

# Frangipanis and freedom!



Once upon a time there lived a beautiful successful young woman who had the world at her feet. Although her career was fantastic and she was admired by those who worked with her, she carried a secret inside. The secret was so horrible that it just couldn't be shared with anyone. However, over time, the pressure of her job became too much and her secret rose to the surface for all to see. This is her story of demise and resurrection.

I was a recruitment consultant working for a major international industry player. On a daily basis the human heart was my concern and I desperately tried to put people into the right job. What began as a passion ended in an inner war where the game was to sell people and the prize was big commission.

When I was well I would put on my sneakers and walk toward the buzz of headquarters. After a while I realised that the people we placed in jobs were not a main concern of the company. Rather, it was all about keeping the client happy, placing a person in a job role as fast as you could, and crossing your fingers that they stayed there. Although there were many success stories and happy customers, there were also stories with unhappy endings. These people were the ones that awakened my horrible secret because I had lied to them and also lied to the client. Putting your blinkers on and hoping for the best was necessary in keeping my job, maintaining excruciating targets, justifying myself in meetings and ensuring the boss was happy.

Allow me to say that the recruitment industry has its place and helps many wonderful people throughout the world. The flip side is the lie that is sometimes told to make a buck. I don't believe that this exposes anything not already known within the public arena.

My sneakers were replaced by taxis as time went by. The energy I had was dwindling and I found myself battling to get to my desk and on the phone. Months passed and I began to cry at the most inopportune moments.

If I wasn't crying in a meeting, I was crying in the elevator or at my desk. Tears would drip into my sandwich and I wondered how on earth I was going to continue living at all.

The dog had moved in on me like never before. We became acquainted when I was fourteen years old but nothing could have prepared for me for the depressive tsunami that was about to hit. For most of my life when "it" came I would carry on and lie to all of those around me. Everything is fine thanks. I'm just a little tired that's all. Yes, I have lost a lot of weight but I've had a virus. Sorry I seem so angry and snappy – I've just had a lot going on lately. The world was in slow motion and I could barely speak, read, or even watch television. Yet, it was still a secret. Sound familiar?

Back to the job. I became known as the company sook. My boss would call me in and ask if I was OK but in my mind she hated me so I wasn't going to share my personal feelings with her. All she wanted was for me to make money. More and more I was under the gun, being watched and questioned why my performance had gone from number one in the world to the lowest performer. It didn't make sense to anyone – least of all to me.

The decision to leave this job became necessary to survive. Getting out of bed took an extraordinary amount of strength so working was out of the question. So I left the company and what remained was a reputation of being “the sook” and a “corporate enemy”. I was even marched off the premises and not allowed to farewell anyone. Of course this was due to the negativity I was casting out upon my colleagues about the ridiculous notion that we cared for people. Human resources! You have got to be kidding I thought. We sold human beings to work for people so our company could make money.

Leaving my work did not ease the pain. Living got harder and harder. It wasn't long before I knew I needed help. This monster was bigger than me. I was drowning in a sea of black bile and had become retarded in every way. My cognitive, physical and spiritual self were functioning at a speed below zero. I had become the walking dead.

Sally was my psychiatrist at the time. She got me on medication for the first time in my life and helped me claw my way back into existence. My first job was a data entry operator one day per week. My whole being was so crippled with sickness that I could barely type a number from the keyboard. I would phone her and say I can't do it. She would say you have to – just one number at a time. Focus only on the minute ahead. Not a minute more. Just the task. That is all you have to do. Start the task. Can you do that for me? I felt as though I had become a five year old child inside.

What followed was a daily diary where she wanted me to record my mood. As one day of work increased to two and then three I would draw a face and give it the appropriate mouth – happy, sad, indifferent and a brief description. Gradually, over many months, the faces became happier more often.

Slowly I made my way back to becoming myself again. Eight months in fact! It took so much courage that I can't even put it into words. What that episode did to me changed my life forever. It's now ten years on and I have experienced recurrent depressive episodes with similar severity. I now accept that it is a part of me but there are things I can do to lessen the blow.

If you have a mood disorder and you are in a job that is too stressful or not in line with your own beliefs then getting out is a form of self-protection. Life for “us” needs to be simplified and appreciated from a different perspective. Make that perspective as uncomplicated as you can. Work is just part of your story – not your life.

As far as colleagues and companies understanding you – I must say that we are still a special breed to the uninformed. Until mood disorders are more clearly accepted by society we will remain a confusing entity to the “norm”. More and more people are accepting the reality of a broken mind but to the majority we remain weak or strange. I urge you to reject the “snap out of mentality”. You need to take a strong hold of yourself, rise above criticisms and believe that you are not your illness. It will bleed you from time to time, but when it's good – the smell of a frangipani is ecstasy just on its own.

Looking back, the company I worked for were probably willing to help. Unfortunately, the illness causes such hypersensitivity that everything becomes distorted. I didn't have a name for my illness until this episode struck me down. Through seeing a psychiatrist and learning about what was wrong with me I became equipped to shed the shame and put my boldness back on. Having a mood disorder is a tragedy and I empathise with you from the depths of my heart if you suffer like I have and still do. Nonetheless it is also a gift, because when the good waves come you see things from a perspective that only adversity can breathe richness into. Like never before, a frangipani will be like heaven! And it is free to smell and admire. What a bonus!

**The End**