

**A Severely**  
**DYSFUNCTIONAL**

**Family** *with Additional  
and Self-Help  
Notes!*

A case study of  
relationship  
breakdowns within  
the author's family

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# A Severely Dysfunctional Family

A case study of relationship breakdowns within the author's  
family

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# PROLOGUE

We all have perceptions of each other and these could be said to be either well balanced or, alternatively, viewed through some prism of bias. Within families, our feelings about each other are particularly personal and perhaps we cannot so easily stand back from them.

Very commonly, if we are part of a dysfunctional family we will not even know that. We will be part of a nexus that has common and shared values that unbeknownst to us, perhaps, defy standards that apply in the bigger outside world. Parental attitudes can become skewed, as it were, and then the children grow up under the influence of some misdirection. Generally speaking, the outside world is reserved about interference in what goes on within families, too.

This, then, is how a dysfunctional family can function and its members not acknowledge the dysfunctionality. Who, after all, wants to own up to being part of a dysfunctional family; and surely to do so must be to be in some very lonely place, wouldn't you say?

On my website, [www.geoffreyslocock.com](http://www.geoffreyslocock.com), such issues are explored and discussed. In my experience, I have felt I have had to come out as being a member of a dysfunctional family and there is some discussion of the reasons why I feel this and for my publishing this work. For example, my siblings feel they are part of a standard family and they feel that the family has to be sufficiently cleansed of non-standard influences in order that it can be a more conventional sort of family. But I think they have been sweeping too much under the carpet.

So, on the basis of these introductory comments, I will now give my account of the feuds, abuse and the heavy-handed browbeating and indeed the personalities that have shaped developments.

## Chapter 1 — Elephant in the room!

My dysfunctional family is something of a wonder to behold. Plus, of course, I am a product of it and am therefore not entirely untouched.

The brief overview much concerns my mother's lesbianism and her inability to function in what she made out to be a conventional marriage; of course, she never intimated that she was ever any sort of impediment to the marriage and the family happening in any complete sense. Her “marriage” started in the nineteen-forties and at that time society had no tolerance for alternative sexual orientations. It was to an extent a sham of a marriage and yet five children came along, me being the second. There was for her an element of the double life but there was also some evidence of some sort of understanding between my parents. Her origins, moreover, were in Alberta, Canada and she came to Wimborne in Dorset in the United Kingdom with her family when she was seventeen. Social values in that Canadian Province at that time were very extreme as regards to attitudes toward non-standard sexual orientations and I do not rule out that the family's major reason for returning to this country was to get my mother straightened out and into a conventional marriage in a somewhat safer country and in a social environment where her past was not known.

We all know that attack is commonly said to be the best form of defence. And I think it to be no coincidence at all that I have come under attack in my experiences within my family. There were also similarities in the ways in which my father came under attack. For my troubles, I would always be critical of my mother, but I believe she rather needed to have a problem child as a rallying cause for other children coming to her support.

She was, in that way, able to gain support from them through thick and thin. And this is how I believe a subtle apartheid-like system developed. There may have been echoes of society's prejudices against gays and lesbians, but it meant that my other siblings were always behind my mother in her protestations that she was *straight*. This term is, of course, the opposite of *bent* and, indeed, we have this vestigial nuance of political incorrectness.

She sort of trumped one card with another. The family environment she created for my other siblings was not ultra-stable; indeed, they all hated me like the devil. But she was able to win a certain amount of acceptance for her seemingly non-standard lifestyle.

A family fails to function well if it does not provide for the needs of all its members. Disowning one member does not, of course, make it a better functioning family. Of course, it can further destabilise such a family, arguably as is happening now with my setting out my overview in published book form. Earlier and within the family I could always set out my views and they were always rebuffed. There is, of course, a profound philosophical debate to be had about whether this family was a satisfactory environment and indeed in this work I am engaging in that debate.

To some extent I was inculcated that I was the cause of all family problems. But, in my

analysis, I never could change myself to satisfy my mother and moreover what was happening is to be properly described as abusive behaviour. My siblings, bless them, will probably never agree with me.

Within a fragmenting family, clear logic and rules of good conduct do not necessarily apply. One comparison is with martial law that is imposed when a nation state's continued existence is at stake. So, for example, I was threatened at one stage by my mother with hired assassins being sent after me. Again, my siblings (bless them) probably felt that sort of thing was acceptable.

They claim to have a strong sense of family, but for me and despite all of my very obvious mixed feelings I have the more practical considerations of how to set about putting my life on a more secure footing. Okay, my origins have been humble in the moral senses but I have watched and been critical.

One thing I have to try to do is endeavour to understand and take on board all of the fragilities without becoming overly sympathetic toward anyone of them and actually find myself ending up ducking some of the issues. Making progress against a background of abuse is made easier if one has some better overall understanding. Outrage may be felt, but it is better to try to mellow such feeling by learning more and more; and sometimes, of course, skilled outside guidance will prove helpful.

Moreover, when one takes one's problems to a counsellor one has to try to explain them. And the moral language of the family has to be better understood because society's standard of what is right and wrong is not the only yardstick in contending with the trauma of events. If one wants to try to preserve some relationships, as I did, then one has to still try to co-exist with others.

In my experience, then, a much more enriched view of the family history needs to be acquired. Certainly, often my first awareness of problems was allegations made against me which did not stack up. But on closer and closer examination I could see the failings of others and the traces of historical detail which were being evaded and concealed.

Most often there will be an elephant in the room in a dysfunctional family. Those in the main nexus will not see it. They will arrange for it to hide behind the sofa or sometimes the television set, where perhaps it could blend in with sympathetically-coloured wallpaper or even a big vista of the open savanna. In more literal terms there was my mother's lesbianism, which they did not think was really true, was not an issue and — in any case — they could help make sure that it was not an issue; instead, they focused on my existence as being the key destabilising force. In some senses, my mother had pressured them to believe in her, above all else. In other senses, they did not want to face the awkward questions that could follow. Maybe they wanted everything to remain consistent with what they had come to accept in their childhoods; being part of a family is a rather important badge that one can wear, after all.

## Chapter 2 — The Chronology

I am aged sixty-seven and I will now set out the chronology supporting the brief overview of dysfunction within my family. After publication, there may be subsequent developments. Also, there will inevitably be aspects of my life that do not get much of a mention within this volume. You, the reader, can check on my website [www.geoffreyslocock.com](http://www.geoffreyslocock.com) to see if later volumes become published. Generally, also, there will be details of any expected publication dates and to some extent, also, of writing briefs and progress being made.

I have intentionally written this work in the form of a case study of familial abuse conducted by a parent and siblings. In many ways, a sufferer can be so victimised that they need help to gain independence to the point where they can sort their own problems out, perhaps as I am doing now. For one thing, in a case such as mine, the victim is barraged with misinformed views about their origins, mental health, strength of character, sexual morality, integrity and so forth. It is correct that I always rebutted such views, but I was subjected to these viewpoints when I was immature and not so worldly wise; and so I could not, of course, form a fully rounded view of myself. Moreover, the fabric of my life became at times very battered under the weight of all the interference. Overall, then, there had been a pattern of intimidation and the origins of that intimidation were obscured to me in my earlier developmental stages.

I was being manipulated with some evil intent, also, it being that my mother was manipulating her children so as to help sustain her own lifestyle and not the other way around of sustaining the proper development of her children. Obviously, though, a parent has to sustain his or herself so that they can be there for their children; but a debate as to justification has to start as to where any means might justify an end. And, in the case of this account, there was insufficient transparency as to motivations because of the extent of concealment.

Going off to consult experts in later life subsequently presented me with an additional complex transference\* issue. The person you are working with is obviously more trustworthy in their opinions than the parent that failed you. But to start with one is going to have profoundly divided loyalties between the bad parent and new good parent role model. This inner conflict I can assure everyone is really painful to experience. For what it is worth, though, that agony provides a useful focus for how you, yourself, learn to become a more competent adult than the failed parent presented as being. One perhaps can learn to accept that one had been failed even though a large body of our instincts in childhood would lead one to blindly assume otherwise. One might want to call this aspect of therapy *self-parenting*.

In such a state as I became in, pulling all the threads together of my personal narrative was not at all easy. With good luck and patience, however, I feel I have now got that rounded narrative together. But what I will say for the benefit of anyone in similar circumstances to those that I have

found myself in is to try to be patient with yourself because when your life starts to fall apart through no fault of your own you, in fact, just need to keep hanging on in there.

Finally, the other children have had some issues. Their beliefs in themselves were to an extent illogically predicated on a false belief in the extent of the fallibility of my father and myself. I, in particular, was presented as being a failed person and yet my robustness has surprised me. My sister Diana, for example, like me eventually suffered from diabetes type II; but she apparently would not consistently take her medication because she believed that she could not have real diabetes. She died rather prematurely at the age of sixty-three; and yet my other siblings could have warned her extensively of the possible consequences of her denial that she suffered from a limiting medical condition.

My mother and my siblings, then, had a strong belief in my fallibility, but they also had a strong or exaggerated belief in their own infallibility. There are shades of grey in such a distinction, but I believe it is to be fairly drawn. There is also a strong thread that Diana herself grew up in miserable circumstances and was intentionally encouraged by my mother to despise me so that she could thereby believe in herself.

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If it is not my first recalled memory, it is the one that has heavily stuck in my mind. It concerns my first day at St John's C of E Infants School, Wimborne. Like so many experiences, it needs deconstruction — for what my mother believed of it or my siblings felt about my mother's dealings with me are in this work being met with close scrutiny. It also belongs to a class of my memories which only became understood by me as being oddball events later in my life as I came to understand that a mother's relationship with her son is not supposed to be of an abusive character.

The school is situated to the rear of the St John's Church and is straddled between Legg Lane and St John's Hill. The main entrance is on the St John's Hill side, but there are two Legg Lane entrances. One is just a pedestrian gateway and that is within sight of the main St John's Hill entrance way. The other is an entry point for vehicles, for it lies by the kitchen of the hall to which hot school meals were delivered.

My recollection is that my mother wanted me to proceed on my own from this vehicular gate and find my way around to the front of the school by passing around two blind corners created by the corners of buildings. She forced matters by pushing me over the threshold. There was perhaps not much point to my protesting my reluctance any further and I made my way. I do not recollect how I was greeted on the other side. But this experience felt utterly terrifying and it has stuck with me. Indeed many years later, when my mother's funeral service was being conducted in the church next door, this memory came back to me with extreme vividness.

With the benefit of hindsight, all sorts of shrewd interpretations become possible. Later events, for example, also indicate that she wanted nothing to do with me; and I believe she was making a point of how she had no participation in how I went to school or was going to make my way in life. Yes, she had got me there on the first day, but that was the end of it, really.

Within the last five years, I recovered a memory which seems by contexts to be of when I was eighteen months old. I seem to have witnessed my mother in a lesbian sex act with the daily help and my mother became very angry indeed with me. There are all sorts of little pointers to this having happened in my various other recollections, too. I believe it is to be inferred that my mother

was very greatly afraid of how I could disrupt her lifestyle and the stability of her dealings, including the durability of relationships with her lovers; she was, after all, a mother of children and that involves not just hard work but some opportunity, also, to enjoy the support from those children in the face of a world which I believe she felt was hostile for her. She would always present that fault intrinsically lay with me and not her; but am I really to be surprised about that after all of these years and after all of these experiences.

What I say here, then is some sort of brief analysis of how it could be that my mother dumped me into a quiet corner of the playground on my first day at school.

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(\*) ***The Transference.*** The term is expert's speak for the echoes of the parent-child interaction that occur in the therapy room. Both the therapist and the person being helped can learn a lot about the nature of the parent-child relationship from the various feelings and emotions that become evoked. The process of such learning involves decoding the workings of unconscious parts of the mind and, later in this work, this is touched upon some more. Although we often think we intuitively know ourselves, the unconscious aspects are deep and primitive areas which can easily be overlooked or even misinterpreted.

## Chapter 3 — After the first day at school

One context to bear in mind in the above experience of my first day at school is that I had a terrible stammer and that may have helped my mother to feel confident that I couldn't tell of her or about her. Another is that doubtless she would have travelled back to the pedestrian gateway to double check that I was finding my way around to the front of the school. From my child's eye view I wouldn't have thought about stuff like that, but then I am not a child, anymore!

I have one fairly vivid fix of a memory with this stammer. I was waiting after school for a bus home with Susan, and other children started dancing, pointing and chanting "He speaks double-dutch! He speaks double-dutch! He speaks double-dutch..."

Susan shouted at them in a terrifying way, "Oi! Stop that!" and magically, I felt, they were silenced.

There is a question about that stammer. My mother claimed that it happened when I returned home from an isolation hospital when I was eighteen months old. But there is so much that my mother said that has to be taken with a pinch of salt.

According to that account, I had a terrible fever and was taken to hospital and deprived of human contact and therefore became deeply traumatised in some way that she could never engage with me, thereafter. I suspect though she reduced me to a state of stammering by torturing me so after I had witnessed her and the daily help engaged in "stuff". Apart from my having been dropped off at school on the first day in the way I described, there are later incidents which show her very distanced and harsh attitude toward me. So, although a recovered memory such as this can scarcely be verified per sé, we can expect to observe some correlations.

By about the age of nine, I had got very good control of that stammer. But by that time, also, Diana (eighteen months younger than me) had developed a stammer. I had wondered in my childlike way whether she had been copying me, but I rather think she had her own emotional disturbances. She, for example, sucked her thumb so much that she had to wear a brace on her teeth, which had started to point outwards.

**– THE SAMPLE ENDS AT THIS POINT –**