

Beginning to Heal from Depression

Nancy Hufnagel

"Over the past ten years, I have been living two different lives—the life that my family, friends, colleagues and teammates see; then there is the life that I see, I live, and I feel. If you asked my family and friends what they thought about me, they would probably tell you I am a happy-go-lucky, hardworking, and confident guy. But all that is a bit of a lie. You see, I am living a completely different life inside—that of someone who suffers immensely from depression.

It is so hard for me to talk about my depression, but it's not just me; it's hard for millions of other people to talk about it, too. What we fear the most isn't the dark place that we are in, or the dark times we are going to go through... What we actually fear the most is that our friends won't understand and that we may lose them, that our family won't understand what we're going through, that our colleagues will look at us differently, or that we may lose our jobs."

This is an excerpt from a video by Doug Leddin where he shares the story of his heart-wrenching battle with depression. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), depression is now the leading cause of ill health and disability worldwide, affecting an estimated 322 million people, including more than 16 million Americans. Depression is strongly linked to an increased risk for substance abuse and diseases such as diabetes and heart disease, and to suicide.

Like Doug, many people suffer in agonizing silence. It can feel like you are trapped in a dark corner where you feel disconnected from everyone and you don't have a meaningful relationship with yourself or your spiritual source. Author F. Scott Fitzgerald, who is said to have been manic-depressive and an alcoholic, summed it up when he said, "In a real dark night of the soul, it is always three o'clock in the morning, day after day."



LET'S TALK ABOUT DEPRESSION

There has certainly been much progress in the area of mental health discussions, yet many are still afraid of the stigma. According to WHO, a majority of people with depression do not seek treatment. It can be easier to hide behind a wall of silence than risk being labeled as weak, inferior, or crazy. Then there are the well-meaning people that tell you to just snap out of it or that you only need to think positively!

It takes courage to be vulnerable. As Leddin said in his video, "The first step to solving a problem is to admit that there is one. How can you expect to find an answer when you are still afraid of the question?"

It took him ten years to open up about his depression, yet when he did, he discovered that people were accepting and caring, that the stigma existed almost entirely in his mind. He says that, in some ways, he hated all those years of living in that dark and awful place alone, and in other ways, he is grateful, because it helped him see the light, it helped him to be stronger than he ever imagined he could be. He shared his story to encourage others to open up. His video went viral, which is evidence that over a million people related with his story.

More and more people in the public eye, from celebrities to royalty, are speaking out about their mental illnesses. In an interview with the UK's *Daily Telegraph*, Prince Harry spoke openly about enduring years of "total chaos"

following the death of his mother, Diana, Princess of Wales, who was killed in a car crash in Paris when he was only 12. He said that he came "very close to a complete breakdown on numerous occasions" and had to turn to a therapist to discuss his problems. He described the therapeutic process as "great."

Personal stories are a powerful tool for breaking down the barriers caused by stigma. When people share their struggles, it encourages others who are suffering to come out of shame and isolation and seek treatment. The adage that "we are as sick as our secrets" is true. By asking for help and finding the courage to have an authentic conversation about our inner life, we come out of the darkness and into the light. Thus, the healing process can begin.

HELP IS OUT THERE

There are mental-health centers in most cities in Montana. They provide psychiatric and counseling services at a sliding-scale fee, as well as offering support groups. NAMI Montana is the Montana chapter of National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). Visit it at NamiMt.org. NAMI is the nation's largest grassroots organization for people with mental illness and their families. Founded in 1979, NAMI has affiliates in every state and in more than 1,100 local counties across the country. Among other services, they help families and friends start up local support groups, and provide education and advocacy groups. They dispel misconceptions and help overcome the stigma associated with mental illness. ■

For more, see our 7-page, comprehensive article on nutritional and lifestyle solutions for depression from our last issue, available in our Archives at: NaturalLifeNews.com/pdf/DepressionNow1.pdf. —Editor