

A photograph of Mike Yardy, a cricketer, celebrating with his arms raised in a victory pose. He is wearing a dark blue England cricket jersey with yellow accents. The jersey features the 'T20' logo, '20th WORLD TWENTY20' text, and the England crest. The word 'ENGLAND' is printed across the chest. He has a tattoo on his left forearm. The background is a blurred stadium.

MIKE YARDY

THE
HARD
YARDS

Highs and Lows
of a Life in Cricket

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Introduction

PUTTING together this book has really made me appreciate the number of people who have helped me through my life so far, during the good times and the bad. I would love to mention everyone but that would probably need a book of its own. However, I'm sure they know who they are and how much I appreciate all that they have done for me.

I would like to thank my parents, Howard and Bev, for their unbelievable support when I was a little boy wondering if could turn my dream of playing cricket for Sussex into a reality.

Sussex County Cricket Club have played such a big part in my story so far. Actually, it is people that make an organisation special, not the name. All the people who worked at the club during the 16 years I was player and captain helped to make it such a special time for me.

The coaches and players at both Battle and Hastings Priory Cricket Club, for teaching me early in my cricketing journey all about the values of being a team player.

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Thanks to all the wonderful team-mates I had the opportunity to play with and learn from, for both Sussex and England, and for all the unbelievable support and friendships gained.

And the friends who have supported me whether I was doing well or badly and took the mickey accordingly!

To Bruce Talbot, who has followed my career from the very start, thanks for all your hard work in turning my waffling anecdotes into a book I am very proud of.

Lastly, to Karin and the kids. I'm not one for big gestures but suffice to say you are all amazing and I'm so proud of what we have achieved together.

You have taught me that spending time as a family means so much more than the day to day stuff. It has not been an easy ride for us but we have always faced the challenges head on.

Enjoy my story.

Mike Yardy
Brighton, April 2016

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Breakdown

ANDY Flower knew the signs. I'd spoken to the England head coach when I first left the squad during the one-day series against Pakistan in September 2010. The morning I literally couldn't get out of my hotel bed in Southampton. The morning I was staring at the ceiling and felt like the walls were closing in.

"Look, you'll know when I'm in trouble. Just look into my eyes."

Seven months later we were in Colombo, preparing for the World Cup quarter-final against Sri Lanka. It should have been one of the highlights of my career. Instead, I remember standing in front of the mirror in my hotel room wishing I could pull my own face off and be someone else. I didn't want to be Mike Yardy anymore.

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A few hours later and we were practising under the floodlights. Well, the other players were. I was just going through the motions. A zombie. I felt like my head was in a cloud and I couldn't find my way out.

No one in the England management team knew me better than Mushtaq Ahmed. We'd been Sussex team-mates for six years and when he joined the England set-up I worked with him regularly on both my bowling and batting. He was a friend as well, someone I could confide in.

He came over. I must have looked terrible, that same haunted expression I'd been staring at for the last few days in the mirror of my hotel room.

"Yards, go home."

That's all. Not that he needed to say anything else. He knew. I knew.

My first thought was one of overwhelming relief because someone had recognised I was struggling and, more importantly, was making a decision for me. I wouldn't have to confess how I really felt to anyone. Not to Mushy, Andy Flower or Matt Prior, my Sussex team-mate who must have worn out the carpet in the hotel corridor traipsing from his room to mine to make sure I was okay.

Okay? I wasn't okay. But I couldn't tell Matt. That's the thing with depression. You become a great actor. You're trained to RADA standard when it comes to putting on a brave face.

I went to see Andy. He was brilliant, as he had been since he sent me home from Southampton a few months earlier

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and then put me in touch with Brett Morrissey, a psychologist I'd seen several times since and who was always on the end of the phone when I needed someone to try and explain to me why I was feeling the way I did. Why everything – not just cricket – had become such an effort.

Andy's priority was to get me out of India as soon as possible, not just for my sake of course but to make sure my sudden departure wasn't a huge distraction for the team with such a big game coming up. That was fine by me. The last thing I wanted was to have to look any of my team-mates in the eye and admit I had let them down. That I had let my country down.

They smuggled me out the next morning. The team doctor accompanied me to the airport and the ECB made sure someone was waiting at Dubai Airport (where we had a stop-over before continuing to London) who could take me into the first-class lounge for a couple of hours.

I knew the ECB would have to issue a statement. I told them I was quite happy if it explained that I was coming home to seek treatment for depression. If they had asked me to feign an injury so they could get a replacement for me in the squad I'd have gone along with that, but they had checked the regulations with the ICC. As well as groin strains, dodgy knees and broken fingers, the diagnosis of a mental illness is a good enough reason for a team to call up reinforcements.

Sitting in the lounge in Dubai Airport. My phone starts bleeping, then again, and again and again and again for what

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must have been 15 minutes. Text message alerts. The news was out. I phoned Karin and explained what had happened and that I was on my way home. She was in tears. Later she told me it was because she was worried about the impact that the treatment I would need might have on our families and friends.

She had to tell them, which cannot have been easy. Outside a very small circle of people, they had no idea of the problems I was experiencing.

Our two young children, Syenna and Raffy, were oblivious of course. They would be thrilled to see me earlier than expected when I came back from the World Cup and would be dragging me off to the swings and the park as soon as I'd put my bags down. They were too young to understand why I kept having to go away for long stretches and they certainly didn't realise that for the past couple of years, and on more than one occasion, going off to represent my country was the last thing I wanted to do.

I must have received a hundred texts when I was sitting in Dubai Airport. That was nice and everyone was genuinely concerned but the ones I wanted to receive more than any were from my England team-mates. I felt I had let them down and the only way I would feel even slightly better about my situation would be to read some supportive messages from them.

Kevin Pietersen was first, the others followed. Thank God for that. All I felt as I read them was an overwhelming sense of relief. I just needed that reassurance, that they didn't feel bad about me for leaving the World Cup.

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The statement the ECB had put out in conjunction with my county, Sussex, was now on the internet. Looking back, I'm not sure if I was in the right place mentally to make such a snap decision on what it said. But at the time I felt 'why should I be judged?'

I knew the truth would come out at some stage. There was no point in hiding from it any longer. I'd been living a lie for so long about the extent of my issues, although it would be another year before the penny finally dropped and I realised my illness wasn't actually related to cricket.

It was related to me.