



Introducing Health Sciences : Trauma, Repair and Recovery

Surviving the Edgware Road Bomb

Woman

I had my back to the platform at Edgware Road and when the train pulled out it started to gain speed, and we were in the darkest part of the tunnel, and there was a simultaneous flash and a sound like a firework going off, and several things happened at once. The train immediately lost power but kept moving. In that flash I saw the air seemed to be filled with tiny shards of glass, raining down. I felt, I saw the access panels in the floor blow out, there was one at my feet, and underneath there was moving machinery, and I felt this invisible hand on the back of my head and my shoulder thrusting me forward in my seat, so I thought this is bad, I'm going into the crash position, and I continued to go forward and buried my face in my newspaper. As a result of that the shards of glass, which had the force of being shot from a gun, went into my scalp and not into my face, my eyes, and they went down the back of my clothing, they just went everywhere, and then there was darkness and the train came to a halt, and there was smoke. And the smoke was not like ordinary smoke, it was a thick, black, greasy, acrid, gritty, almost solid, it was the most disgusting, it was grimy, I mean you couldn't breathe, you couldn't see and you, another survivor described it as putting your head into a vacuum cleaner bag.

People were, we were like, everybody, nobody panicked that I could see, we, everybody was quiet, calm, you had this rising feeling of this inner voice screaming get out, get out, get out. It was an imperative, it was, it was so strong that you had to fight it down because I thought I am so close to panic and if I do, then if one person breaks then others will break. They opened, they got the driver's door open, they got the ladder down at the front of the train, there's an emergency door at the very front of the train, and the driver and another survivor helped me to climb over the hole and to get out. So we began to make our way down between the train and the tunnel wall, and there was debris, there was a girl, somebody was with the girl, she was screaming, she was awake and that she, you could see that she wasn't really aware of her surrounding, she was lying alongside the train wheels. We had to climb past her and I remember saying I'm sorry, but still had this get out, get out, get out screaming inside. Then we came to some more debris, the doors, sort of on me they were at sort of hip height really, and we had to stop and then we were alongside the carriage where the bomb had been and the doors had blown out. So I looked, and then I started to cry and the man behind me, who was covered in blood, put his arms around me and said it's alright, it's alright, don't look, don't look. And if he hadn't done that, because we were stuck at that point, I'm so very grateful for him to doing, for doing that because it did give me strength, because I think at that point I would have just sunk to the floor and decided that, you know, I mean I don't think my legs would have carried me further. When I looked in I knew it was a bomb, and then I looked down the length of the train how far, how many more carriages there were and to Edgware Road where you could see daylight, and I thought there will be another bomb, and it looked like a very long journey to me. We had climbed and then were just sort of directed up the stairs and I kept thinking as I was going up the stairs, I thought where's my ticket if I need my ticket, and of course the barriers were open, and I thought well that's, that's lucky, but then I realised afterwards that's stupid, they'd opened the barriers. And I sort of stumbled into the entrance and someone was looking after someone and he said to me you need to sit down, and I thought that's a good idea, though a woman next to me was hysterical and hyperventilating and I knew, I couldn't think what to do for her so I just sort of patted her back, I thought there must, you know I'm a first aider at work, I know how to deal with this but I couldn't access the information, so I just tried to comfort her by patting her back, and it was so bizarre. And I thought, well I got my 'phone out and I looked at my 'phone and it didn't make any sense to me. I knew, I couldn't remember the secrecy buttons to press to get numbers, I couldn't remember my daughters' names at that point, and I just thought well I'm just going to hit buttons at random.

To begin with it was all very much at the front of my mind, that's all I could think about. Flashbacks last for a fraction of a second, but when they come they replace reality. If I had one now while I was talking to you, I wouldn't be here talking to you, I'd be in the tunnel, and then I'd be back here talking to you. So I was convinced that the flashbacks were real, they were moments of consciousness, and I was trapped down there and dying, and that everything that was going on around me, and this being sort of getting out was an illusion. I thought it was a device my brain was coming up with to make me feel because I was really dying, and the flashbacks were moments of consciousness. It was November the fifth, was going out to a shop in the evening 'cos I'd forgotten something, was just driving and I was approaching a roundabout near my house. Luckily there was no traffic on the road and a firework went off somewhere nearby and, of course, for a second I was right back at that moment when the explosion occurred, and then when I came back there was I approaching a roundabout driving a car. I thought that I would have to learn to just live with this for the rest of my life, it was, I was never going to feel any better, and then when the Trauma Therapy Centre contacted me and offered me an assessment, my counsellor recommended I take that because you have to, you have to do a certain amount of reliving, and the thing is because these trauma memories are not in the right place in the brain, and I had, I mean they assume they know that because they're doing MRI scans and seeing which parts of the brain fire up.

We chose the worst points for me which were my flashback moments, and I had several. One was the moment the bomb exploded, I kept reliving that, and then what we had to do was talk through, through it but in a very calm and detached way. We had to do it because I knew if we didn't do it I wasn't going to get any better, so we went through it step by step, second by second almost, and I chose which ones we dealt with, and the ones that were hardest for me were the ones outside the train. It's a long journey, but when I look back to how I was then I'm a huge distance away. It's never going to be, in ten years' time or ten years away from the event, I'm not going to say it was ten years ago, that's never going to happen, is it, I know that but if it goes enough into the past I can live with that.