

THE DEVIL AND ME

This story is for everybody out there suffering. For anybody who has ever looked around and thought "What a crazy bizarre world, *am I missing something here?* For people who think they may be crazy. For those who struggle in the dungeons of their own mind. For those who have trouble coping with life and just don't know why .

For as long as I can remember, I have had a niggling feeling that something was 'wrong', something was different about me. I remember it clearly in childhood, and this intensified considerably throughout my adolescence and my early youth. When I look back on my adolescence, my memories are surrounded by a grey fog, and tinged with sadness. Many times I convinced myself that I just 'wanted' to be different, that there was nothing at all wrong with me. It's like listening to a symphony of beautiful music with just a few notes off ó it's hard to put your finger on it but you know that something is wrong.

On countless occasions I struggled with daily life ó it's as if someone had tied a brick around my heart, and was daring me to swim. The slow suffocation and strangulation of despair would descend upon me, like a parachute gracefully landing. I could often see it coming, and try to brace myself. Other times, it fell upon me quicker than a swift kick in the guts. It is not enough to just say 'snap out of it'. I would *literally* want to, and try my damn hardest to ó but it was me against the Devil. And the Devil often won. He would take me to highs and lows like never before. Sometimes I felt privileged ó no one else had seen the wonders from the heights I had climbed. The Devil was my best friend, the only constant friend I'd known. I didn't know any better.

But for every time I soared upon the wind, there was an immediate plummet into the prison that was my own dark mind. And you never knew just how long or severe my sentence was. I once heard that the Devil's most sinister trick, was to trick people into not believing him. In floods of endless tears, and bloodied self mutilation on my arms, I would often ask: "Is this all there is?" And more often than not, I was convinced that yes, this was life, just the best it could get. To ask for more would be ungrateful.

My demon had convinced me he did not even exist.

The constant guilt that I felt from being depressed, sometimes about nothing, would hang off my shoulders. In these times, the Devil would be a harsh and pervasive voice, preaching to me the 'shouldsø and 'should notsø of how I should be feeling. When you add a serving of guilt and self-doubt to the already utter despair of depression, it is a recipe for suicide.

For many lucky people, depression and bipolar is but a vague word. It is almost impossible to understand what it truly feels like, unless you have struggled on that dark road yourself. I remember waking up in the mornings, and feeling like someone heavy was sitting on my chest. At other times, I could not shut down my mind, no matter how hard I tried. The adrenaline would cause me to get overexcited and do the sorts of things people would do when they were drunk.

Most of all, there was the daily Struggle between the mood disorder Devil and myself. We were in a toxic, unhealthy relationship. The arguments were constant, with no relief in my mind. They would often last long into the night. I could not shut down and sleep was a luxury. I would often stare out of my virtual cage with longing and envy at all the lucky, normal people, who just 'got it', in life.

These days that intense depression feels like another world, a twilight zone. Hell, sometimes I can hardly even remember what it feels like, until, on occasion, the Devil makes an unexpected and uninvited house call. He tries to convince me of the euphoric times we had together. But now I know better. Those moments dissolve as quickly as sugar in boiling hot tea.

And they leave burn marks. Forever.

So, how did I learn to finally break if off with the Devil, and bask in the warm sunshine of life? It all happened one very ordinary day. For years I'd had suspicions that my depression and extreme moods were a problem 'outside' of myself. Kind of like being born blind, or without a leg. No one can really help this. Years of reading, counselling, meditation, church and much more, pointed out that I had tried my best ó and this was not enough. This illness, *is not my fault*. I am not to blame. Those hours spent researching in the high school library finally came to fruition. The acceptance of depression and bipolar as a proper, classifiable illness, has been for me, the INSTRUMENTAL first step in getting me back on the path I was always meant to be on.

By finally accepting depression and bipolar as an *outside* defect, it opened the doors to the mysterious world of healing. Antidepressants made an entry into my life, and have been MONUMENTAL in balancing my struggle with the devil. If I were born with one leg, antidepressants have given me the other leg, so that I can simply compete equally in the game of life. I am no longer disabled. And this is all I ask for. My fear of antidepressants turning me into a 'fake and boring' person has melted away. I have become *more* of myself, and not less.

And I still have my edge.

The journey to healing and recovery is a definitely a marathon event. It will never qualify for the 100 metre sprint. Along my marathon, I have discovered the GROW program. This idea was a visitor in my mind that I constantly ignored. And then one day I opened the door. Now that door is always open. The first few visits were hard. I wanted to bolt my door shut and pretend I was permanently out. The GROW program, and its members, have cleaned out my mind, heart and soul, and given me a shiny new perspective. It has also given me the opportunity to support others that are in similar boats on the same ocean. In this support group, I can truly B R E A T H E!

I once heard an insightful quote: "You alone can do it, but you cannot do it alone". I'll never in my life forget the night that my own family members, FINALLY took me seriously about my illness. They had never really understood it, and were not necessarily willing to. It took hours of soul baring and conversations deep into the night. But finally, here was my mother, after all these years, loving me and accepting me with watery eyes. She was actually proud of me, and what I had been through. My mum and sisters opened their eyes and saw all my different sides and angles, under the harsh light of the truth. And I was a sparkling diamond.

What then naturally flowed into my life was the ability to see myself as a fragile piece of glass, and take care of myself delicately. I become drained very easily, and my energy is very sensitive. You could say that I am like a mobile phone that constantly needs to be charged, otherwise it will run out of battery very

quickly!! What recharges me is regular, sweaty exercise. Good food. Lots of time alone. Regular naps. Time with nature. Getting rid of outside 'noise': the noise of the world.

I imagine my mind as a large dark cave, with a 24/7 guard standing out the front. His job is to fight away negative thoughts, unproductive feelings, and any other dangerous stimuli. There are times when my guard has fallen asleep on the job, and occasionally, he has gone on holidays without any notice! But I am getting there. He is getting better and better at spotting the return of the devil from afar.

I see myself as a very expensive car that needs to run on premium petrol, in order to function optimally. I am very careful with myself. For example, too much time alone can be isolating. And for someone with a mood disorder, isolation is as easy and comfortable to slip into as a warm coat on a chilly winter's night.

I'm a high maintenance girl ó but I'm worth it.

There are no more struggles between the devil and me. I have seen beauty that no one else can see.

Instead of black, grey and white, my world is now in full, splendid technicolour.