

# An Army of One

by Ken in Ohio

I was first diagnosed with depression in my early 30's, although I suspect it has been bubbling just below the surface of my life since day one. To say it has had a negative effect on my life is a gross understatement. My father was an alcoholic who killed himself when I was just three years old. My mother died of lung cancer when I was thirteen. My inability to think clearly or rationally on any given day has caused me to simply walk away from a number of jobs as well as relationships with those around me. A mix of financial problems and an unexplained fear of the world in general most often keep me from going out and engaging in new relationships. Right now I am an army of one and I am losing the war. I feel like there is nowhere to turn.

My family is as dysfunctional as they come. We are not the happy family that has meaningful conversations and can't wait to see each other for the holidays. All of us suffer from depression to some degree. Although I seem to be the only one who openly admits it. I have not spoken to my older brother in almost ten years. Anger is the only emotion he knows and to deal with him requires energy and patience I do not have. Over the years he has abused drugs and the people close to him, especially his family, and a couple years ago he tried to commit suicide; I chose to ignore him. This especially scares me since over the last few months I have been feeling an overwhelming desire to help others with depression. How can you help others when you can't even help yourself?

My sister is an alcoholic and she will be the first one to admit it, maybe because it is easier than hearing it from someone else. She has been there for me financially on more than one occasion than I can remember, but we have very few brother-sister talks, unless we are side by side on our respective barstools working on a drunken stupor. And then there is the brother I pretend doesn't exist. We are closest in age but farthest in every other aspect in life, something that has slowly taken its toll on our relationship over the years. Put the two of us in a room together and within five minutes the dead silence is almost eerie. Nothing I say is ever right, nothing I do is good enough or at least as good as he can do it. I get angry. He will blame me and vice versa. Nothing is accomplished.

Therapy is the most logical step and I do make use of it when it is financially viable. Unfortunately I cannot afford to go on a consistent basis. While I am lucky enough to have insurance the co-pay for an office visit costs twice as much as regular doctor visit. It is as if those of us who suffer from depression are being punished because it doesn't fall under what most healthcare providers consider a normal problem. The system is obviously broken. If it were working there would not be almost 20 million people in this country with some form of depressive illness and I (we) might have a fighting chance. The most you hear from the media are some statistics or medical facts but you almost never hear from the real people depression affects every day.

The worst part of it all isn't the muddled thoughts or unexplained fears, the stigmas, aches and pains--although these are bad enough, it is the feeling like no one cares. Those who don't suffer from depression don't understand what it is like and those who do suffer from it can't explain how it feels. The rest of the world just doesn't care. I have written letters to countless media sources and so far have been met with no response. I even wrote letters to the Executive Director and someone in the

Development Office at the University of Michigan Center for Depression. I have heard nothing. It is situations like this that have me wondering exactly what it is that keeps me going and then I remember that little spark inside me that believes I can somehow be of help to someone else. It is the one shred of hope I have left. I wake up almost every day thinking to myself, "I can't do this anymore." My greatest fear is that one day this statement will come true.