

Depression and My Life

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Depression is a fascinating condition. There is a great deal of value in thinking of it as a disease. For one thing, it responds very well to medication. Further supporting the disease concept is the finding that the brain chemistry of depressed people is different from that of other people and that it is possible to find the same biochemical differences in the brains of animals who appear "depressed".¹ Depression is a grave and life threatening illness—much more common than we recognize. There is a connection between the blues and depression, but the difference is like the difference between the sniffles and pneumonia. A person with clinical depression is one who feels almost no joy in life, who has no hope, no ambition, who feels stuck, powerless, and perennially sad—and who thinks this is the normal way to feel. You cannot connect to other people, you have distressing physical symptoms, You can't concentrate, you feel guilty, worthless, hopeless, and you think about suicide.²

I have it, and I guess a lot of other people do too, but I can only relate my story. The Whale Foundation thought it would be helpful to print a first hand account.

I don't know exactly when it started, but, knowing what I know now, it was rearing its ugly head early in my childhood. The Canyon and the river became a refuge for me without my even realizing it. There were times I would leave it for a "real" job, but my life would go into a downward spiral and I would eventually seek refuge and return to the Canyon, not realizing what was happening. Nothing made sense, nothing made me happy, and one day I noticed that I had stopped feeling. Looking at the walls no longer had an effect on me, like I was dead inside. I saw a therapist at one point. She diagnosed me with depression (I knew I was depressed!) and suggested anti-depressants. That was out of the question for me—I told myself I could beat this—I just had to try harder. .

Ever so slowly the disease creeps into your brain like a dark cloud, until it is so grey in there, being alive has no meaning. At the times it eased up I would venture forth and start a new career, getting involved in life. It seemed if I stayed fanatically consumed with what I was doing I could keep the demon at bay. Other times I would sink into a depressed lethargy, exhausted by my own energy.

I had an overall feeling that life was slipping away. But the harder I tried to get a grip, the further I had to reach. My friends drifted away. I was no fun to be with and I did not want to be seen in this state. I craved friendship and support but the nature of the disease makes it impossible. I felt so worthless, so unworthy. I thought I was affecting other people negatively by my presence. At first people would say "snap out of it" or "get over it". Truly that is the most painful and cruelest thing one can say to someone with depression.

The river, the Canyon, and the community kept me alive until I reached the point of no return—there was no more reason to be alive. I couldn't feel anything anymore and even the Grand Canyon couldn't touch me. I had lost my friends and support from being down for so long and I was having trouble getting along with other crew members, everything was so distorted, I was clinging desperately to little things to hold me together and driving others crazy.

I called the Whale Foundation one day, in a half hearted attempt to reach out and Sandy Reiff grabbed me, saw me immediately at her inconvenience, and for the first time told me what was going on and what I had to do about it—and gave me hope. She not only arranged for further help but followed up on it, which is important because when one does reach out like that, it is in a moment of clarity that might not happen again and it's very easy to slip back into oblivion. She got me pointed on a road to help myself. I do not know where it will take me but I have something I haven't had before—

hope and understanding. Its unbelievably painful and my point of all this is to maybe help anyone else as well. Besides, misery loves company.

Depression is a thief, It robs you of the ability to think clearly, it steals your memory. It stole a large part of my life, and my self confidence. The ability to think good things about yourself goes away, as if there is a hole in your persona. In the spaces it leaves perfectly placed fears that further paralyze you. It boils down to two choices, reach out, or kill yourself. If there is someone to hear when you reach out you may be saved It's a very long road as yet I have no idea of how long.

Depression is not an emotion in itself. It is not sadness or grief, it is an illness. When you feel your worst—sad, self absorbed and helpless—you are experiencing what people with depression experience, but they don't recover from those moods without help. It's Hell. The longer it goes on the longer it takes to turn around. If you can relate to these feelings please get help. They say its curable, it can be manageable.

If you know someone who could fit into the category of depression help them to get help. Its a matter of life or death. I am very grateful to Sandy and for the Whale Foundation. I miss Whale. He is saving my butt (again).

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Foot notes 1&2: Breaking the Patterns of Depression, Michael D. Yapko