



Charlotte Mitchell  
**A Memoir**

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# Introduction

In writing this memoir I wanted to share my story and found that there was an arts grant available to help me.

Many people who pick up this book will know me from my work in the user movement. However I am a writer, a lover of classical music and a Christian.

I would like you to realise that it is possible to live a full life after being ill.

I hope that it will help other people with lived experience to get involved in collective advocacy where they can meet people with similar experiences and contribute to positive change.

I would like collective advocacy to be better known, so read on and share the book with your friends.

# One

**1945 - 1950:**

Early Childhood



We lived in a rented flat in Cobden Crescent, Edinburgh. My first memory is crawling under the dining room table which had a large overhanging table cloth. It was a safe place for a little one. My paternal Granny and Grandpa had come up to see us for a week. Granny was on her own that afternoon. I asked where Grandpa was. She replied, 'he has gone to the barber'. This puzzled me, as Grandpa was bald.

I loved our back garden, with its summer house, and often went to play in it. One morning I went out and found that the door was covered with a huge spider's web which glistened in the dew. I did not know what it was and had to ask my parents about it. So I learnt all about spiders.

My father and I kept a scrapbook. We were looking at it once, when suddenly his nose began to bleed and a drop fell onto one of the pages. It was impossible to clear the mess up and the remains of it were seen for many years, reminding both of us of the nose-bleed time.



I had a Nanny. We often went to feed the ducks on Blackford Pond. I was still in my pram – this was in the days before buggies. The child was supposed to sit facing her carer, but I liked to face where we were going. This worried Nanny, as none of the other children she had looked after had done this.

My maternal grandmother had stopped driving and decided to give us her Austin car. My mother and her brother, Uncle Julian, went down to Sussex to fetch it. There were no motorways in those days. They were delighted to receive a tremendous greeting when they arrived back in Edinburgh.

When I was about four I went to Margaret Morris dancing classes in Riddle's Court off the Grassmarket. As a treat at the end of term my family would take me to have tea at Crawford's Tea Room in Hanover Street. The tea room is no longer there; it was taken over by Miss Selfridge. I later learned that it had been decorated by Rennie MacIntosh (much later I learned it was

actually decorated by Robert Burns). I wonder if any traces of the design remain.

In the summer of 1949 we spent a week in a hotel at Rowardennan on the banks of Loch Lomond. We had recently moved house and could not afford to go further afield. I still vividly remember the walks we took up Ben Lomond, with its gurgling stream and waterfall. There were traces of hedgehogs, though I did not call them hedgehogs, but 'Mrs Tiggy-Winkle', after Beatrix Potter's book.

After that summer we often went to the east side of Loch Lomond in the autumn to pick brambles for a day. The prickly bushes were full of delicious fruit. We got enough to make jelly and we strained it through a jelly bag. This looked like a witch's hat upside down.

In the late 1940s there was a very hard winter. Snow lasted for six weeks. Piles of it clogged the streets. It was very cold, and with no central heating, my father got chilblains on his fingers.

In 1948 we went to Shetland for a fortnight. My father had recently got work up there.

We stayed in a croft-cum-hotel, run by people called Henderson. The accommodation was basic. I fell out of my bed, which was unstable. Also staying was a lovely couple, who were teachers. The husband knew how to amuse children. He smoked his pipe out of his ear. I am still not sure how he did it.

My grandmother came up from Sussex to see us. She stayed in the hotel just round the corner from us, as we did not have a spare room. I decided to go and see her, so without telling anybody, I toddled off round the corner. She was pleased to see me but was worried that I would be missed. So she took me back home to the relief of my family.

# Two

My Parents



You may have guessed that I am an only child.

My parents, Betty and Richard, were architects, planning consultants and landscape architects. Their office was in the house so I got to know the staff. They built up a large and prosperous practice. They were much admired by their peers and were at the centre of a very active social circle.

Richard loved sailing. He got a Shetland model boat, with a cabin, built for him. He had a lot of work up there, so he often went to Lerwick. He sailed around Scotland. Betty loved the countryside in the Highlands and had work up there. In either 1960 or 1961 she bought a plot of land on which to build a chalet. All the friends helped her build it. It was where the two of them could go at weekends. We all loved it there, deep in the woods.



# Three

1950 - 64:

Education

When I was five I was sent to the Edinburgh Rudolf Steiner School. No, my parents were not anthroposophists, but they wanted me to go to a co-ed school. I was not happy there. I was teased and bullied by my classmates and did not make friends.

A girl called Alison arrived, and became my best friend. We were lifelong pals until she died of a brain tumour about fifteen years ago.

English, French and History were my best subjects, especially French. We changed class teachers often, which was not how it should have been. Steiner said that a class should have the same main teacher for eight years, until the children are about fourteen.

I only got one A level, in French.

The Old Scholars (former pupils) were very active. The group was open to 5th and 6th year pupils too. We went carol singing. One of the families we visited were the Clarkes of Penicuik House.

We spent a weekend at a cottage near Moniaive.  
We went skiing and got snowed in.

We helped one of our teacher's husbands tend his market garden. This was near Livingston where the teacher, Anne-Marie, and her family of five lived. Their home was the converted stable of Murieston House. We gathered there on Sunday afternoons and were given a nice supper.



# Four

1964 – 1970:

Education, Continued



As I left school with only one A level, I could not go to university in Britain.

After much discussion it was decided that I should go to the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland, which did certificate and diploma courses for non-French speakers.

My parents wanted me to live in a safe environment. So after much searching we found a pension for young ladies run by an elderly lady called Melle Collette. She was very strict but had a heart of gold.

There was a TV in the lounge on which we watched Winston Churchill's funeral. I did not get on with my room-mate. She said that my feet smelled and that I was untidy. Mademoiselle moved me into a single room overlooking the street which was tree-lined. It was very pretty when it snowed.

My course was very interesting. The lecturer, M. Lugin, was very old-fashioned and wanted to go by the rules of grammar. We also did little

talks. By this time I had made friends with my class-mates: English, American, Canadian, Swiss German, African. We drank coffee and went out late into the night. Mademoiselle disapproved and said that I had to leave as she wanted to put two girls into my room.

Where was I to go? Some of my pals lived in a new student house on the edge of town. I was accepted by the staff and I moved in. My room was on the top floor overlooking vineyards, the lake, and in the distance, the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau mountains, all lovely shades of pink when the sun was setting. I lived in the same room for eighteen months. The curtains and bedspread were a beautiful shade of blue.

I got my certificate and then decided that I did not want to come back to Britain. In Geneva there was a university-level social science college which ran a social work course. I applied and got in. This was the first time I had come across sociology, statistics and law. The school had a pension attached so I lived there. The lady who

ran it was very insightful. The other girls were very friendly and welcoming. I got on particularly well with one girl.

One day she came to me to ask for help. She had found that she was pregnant by a Turkish man she met on holiday. We arranged that she would have an abortion in France without telling her parents or the pension mistress. The surgery was a success but the secrecy was not!

After a year (my course lasted three and a half years), I moved into a student flat in a block which contained several other students. They housed six students each. I did not really like it. The block was on a busy main road, with traffic lights just outside my window. The cars and buses made a terrible noise revving up.

On my course I made friends with a girl called Regula from Neuchâtel and often took her home for the weekend. I had a car, and I liked to keep up with the friends I had made there.

The last year of the course was made up of two placements in social work agencies, and a dissertation. My placements were in Neuchâtel, in agencies which dealt with a multitude of different cases. I had to find somewhere to live. I was lucky that somebody who knew somebody who knew me was going away for a year and wanted to let out part of their flat. I took it on and was very happy there. Regula and I decided to do our dissertations together, on the involvement of teenagers in the local youth centre.

When the year was up I found another flat the same way as before. It was in the servants' quarters of a big house. The owner was a local politician and a psychiatrist. The dissertation was not going at all well, and my parents wanted me to come home and be nearer to them. Regula kept saying she would do her bit but nothing came of it, so I came home with nothing to show for my social work course. I was very worried about the future.

# Five

Holidays



My childhood summer holidays were all spent in Shetland. We stayed in a hotel-cum-croft run by a brother and sister called Burgess. We went for ten years solid, helping on the croft, sailing on the loch, fly fishing and helping my father with his work in Lerwick. At Easter we always went to Aviemore before my mother built our chalet. That was also before it became a very busy tourist destination.

My grandmother died when I was eleven and my mother inherited quite a lot of money. She decided that we should go on a cruise to Greece run by Swan Hellenic Cruises. I had been doing Greek myths at school and wanted to see what the place was like.

My memories of this are fading, but Sir Compton Mackenzie was one of the passengers. He was friendly. We saw where the first Olympic Games had been held and the beauty of the Acropolis in Athens. The palace on Crete had been rebuilt, and was not very tastefully done.

The following year (1958) we went to Flims in Switzerland. It was the start of my love affair with that small and very tidy country. It was so nice to walk in the mountains and see the wildflowers, or to bathe in the lake below the village.

I wanted to go back to Flims the next year but my parents wanted to go to Finland to see the modern architecture, mostly flats surrounded by birch trees. The flats had lifts called 'hissi' in Finnish. We spent a few days up-country surrounded by mile upon mile of pine forests stretching to the Russian border. We were given mushroom porridge to eat and had saunas.

I was not really impressed, but my parents were most interested in it all.

From that time on I branched out on my own. First I went and stayed with a dear teacher who had left to start a children's home in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland. The family were German speakers. I spent three or four school holidays with their family and met German and



Dutch teenagers. We walked in the mountains across the valley called Dente della Vecchia (Old Woman's Teeth).

As French was my best subject at school, it was decided that I should go for a week to Paris at Easter-time, and for a fortnight to Avignon in the summer. I did not like Avignon - the family I stayed with were unfriendly, and I had to explore the town by myself. The only nice thing was the juicy peaches: they were very delicious.

The French teacher recommended that I go to Westham House near Warwick. It ran adult education courses including a French New Year week. I went several times. Yes, it was lovely, all in French about France, and we performed a French play on the last night. The other people on the course were very interesting: a retired teacher who had taught French at St George's, and Marion Stewart, a graduate from Moray House Teacher Training College. We became very friendly. In the end she was my best maid at my wedding.

After a year in Neuchâtel I wanted to improve my German, so I enrolled in Heidelberg University's month-long summer course for foreigners. The only two things I can remember about it were that we British won the singing competition, and that I made friends with a Miss Thinn (whose first name I have forgotten}.

The American girl students at my student hostel in Neuchâtel were very friendly, so was a boy called Richard, also American. One of the girls, Richard, and my special friend Jane from Canada, wanted me to visit them when they got home. So it was arranged that I would fly Icelandair from Luxembourg. This I did and stopped off in Iceland to indulge in one of our family hobbies. There was an Icelandic pony stables near Edinburgh and my parents and I used to go every Sunday. We all had our own favourite little horses. Mine was called Kobi. Richard and one of the girls lived on Long Island, New York. She took me to a very nice restaurant to eat lobster, one of the local delicacies. In

Canada, Jane and I saw chipmunks in the woods near one of the Great Lakes.

While still at Neuchâtel I went on a student trip to Florence, Rome and Naples.

Florence had a lot of lovely leather shops. I bought a dark blue shoulder bag, which was much admired.



# Six

**1970 – 1988:**

Back in Britain ~ Work

Back in Edinburgh, my parents and I decided that I should live at home. My house was built in 1812 and overlooked the Botanic Gardens. I loved it dearly. It was part home, part office of my parents. As I had nothing to show for my time in Geneva, it was very difficult to find work.

My mother was the landscape architect for the Royal Edinburgh Hospital Group of psychiatric hospitals and she was able to get me an Occupational Therapy placement at Rosslynlee Hospital, Midlothian. It involved working with old patients. We made pom-poms. The patients were not able to do anything more difficult.

I applied for the student psychiatric nurse course but was not accepted. This was yet another set back. However my Steiner connections came up trumps and I obtained a post as craft teacher to disabled children at Garvald, West Linton. This was most rewarding.

We painted, we wove, we acted Scottish ballads, we listened to stories, we made candles.

I was in charge of the most difficult children. We were a community with a very structured way of life. The children could take part in the structure and benefit from it.

After four years at Garvald I decided, with the help of my boyfriend, William Mitchell (Mitch), to get qualified. First I had to get some Highers so I went to Telford College to do English, Modern Studies and Art. I got A passes in the first two and failed the art.

What next? Napier College accepted me on their Scottish Higher National Diploma in Business Studies with Languages. I got through and decided to continue studying, this time at Heriot-Watt University. I did their postgraduate certificate in management, then their MSc in Management Studies, which was half-taught, half-dissertation. Mine was on the Marketing of Scottish Craft Products. Mitch, who had a mathematical mind, and who was keen that I got my degree, helped me.

On my course at the Watt was a very nice person from Nigeria called Joshua. We became firm friends - he, his wife, and three very well behaved little ones. They all came to Christmas dinner with my parents. We enjoyed their company.

For the next few winters my tutor, Sandy Young, asked me to take tutorials with first year marketing students. I enjoyed this very much.

My aim was to work in market research so I applied to five or six firms and became a market research interviewer. Arduous work, but worth it. In the summer I worked in Princes Street Gardens, and in the winter in Wester Hailes shopping centre. These places were where you could get a good cross section of the public.

# Seven

**1970 – 1988:**

Back in Britain ~ Art and  
Politics





In the late summer of 1970, I went on a National Trust cruise to the Western Isles and Northern Ireland, where we admired standing stones.

Back in Edinburgh, we had family friends who met for lunch on Saturdays at the Leigh Coffee House in Hanover Street. I did not want to be totally dependent on them for company, so I enrolled at the French Institute for an advanced class and other social activities. Later the Institute became very expensive so I stopped going.

I also went to a weaving class at the Edinburgh Art College. Here I met a nice lady called Alison Geddes (not to be mixed up with my best friend Alison Thomson). She introduced me to the Edinburgh Sketching Club. This proved to be a great success. We met once a week at their rooms near the Castle in the winter. In the summer on Sunday afternoons we met to sketch at locations like Duddingston Loch or Malleny Garden in Balerno, or the view from Corstorphine Hill. I soon made friends with other very interesting people, especially a retired American

couple, Fred and Hilda. They spent summers in Edinburgh for many years. Fred's paintings were very professional. By 1975 I was courting Mitch, who took very good photos of members. He too was very friendly with the Americans.

The Club was not my only outlet. The local Liberal activist knocked on our door and recruited me. I had always been interested in Liberalism, and this was the beginning of thirty years' hard work. I helped Ronnie, the activist, with some case work. The incinerator at Powderhall was spewing out particles which were landing on parked cars in the neighbourhood. We wrote to the Council asking them to deal with this. They did so. That was my first case of many.

When I got married I moved into another constituency, Edinburgh Pentlands. For the next general election I helped by addressing envelopes. I did not have time to do more just then as I was studying, but I was soon on the local committee, and several years later (in the mid-1980s) was made Chair. I enjoyed by-

elections, conferences, meetings and writing letters to The Scotsman for our candidate – all key activities of a grassroots worker.

In the mid-1980s I stood for the Council but did not get in as it was a safe Tory seat.

I only stopped being active when Nick Clegg became leader and went into coalition with the Tories. I was not prepared to start from scratch again.

Two summer fortnights in the early 1970s were spent on a painting holiday in Shetland run by the Council. The tutor was called Iain Fleming from Gray's School of Art, Aberdeen. He was a wonderful teacher. His own work was most inspiring. I profited greatly from these courses. I was getting proficient in watercolour.

I had kept up with my old school friend Alison, who had become a committed Christian. She had recently married a fellow Christian from the Borders. They lived in Selkirk and I visited them often. We went on holiday together. One trip was

sailing on the Norfolk Broads – very different from sailing in Shetland. Another trip, which included their three little girls, was on a canal barge to Wales. We learned to work the locks. They tried to convert me to Christianity but without success at that point. However, I went to Salvation Army meetings with them, and later I did become a Christian.

Mitch and I got engaged on Christmas day 1976. My parents were pleased that I would soon be settled. They liked my fiancé, even though he came from a different background from them. We were married in St Giles Cathedral on 3rd September 1977, a beautiful sunny day, with about 80 guests. We went to the Lake District for our honeymoon. We did a lot of walking, and Mitch bought me a pair of walking boots.

In the early 1980s, my parents needed a great deal of support: their business partner was trying to take over the firm. They had to take out an injunction against him.

For a whole year we went several times a week to see them. In the end things sorted themselves out, not very satisfactorily for my father. It had taken a great toll on his health.

# Eight

1988 - 1994:

Difficult Times



You, my readers, may think that I had a lovely life with no troubles, emotional or psychological, a strong marriage and loving parents. But after seven years of marriage I realised that things were not going great. Mitch did not keep well, we hardly did anything together, our sex life was not good, we had abusive neighbours.

I wanted to leave but my father was very much against it. So I stayed and prayed that God would tell me what to do. He said, 'Stay'. I stayed and went to Relate, a relationship counselling service. They were most helpful, and put me in touch with a psychological counselling service which helped. Also my parents decided that they would help us to get a house of our own (I had moved into Mitch's Council flat when we married).

We found double colonies-type flats in Colinton village. My father converted them for us.

We moved in at the height of summer, full of hope that things would be better.

We got a little black cat called Emma. She

became Mitch's best friend.

But no, things got worse. In April 1988 my father was diagnosed with leukaemia. I was harassed by my boss in my Liberal voluntary work. My father died. My boss decided to visit Mitch and my mother to see if he would be welcome as an extra family member. Mitch decided to hand me over and money changed hands. All this, including gossip and innuendo, left me in a terrible state after I found out what was going on.

I decided it was time to leave, so I upped sticks and went to live in Shetland, where we had connections. I had told the people in Edinburgh that I was only going away for the summer.

In Lerwick, my friends decided that I needed the services of Women's Aid. They were wonderful at sorting me out.

I went on an employment course, but it was too difficult for me given my nervous state at the time. However, it put me in touch with a little local museum. They needed somebody to index their



exhibits. This was fun.

I didn't even want to see my mother when she was dying. She had been diagnosed with bowel cancer and died eighteen months after my father.

Alison had been in touch about me to her Christian colleagues. They took me to a Billy Graham meeting and I went up and gave my life to Jesus. I joined the Emmanuel Christian Fellowship, which was very spiritual. They made me feel very welcome. We had services, prayer meetings, Bible study and social gatherings. That was the beginning of a turnaround in my life.

I had inherited a little flat in the centre of Lerwick from my father. I rented it out to give me an income. I was not eligible for any benefits so money was a problem. After my mother's death I was in charge of her estate, which included the family home. My lawyer was a great help. He also helped me with my divorce.

I was ill with grief and not knowing what the

future would bring. I was found by the police wandering about the town at night. They took me to the hospital, which decided that I should go to King's Seat, the psychiatric hospital in Aberdeenshire where people from Shetland went. Here I spent several months, a time of reflection and my introduction to medication. The latter helped my state of mind but I was not to know the very bad side effects they would have.

Back in Lerwick I decided to run a craft shop. This was not a success and I went bankrupt. But I became friendly with the local young people who went past the shop. My friends, the ones who had put me in touch with Women's Aid, persuaded me to phone Mitch. He was pleased to hear from me, and after some correspondence came up to visit. We got on well and decided that we would keep in touch. He had had another blow: as well as my mother's death and our divorce, he had been made redundant. Ferranti, where he worked, had gone out of business. He never worked again, though he had managed to buy a

little flat in Viewforth, Edinburgh.

Two or three years later I decided that I was a big city girl and that I would move back to Edinburgh. My flat in Lerwick sold for £41,000 – just enough to buy a flat in Edinburgh.

# Nine

1994 - 2009:

Back in Edinburgh



Mitch and Miss Lowe, our family accountant, found me a little flat in a quiet cul-de-sac off Viewforth. It was quite basic but suited me fine.

My psychiatrist in the North referred me to one at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital (REH). He was very good and I saw him often. He put me in touch with a CPN, who put me in touch with two organisations: the Volunteer Exchange, and Stepping Stones. The Exchange found me clerical work with the PDSA, the charity for pets. This was very basic but it got me out of the house. I stayed with them for two years.

Stepping Stones was an art service/group for people with mental health issues. I was made welcome and did creative writing, painting and stained glass. I enjoyed the company. There were two ladies I particularly remember: one played the piano and used to pull her hair out; the other was the sister of one of my classmates at Steiner's. We enjoyed catching up.

On the notice-board was a flyer about a mental

health drop-in run by the chaplains at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital. It met on Tuesday mornings, for tea/coffee, a chat and a service, at St Augustine's, George IV Bridge. I went along and was soon making lasting friendships. I became very friendly with a woman called Aileen, who had helped to start the drop-in. We met for lunch and other meals. Eventually we also went on coach tour holidays with her friend Liz. As a group we visited Iona for three days. I must have been the only person who did not appreciate the atmosphere of that small island. The drop-in lasted until recently. The pandemic and change of chaplains meant that it was no longer viable.

When I first came back to Edinburgh I went to the local parish church, which was only a few steps from my flat. I became involved, firstly with the Guild, a lovely group of older ladies, then with the Thursday supper evening which was mostly younger people. We ran the Alpha course. This was most rewarding and time-consuming. We also met for lunch on Sundays after our new

more modern form of worship which was held after the main service.

I was so involved that Tony, the minister, later invited me to become an elder. I said yes. A perk of being an elder was being invited to the Royal Garden Party. Luckily it was held on a sunny day that year. One of the things an elder is not allowed to do is to criticise how the minister is running the worship. After a year, I realised that Tony was being divisive, and he was lifting his sermons straight from the internet. A bad atmosphere was growing. I could not tackle him about this so I left. Several other people had also left for the same reason. During these times Mitch and Emma the cat were most supportive. We were good friends.

Back when I was first going to the drop-in, one of the lads, a devout Christian, had been on a retreat with Ellel Ministries. This is a non-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to serve the churches. It offers Bible teaching and prayer ministry to those in need. I went to a

retreat near Inverness and found it most uplifting. One of their leaders recommended that I go to the Fellowship of Healing in Edinburgh. She got in touch with the chaplain, Jenny Williams, telling her that I would profit from the Fellowship. I found it wonderful and went every Thursday to a service and coffee. Jenny was full of insight about her flock. I am still doing the Ellel Ministries devotional every evening.

During this period I also attended Edinburgh University's Office of Lifelong Learning to obtain a certificate in Creative Writing and do their summer school in Archeology. The latter interested me greatly and I went along to the Edinburgh Archeology Club. However, it was not at all friendly, so I did not go back.

I heard of a writing group at the Fountainbridge Library and went along for several years. It was within walking distance from my flat and was facilitated by a New Zealand woman. However she went home and the group fell apart. I also went to a writing class at the National Gallery



run by Helen Boden. I remember the little seats we used as we went round. She told me about the Southside Community Centre's writing group and I went along and have continued to go ever since.

Some of my colleagues at the drop-in were very active in the user movement (now called the movement for people with lived experience of mental health issues), and introduced me to the Edinburgh User Forum. The other people with lived experience were very active, campaigning for better services, and managing to get a crisis centre up and running in Edinburgh. I greatly admired several of them, especially three women: Maggie Keppie, Anne O'Donnell and Dianna Manson.

My colleagues also introduced me to the Patient's Council, the collective advocacy group at the REH, in 2006. At first I just did some very necessary filing work but soon I was on the management committee and eventually became Chair.

I helped set up an advocacy group on the Forensic Unit. These patients were just like any others, worried about washing machines, food and benefits. We got things sorted for them.

In the autumn of 2007 the manager Ruth decided to leave to become the manager of the Carer's Council. As Chair it was up to me to keep the show going, including advertising for a new manager. I enjoyed the work very much as I got on very well with the admin assistant, Maggie. For team-building and Christmas we used to go for lunch to the Braid Hills Hotel. A good time was had by all.

In 1999 or so Alison and her husband Les had moved down to St Austell to be ensigns, the most junior rank of officer, in a small Salvation Army Corps. They invited me down for a week. It was not a success: I had a relapse of my mental health issues and when I got home I had to have my medication increased, and Alison said that I was never to stay with her again.

A few years later Alison's eldest daughter was expecting her first child. This was a miracle as the mother-to-be had had cancer and had received chemotherapy. Alison was thrilled at the thought of being a granny. It turned out that she was not at all well. She was diagnosed with a brain tumour in November and died in late February. She was able to hold and cuddle her grandson. She did not want to see me. That summer I went to visit Les and see the baby. We laid flowers on the grave. It was overlooking the green, rolling Border hills, most peaceful.

Les and I have not kept up. He is very bad at that. He has also not kept up with Alison's and my mutual friend Penny from Vancouver. Penny and her husband visit often. At the time of writing this she has just gone home. We had a lovely morning together. She had not been over since before the pandemic.

Alison's grave is not the only grave I visit. Every summer a family friend called Bob used to take me to see my parents' graves in Kincraig

churchyard near Aviemore. Unfortunately his health became an issue and he is no longer able to drive that far and back in a day. I also feel that their spirits are no longer in the area. I hope you, my readers, won't find that fanciful.

Money was always a problem. It took a very long time to settle my mother's estate. When we had, we invested the money in a Scottish Widows product. Things were very tight. Several years later Scottish Widows gave me a large payout. I decided to use the money for several holidays - cruises. I went to the Mediterranean, the Baltic and the Canaries. This was fun. The sights were well worth seeing and the food was very good. On one of them we stopped off in Tunisia. I was entranced. I also bought clothes.

I used up all the money and had no savings. What to do? The accountant said that I should sell my flat, use the money to live on and move into a council flat. This I did. My flat sold for twice as much as I had bought it for, so I had made a good investment. I moved into a nice little

flat in St Mary's Street in 2004. It had an alarm system linked to the housing department. The friends from the drop-in helped me on the day of the move, they were marvellous. Aileen was a neighbour now. To help my finances I at last got Disability Living Allowance.

About this time I was becoming friendly with my cousin Jeremy and his wife Anne. Over the years we had not seen much of each other - we were all very busy. He and his daughter had come up in about 1998 to visit Edinburgh Napier University to see if she would like to do their journalism course. We got on well, so started a lovely friendship. In 2006 they invited me to stay with them at their home near Farnham, Surrey. We enjoyed ourselves.

For my 60th birthday (yes, I was eligible for the state pension), I organised a party for friends old and new. We had a meal at the Italian restaurant opposite Viewforth church and then went over for coffee and cake. There were thirty-five of us and we all had a good time.

I had so enjoyed my day in Tunisia on one of my cruises that I decided, with the help of my travel agent, that I would go there for a month in the winter. It would actually work out cheaper than staying at home.

So I went to Sousse early in 2006. What an interesting country, and what hospitable people. There were Roman remains, beautiful mosaics housed in a special museum in Tunis, World War II graves, the desert, huge olive groves, and a very friendly English chaplain and his wife. They introduced me to other expats and ran a woman's Bible study group.

I decided that I would go back in 2007, this time for a longer period. I found voluntary work in a school for autistic children, helping the teachers one day a week. I swam in the hotel pool and drank mint tea or coffee in a nice cafe. The weather was always warm. What we call summer flowers were blooming as spring flowers.

On my third visit I found more voluntary work in

a school for autistic children. The staff were very pleased to have me. I helped with two of the most difficult children. Most weeks we went to the local zoo, to see the ostriches and baby camels which made a funny grunting noise when you tried to pat them. The children loved the outing.

# Ten

**2009 – 2023:**

The Royal Edinburgh Hospital  
and Beyond





On my return from Tunisia I found that I could not fit into Edinburgh again. I had trouble with my flat, which had not been looked after by my house helper. Keys were always getting lost. I was in a disturbed state and spent several nights in Greyfriars church yard and on the Rocheid Path. I started to hear voices:

The Portrait Gallery in Queen Street said, 'please visit us and see our collection of modern portraits'.

The High Court said, 'you should come and see us when we' re working'.

A block of flats near where I now live said, 'we don't want you here'.

I heard loud noises. My radio talked to me. I no longer liked St Mary's Street. It was above a funeral parlour and I thought I could smell dead bodies.

There were other things, too, and it turned out that the police had to take me to the Royal

Edinburgh Hospital (REH). My doctor admitted me and so began a year of horrors. I had paranoia about the hospital and other patients. I was being highly drugged. It was all too terrible and the ward was in need of renovation.

Jeremy and Anne came to visit. Jeremy is my named person. They had a long talk with the doctor and were most supportive. My key nurse tried to get me to go to the Verandah Club, which is the hospital's tea room. I did not enjoy being out of the ward. I did not feel safe and thought I was being watched by spies. She also took me to my flat to try and tidy things up. I was not well enough to do anything. One nice thing, though: the activities nurse took me and another patient to Cramond for a cup of tea and a scone.

My doctor introduced me to Heather, the housing social worker, and we discussed where I wanted to live. I made it perfectly plain that I wanted to live in a community. She worked very hard and came up with several options. In the end we decided on the Carr Gomm residence in Ettrick

Road. It is for people over 50 with mental health issues. We had a meeting with the manager, the person who would be my key worker, and the hospital staff. We decided that this accommodation was for me. So in April 2009 I was able to leave the hospital and take up my new tenancy. The building is owned by Viewpoint Housing and serviced by Carr Gomm.

My key worker was very good at supporting me. She helped me with my benefits, state pension, pension credit, higher rate Disability Living Allowance and housing benefit. We worked out how I could pay my clothes catalogue debts. She helped me with my food shopping at Sainsbury's in Gorgie. I like Sainsbury's very much, and since having a computer have done all my food shopping online. I went back to the drop-in and to the Southside writers group.

The second half of 2010 brought bad news. I was diagnosed with a diseased kidney, which needed to be removed. So I went into the Western General for a serious operation.

I was sedated at 9pm and woke up at 5.30pm. There was a clock in the recovery room.

I was very ill and had to have intensive care.

Mitch - yes, I think he still cared - visited me as did my support worker and Jeremy.

Carr Gomm ran a writing group for people they support. We produced a booklet of our work and held a reading evening at the Scottish Poetry Library. It was nice to get out and about again.

I did not go back to the Patient's Council but they kept in touch with me. They asked me to help Maggie set up an advocacy group for very old patients with dementia at the Royal Victoria Hospital. This was very difficult as all the patients were very ill indeed. The charge nurse was pleased with our help; his was a very demanding job.

I was introduced to Carr Gomm Involvement Group. I am still with them all these years later. It was run by a lady called Tricia. We met every

two months to discuss issues like Carr Gomm's values and things that might be important to people they supported, and to the Board. There were several spin-offs from the group: Firstly, I was asked to help with recruiting new staff. I have done a lot of interviewing new staff with all the organisations I am part of. This went on until the pandemic.

Secondly, for a few years I was a member of a Carr Gomm committee which administered a fund for, shall we say, treats and other things people supported could not afford. In the end the fund dried up, but not before I got a grant to go to an Ellel Ministries week at Blairmore House, near Huntley, Aberdeenshire. It was wonderful, most inspirational.

At one of the Carr Gomm gatherings (well before the pandemic) we were given a talk about the National Involvement Network (NIN) and the Charter for Involvement. I did not take much notice, but I realised that this was an organisation which worked with people who needed support in

their daily living. Tricia arranged that we sign up to the Charter with its 12 statements. I began to take notice and we went together to a meeting. I was most impressed and got involved. That was in 2017 or 2018.

The Fellowship of Healing closed its doors in the mid-teens. Some of us regulars decided to meet often at Emmaus House, an Episcopal centre in Gilmore Place. That was a happy choice, however it too closed, this time because of the effects of the pandemic. Our group is much depleted because of deaths, but some of us still meet, now at St Andrews and St Georges in George Street. Tricia retired from Carr Gomm in 2018 or 2019 and the group was taken over by Becs. It meets online at least once a month. We talk, for example, about Self Directed Support in response to a government consultation.

Over time I have had several key workers. Some were very good and my present one, Loo, is excellent. She knows how to sort me out. Carr Gomm does not have much contact with

Viewpoint, who own our building, so my manager was pleased when I became involved with the tenants' association. This disbanded, partly because of the pandemic, and we became the Scrutiny Group. We deal with things like rent, leaflets for tenants, and whether reception is being polite enough to callers.

Jeremy and Anne come up every year to visit. We do trips or visits and go to a show or concert. We have been round the Parliament, to Rosslyn Chapel and on a trip to the Fife fishing villages among other places. One of the shows we went to was a girls' production of *Pride and Prejudice*.

The advocacy organisation CAPS Independent Advocacy runs many different collective advocacy groups. In 2018 I picked up a leaflet about a group called Experiences of Psychosis. I had a talk with the facilitator, whom I already knew from the Carr Gomm writing group. We decided it was right up my street. The group members discuss our experiences of psychosis, and run workshops for therapy students and

others who might come in contact with users - including the police and the Cyrenians.

I also attend a group run by CAPS called Lothian Voices. We scrutinise government papers and go to the Scottish Parliament's Cross Party Group on Mental Health. We also run a People's Conference every year to see what is worrying users at that moment. We are going to see the Housing Minister soon to bring the results to him and show how important they are. We are also writing a radio play for fun. The first scene is about how people can get stressed using public transport. The second scene is about how difficult it is to get a review with the Department of Work and Pensions.

Back to the NIN: more recently I applied and got the position of Association for Real Change (ARC) Associate. This is a freelance paid position. We work at delivering courses and doing presentations about the work of the NIN. The course we are delivering at the moment is 'Power and Control', about getting them right. In



the spring of 2023 I was elected co-chair of the Edinburgh branch. We chair meetings and help with running the network nationally. I have been asked if I would help the staff run workshops to discuss the Autism, Disability and Neurodiversity bill which the government is putting forward.

I have recently completed a Professional Development Award – Mental Health and Peer Work. This is based on the work of the Scottish Recovery Network and looks in depth at how to deliver peer work.

Through my work with CAPS I heard about how Edinburgh University's doctoral psychology students are supported by a group of people with lived experience. The group is called APEX and meets every two months to work out how best to support students and prospective students. They are lovely people.

In autumn 2023 I attended a week-long writing course at Moniack Mhor near Inverness. It was most inspiring and led to me writing this memoir.

So we are up to date. 2023 has been one of the happiest years in my life. Keeping busy and being an activist for better services is most rewarding.

Thank you, my readers, for sharing this memoir.



# **Charlotte Mitchell: A Memoir**

This is a record of the events in my life as I remember them.

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**Charlotte Mitchell is an Edinburgh woman, the daughter of well known architects. She has had mental health issues and now is very much involved in the user movement. In this memoir she takes the reader from her early childhood to today when she leads a very orderly and structured life.**

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