because she did not identify with or derive status from dad's later career as a senior lecturer at their local University. Dad also renovated antique furniture as a hobby and had some beautiful work. The day he died she pestered him constantly because she wanted him dancing to her tune.

A year ago my sister and I met at his graveside and sat in glorious sunshine and raised a tot of gin in his memory for his birthday. I cannot describe the sense of inner peace I had. Another birthday looms and I write this in his memory to make sense of the huge loss we have all had at the mercy of a person who is simply the most malignant human being I know.

## Moira's story

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I thought my ex-husband was my perfect soul mate, such a kind, thoughtful, generous man who seemed to put everyone's needs before his own.

What he was actually doing was mirroring me.

The relationship soon became one which was built upon my sympathy for him as a result of the suffering he claimed to have endured at the hands of his psychotic, crazy, adulterous first wife and numerous other fiancés who had cheated on him. I was determined to help him to be happy once more and see that good, kind and faithful women existed.

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I was head over heels in love with this man....or at least the person he portrayed.

I became absorbed into a story where he was the victim of women who had bled him dry financially, cheated with his best friend, alienated him from his child and then started malicious smear campaigns to destroy him.

I believed it all because his close circle of friends and his parents repeated his version of events. I had no reason to doubt and was reeled in hook, line and sinker. I am ashamed to confess I too was guilty of repeating the lies I was told about his first wife. I began to hate her for what I believed she had done to him.

I was head over heels in love with this man....or at least the person he portrayed.

About 18 months into the relationship I became pregnant.

His daughter had refused to see him and I was made to believe it was because of me. Therefore, I carried a huge amount of guilt. Despite being 39 years old, I wanted him to have a family. Things deteriorated very quickly once I was pregnant, he would be out until 3 am several nights a week and if I tried to discuss this, comparisons were made of me with his first wife. This left me feeling vulnerable and concerned he didn't love me anymore. So, I tried even harder.

We were due to get married the same year our daughter was born. It was a couple of weeks before our wedding day that I discovered a letter he had written to his first wife apologising to her for his affairs, specifically with her friends....my world literally collapsed. But, he always had an excuse and my ability to trust my own judgement and inner voice was now so totally eroded through subtle 'gas lighting' that I would believe him or at least find reasons to justify his conduct. The explanations for this conduct were always so bizarre that it seemed impossible that someone could actually lie to such a degree therefore it must be true ... mustn't it?

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... but being around him was like my feet were stuck in tar.

Despite now being made aware of his adultery by friends and colleagues, including a liaison on our wedding night, I continued to blame myself for everything that happened as I truly believed I was the problem.

Our son was born almost two years after our daughter.

By now I was convinced I had post-natal depression. I was so incredibly unhappy and felt I had become a physically and emotionally unattractive person. I did everything in my power to make him happy but being around him was like my feet were stuck in tar.

If I asked him to spend more time with me and our tiny family, he would inform me I could not tell him how to live his life. I felt saturated with despair and could feel my ability to stay calm had disappeared when I tried to reason with him. This all helped him to justify himself, not being around as I was the unstable, nasty wife and once more he had become a victim of another selfish, psychotic wife.

On the face of things I appeared to have the perfect life and family. Trying to explain how I felt seemed futile because my ex-husband played the perfect family man to everyone except his own family. On paper, I had no right to complain.

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I would tell myself that if I saw the marriage out until the children had left school I could hopefully have 10 years left to live and be happy. However, when the children were 5 and 7 I asked for a divorce. I cited unreasonable behaviour rather than adultery. I was still blissfully unaware what I was dealing with and thought that if I kept things amicable it would be better for everyone.

During the previous year, we had renovated the family home.

We had never co-joined our finances and I spent £30K from

my savings on repairs. He spent nothing but said he would pay me half back. I now know he was already in a relationship with a colleague at the time I spent this money.... they moved in together immediately after I asked for the divorce.

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## I made the mistake of pleading with my ex-husband to stop.

As a result of spending most of my savings on our home, I was unable to pay for legal representation beyond the first month. What followed completely flawed me. Financial proceedings were served upon me. With no funds, I found myself fighting for financial survival against my ex-husband's solicitor and barrister. The process crushed me emotionally, psychologically and physically. I made the mistake of pleading with my ex-husband to stop. I explained just how distressed the children were, not even knowing where they would be living. I now know this is what he wanted to hear.... after all, he had total control. The lies presented to the Court were designed to leave myself and the children homeless and unable to re-home ourselves. At the time I struggled to comprehend a father could do this to his children and to somebody he supposedly once loved. I deeply regret not having the knowledge I now have as the lasting damage to myself and our children could have been minimized.

This process dragged on for three Court hearings and over a year with my ex-husband spending £70k on solicitor and barrister fees. It was worth it for him because our home had been valued at £400k in the initial divorce proceedings.

However, he managed to have the house value reduced through the financial hearing to £217k. My files of evidence to prove my ex-husband's lies were disallowed through intervention from his barrister and as I couldn't raise a mortgage, the judge ordered I should be paid 150k and vacate our home with the children within 5 months.

My ex-husband told the courts I had spent nothing on the house renovations but I was ordered to provide written evidence. The dissection of my finances during this process led me to discover he had been forging cheques from my personal account and paying off his own credit card account.

Initially, I couldn't believe he would do this. I now realise there are no limits to a narcissist's sense of entitlement, especially where money is concerned. When asked about child contact and monetary support by the Judge, my ex-husband stated he did not wish the Court to sort out contact but with regard to maintenance he had opened a case with the child support agency and was paying the sum calculated by them based upon his income. I assumed this was the truth. After all he was telling a Judge within a court room and he was a serving police officer.

About 18 months later, I was advised by a solicitor friend to speak to the CSA as he felt it strange I had received zero communication from them. I did as suggested and discovered they had never heard of either of us. I struggled to believe what I was hearing. I rang the CSA on three separate occasions asking them to search for my case. It transpires I was underpaid by £250.00 per month during this period. When he was contacted by the CSA about his payments, I received a ranting tirade from him in which he accused me of trying to undermine him as a loving, caring father. He continued to claim he had opened a case previously and the miscalculation was the fault of the CSA.

In his bid to destroy me through the Courts, important documents disappeared from my court files whilst I was away from home and my witnesses were threatened by my ex-husband. It was more like a movie than real divorce proceedings. It was a tremendously dark and unsettling time with no end in sight.

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## It was a tremendously dark and unsettling time with no end in sight.

I had been given 5 months by the Court to find a home for myself and the children. I found one within a week and as my ex-husband had told the Judge he already had the funds in place to pay me the sum required, I wrote asking for the £150k to be released. I was informed he did not in fact have the funds and had not yet done anything about it. I was also told that if I asked him or his solicitor again about the funds then this would be harassment. I spent the next couple of months watching the date requiring us to vacate get dangerously close and having nowhere to go. I lost the first house I had found and no others would accept an offer until I had proof of funds. I requested a further Court hearing citing my ex-husband's lack of funds to comply with the Court order. A hearing was granted. However, this was overturned following a letter from his solicitor stating funds were now available.

This letter was also sent to me, plus a further letter in which the children and I were named as being required to vacate within 5 weeks. This was a month before the actual date set by the Court and left me with just 5 weeks to find and purchase a new home and find new schools for the children. We had been left £70k short of being able to find a home where we currently lived so were moving to a cheaper area some 40 miles away.

I succeeded in what seemed like an impossible task. We were packed up and ready to move when on the day before my husband informed me the funds had not yet come through. We spent the following week sleeping on a mattress on the floor with just the clothes we stood up in. I was now in danger of losing this house and being sued for breach of contract. I rang the head office of my ex-husband's solicitor and burst into tears, telling them what had happened. By the end of that day I had the funds and we moved to our wonderful new life. The children were 5 and 7 when we separated.

It was an ever increasing battle to get them to see their father.

They would return in tears yet, I felt too weak to uphold their wishes of not wanting to see him. I worried nobody would see beyond his public displays of super-dad and feared being taken to family Court. This became his go-to, number one threat.

Once in our new home, the children continued to see their dad every week though would return in a distressed state. The poor behaviour towards his children escalated resulting in our daughter running after my car and pleading with me not to make her stay. This was another opportunity for him to play the victim of a controlling ex-wife who had brainwashed his children. I took my daughter back to him and pleaded with her to spend just a short while with her dad. He slow clapped me in front of the children and said I deserved an Oscar. I look back now with shame that I was not stronger and able to put the needs of the children before my fear of their father but having witnessed how he manipulated the Courts and other services who should have supported and protected us.

I felt completely powerless and afraid.

As a result of what the children disclosed to me about their father's behaviour towards them, the children spoke to a wonderful GP who referred them to social services. Foolishly, I kept my ex-husband in the loop as I had been accused continually of alienating him from his parental rights. My ex-husband bombarded social services with allegations of abuse by me, against the children. Before they had even received the GP's report it was treated as nothing more than a bitter contact feud.

Luckily, the GP who had first-hand experience of his lies and coercive behaviour referred the children for counselling to enable them to have an independent and confidential voice. This was also hugely beneficial for me with my ex-husband telling services I had committed psychological abuse of the children and domestic abuse against him. I took great strength knowing this would show I was not guilty of any of this. It did.

The children have not seen their father for over a year now.

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They have become confident, thoughtful children who no longer have night terrors or fear leaving the room alone. I continue to receive regular written communications from my ex-husband in which

I am informed that as a result of my conduct he has no option but to take me to family Court. I am reminded of the dim view the Judge will take of my actions and I will be to blame for the outcome. The notes leave me an emotional wreck and temporarily, right back in the middle of this confusing and debilitating world where I question myself and place him in a position of control and power.

I have had 3 years of counselling to enable me to comprehend what we have been through and what we continue to endure. In my determination to build my shattered self-esteem and to minimize the impact of this toxic, coercive control, I have used every women's' domestic support group I can find and have attended several courses. I acknowledge my anxiety caused through my ex-husbands conduct will impact negatively upon our children. Therefore, I equip myself with every tool I can to enable me to be a confident, nurturing role model in whom they can trust and feel safe.

Throughout all of this, my ex-husband has never once apologised to anybody. Instead, he has projected his own conduct onto me and the children. Telling services we are liars and he is unsafe in our company gives him the last word all the time.

Possibly the most debilitating consequence has been my belief that nobody will believe me. After all, I had once believed my ex-husband's smear campaign spread about several people who had dared to try and stand up to him. The lies and manipulation are in a league of their own. Following 3 months of confidential counselling, he was informed that the children had remained steadfast in their wishes not to see or communicate with him and any contact in the future

should be in a supervised contact centre. He contacted me that same evening via email and stated the counsellors had informed him there was no reason he should not see the children immediately and demanded access that weekend.

On another occasion, following a parent's evening at the school my ex-husband contacted me the following day and stated the head teacher had informed him the children were happy to see him and that contact should start immediately. The school confirmed that this subject had not been discussed as it was not their remit to get involved. When discussing these lies with the counsellors and the school, all I kept thinking was, do they think I am making this up to bad mouth him?

So minuscule is my belief in myself.

Countless times I have been asked "I thought you were an intelligent woman, how could you fall for this and then allow it to continue?" They say this because at the time I had 16 years as a front line police officer under my belt, 14 of those as a highly trained domestic abuse and support officer. So subtle were the words and behaviours which gradually destroyed my self-belief, esteem and finally the power to act, I always knew something was not right. This insipid form of abuse is underpinned by a devastatingly colossal smear campaign which at times you yourself will believe.

I still live in fear of the postman and emails. Until the children are young adults and can make decisions, they will always be a tool for his manipulation and narcissistic demands. I do feel my role is to explain actions and decisions and ease them into an undoubted life-long process of dealing with their father.

Knowledge on how to deal with this type of person is a must. It is a sanity preserving requirement! If I have any advice to offer others, surround yourself with a support network of people who understand such behaviour and its consequences and let go of those who don't.

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The lies and manipulation are in a league of their own.

# Learning outcomes

	Be able to;	Relevant for
1	Identify the social factors for mental health and well-being	Primary care - GP's and staff NHS personnel Counselling services Voluntary sector
2	Develop awareness of how power through coercive behaviour limits the access to tools and resources	Primary care - GP's and staff NHS personnel Counselling services Domestic abuse organisations Legal services
3	Configure a cooperative multi-disciplinary care pathway for victims	Primary care - GP's and staff Children's services Counselling services Legal services Voluntary sector
4	Reflect on the support needs of primary caregivers and address support needs	Primary care - GP's and staff Education services Counselling services Domestic abuse organisations Voluntary sector
5	Develop awareness of local community referral pathways and cycles of communication	Primary care - GP's and staff Children's services Counselling services Domestic abuse organisations Legal services Voluntary Sector
6	Promote inclusivity to identify areas that feed narcissistic behaviours and develop coping strategies	Parent, partner or family Primary care organisations Counselling services Voluntary Sector
7	Establish awareness training to consider the long-term psychological impact of a narcissist	Primary care - GP's and staff Counselling services Legal services Voluntary sector

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What can we learn from these narratives?

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How can Counselling services respond more appropriately?

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Are the needs of family members taken into account?

# Acknowledgements

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The Presentations of Narcissist Personality Disorder addition to our Open Door series aims to expose the damage to mental health and well-being when a person with a narcissist personality disorder applies very specific traits to control those around them.

We acknowledge the bravery of the contributors to open a door into their lives as they struggled with the coercive behaviour of people they tried to understand, manage or even love and care for.

We hope these narratives can improve professional understanding of Narcissistic Personality Disorder and for the wider community, urge people to listen more.

## Further information available from

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### **British Psychological Society**

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# NEURO KEY

An Alliance supporting people with neurological conditions

Our Open Door series is collectively created to share our expertise and ultimately, benefit the whole neuro community. However, we need to sustain this Charity. If this resource has been useful for you, we would appreciate a donation to help keep the work going.

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