

And Then My Tears Subsided...

This morning I will get out of bed. This morning I will go to school.

Today I will finish my maths test. I will hand in my English project and during the lunch break I will socialise with my friends. I will laugh, joke and talk with my friends. I will tell witty stories about my weekend and before I know it the school day will be over and no one will know how I am feeling on the inside. Then when I get home I can go back to bed and not have to pretend for anyone anymore.+

The words above are from a journal entry I wrote on April 20, 2000. At the time I was 14 years old, in Year 9 at High School. I can remember back to the morning of this journal entry. I barely managed to haul myself out of bed and go to school and when I arrived I could not contain my tears enough to enter the classroom. I walked back out through the front gate less than half an hour after I had walked in.

Experiencing clinical depression throughout my adolescence was at times quite gruelling. I think back to my high school years and I can almost feel the memories of the confusion and the frustration of my dark times. The times of not being able to stop crying for days. The moments I felt pain so intensely I thought it would never subside. My appetite fluctuations, the anxiety and the irritability. The almost permanent fatigue which I felt would never lift because I could rarely sleep through the night. I felt empty and numb and alone. I went through phases of indecisiveness, which annoyed my friends almost as much as it annoyed me. I felt paranoid and guilty and my mood would change in what felt like only seconds. Then there were the feelings that made me believe suicide would solve all my problems.

When I remember back to this time in my life sometimes I wonder how I made it through, how I am still here today. Then, at other times I don't have to think for very long about what helped me and why I am still here. There were many different people and many different things which helped me through these years.

For a long time I did not talk to anyone about how I was feeling. I was incredibly confused and did not know that other people felt much the same way as I did. I thought something was wrong with me and I felt like I should make myself 'normal' again. This was probably the worst thing I tried to do. I was 13 years old, I had never heard validation of any mental illness, I only knew that 'crazy people' were locked away. Around this time the internet was just becoming available for public use. I was able to connect at school sometimes and this was where I could anonymously research what was 'wrong' with me.

Through research on the internet and books I would read in the corners of public libraries, I learned that depression was a real illness, affecting many more people than just me. This brought me a huge amount of comfort . just as reading stories of others living with depression did. It was around this time I felt empowered enough to try and change how I was feeling. I researched every alternative therapy to that of medication

and then embarked on a crazy journey of supporting myself and my illness. I cast back to the years of being 13, 14 and 15 and have some fond memories.

Memories of meditation. Meditating before going to sleep at night and meditating in the mornings before I went to school. Then there were the 'secret meditations' at school when I felt myself losing it. I would sneak away during the day to meditate behind the sports sheds. I often wonder if anyone ever saw me. The meditation was closely followed by the yoga. Yoga, while helping my mood somewhat, was most helpful in plastering my body with bruises, stubbing my toes and on one occasion a small(ish) sized hole in my bedroom wall... thinking about it now it was an extremely irrational idea to think I could do the *Prasarita Padottanasana* in my second session. Aromatherapy was a nice experiment, although the rash I developed shortly after dousing myself in lavender oil was somewhat off-putting. I found herbs to be a little frustrating, I would stay awake after taking four valerian tablets and would only feel sleepy at school the next day. For a few months I would strap on the runners at odd hours and go for runs around the block with what felt like absolutely no success. I would read. Drink hot milk. Not have stimulants. Never eat directly before sleeping.

It was not until I was 16 that I spoke to anyone about how I felt. And this is when things really did begin to change. I had spent so much time pretending to everybody who knew me that I was a 'normal happy go-lucky teenager'. I had tried to stop my tears and dark thoughts all by myself and it was just not working. I remember the day I talked to my Mum about how I was feeling. We were in the car, parked near a park where my little brother was playing. I started to shake and cry and actually did not have to say anything. Mum turned to me and said 'You have not been feeling okay for a long time have you?' We talked about depression and she told me how prominent and common it was in both her family and my dad's family. The pressure which was lifted off me that day was just unbelievable. How I had been feeling was validated and I no longer felt I was abnormal or weird or a freak that had to hide away.

My mum and dad were the people who supported me through what were some pretty dark and terrible times. If I could give any advice to others it would be to talk about how you are feeling . with someone who is older and who has knowledge gained through more years of living. Mum and Dad helped me to find a psychologist, and through seeing her I began to understand what I was experiencing more, and begin to make a 'plan of action'. We made a plan together that incorporated some of the things I had been doing before I saw her. It involved meditation and yoga, as well as new things, such as controlling my diet and listening to my body and supporting it when I needed to. I also played a lot of sport. I found that training for a sport each night after school gave me some time outq my mind would switch off and only concentrate on what I was playing. Medication was always recommended to me but I never wanted to go on it. I ended up going on antidepressants when I was 18 for just a little while: I did not like the feel of them and felt more confidence with alternative medicine and alternative therapies.

Of course there were times that despite everything I was doing to combat my feelings of depression I could not stop crying for days and sometimes was not able to get out of bed. These were the times I needed my family and close friends the most. Mum and Dad would continually talk with me about how I would not feel this way forever and remind me of how strong I was. A few close friends would always be there to help wipe away my tears and make me laugh and feel loved.

I am still living with clinical depression. I go through phases. Phases of feeling only a little bit flat and mostly being able to function as I would like to, and then at other times phases of crying for days and feeling like my depression will never lift. I try and stay away from antidepressants but every few years I find myself back on them because everything else I do does not seem to help enough for me to function how I want to.

I think back to my adolescence and feel so thankful and glad that I told my mum that day beside the park. My mum and Dad are still my major support people, as well as a few close friends. I often feel if I had not told my parents back when I was 16 and started my support network then, that I would not feel as supported now as I am. I feel inspired and motivated to never let my depression crush me and I feel that I want to share my knowledge and feelings of growing up with clinical depression with others. For everyone who is reading this who is young and struggling with depression please know that you will not feel like this forever. You are not a freak and while you may not be able to stop your tears now, one day you will and you will feel proud of and confident with yourself.