

## Writing -- the best therapy and it's free

by Deborah in California

From childhood, I vividly remember sitting on top of my shoes inside of the closet, as I hid away and cried. I would cry for hours, if no one caught me and yelled at me to stop. Sadness was my existence; I did not have the words to articulate my experience. Almost every day, I went through an inexplicable pain; not only did I suffer with depression, but also I was being sexually abused, and I did not have the words to voice my experience. Living in a small, rural town during the 70's meant that family secrets prevailed. A book about molestation did not exist in the town library.

The sexual abuse began when I was three and lasted until I was 13; at that point, I was strong enough to fight back, kick him in-between the legs, and tell him I would tell my grandfather what he was doing. He never touched me again, but I still saw it in his eyes. The act itself was always physically painful; but, equally damaging were his innuendos, stares, gestures--a mental and physical perversion. I felt damaged and dirty; I wanted to die. At thirteen, I made my first suicide attempt. The thoughts in my head chattered you must die over and over again. I tried self-medicating with alcohol and promiscuity. Over the years, I was in and out of relationships. Fortunately, school and learning are powerful drugs for me; I dedicated myself to studying and eventually received a M.A. in English, while raising my toddler daughter (as a single mother) simultaneously. Although during that time, I drank bottles of wine at night and cut the entire length of my body, including the bottoms of my feet, with broken glass. My mood was constantly up and down.

I was diagnosed correctly about six years ago. My partner insisted that I be honest with the psychiatrist, rather than saying I was just a little down while hiding my issues. I was afraid to mention anything, because my parents had said it would be used against me. This fear prevented me from advocating for my own healthcare. Based upon my partner's encouragement, I mentioned the cutting (which had transitioned to razor blades), the risky behaviors, such as driving 90 mph, sporadic substance abuse, the emotional-mood rollercoaster.

I was diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder, Major Depressive Disorder, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Hospitalization, therapy, and medications were used to treat me; I believe the medications combined with my writing abilities are what saved me (talk therapy did not work for me; I always held back, probably because of that ingrained fear that I'd get in trouble if I talk.).

When I was prescribed an anti-depressant (in combination with 4 other medicines), the "you must die" chattering mind stopped. I am thankful every moment for my insurance that covers the thousands of dollars of medicines that I take, as well as for my psychiatrist with his in-depth and up-to-date knowledge of pharmaceuticals. I have not been able to maintain consistent employment, although, now that I am stable, I believe I am finally beginning a lifetime career.

I am in the process of job searching and goal-setting; I am considering obtaining technical writing certification to enhance my marketability. My partner, Sherry, lives with me; she has MS, which is a challenge--we struggle between my need to be a caregiver and her stubbornness to be independent. She struggles with my ever-changing moods and behavior, which she cannot comprehend.

I have a 14 year old daughter, freshman in high school, who began living with her father after my suicide attempt when she was 10 (she was away on a trip). I carefully kept my moods and behaviors hidden from her, and fortunately, through therapy sessions, we found she was unaffected by them. Now, she says I want to be just like my mom, because she went through hard times, but she made it and became really successful.

Of course, I am not a Pulitzer Prize winning writer; however, I do enjoy writing, and I believe that I can contribute these skills to help others. Based upon my life, I learned that writing and education eliminate many misconceptions, while providing opportunities for self-awareness, new understandings, and personal growth. My hope is fears surrounding mental illnesses could be alleviated through education; therefore, untreated individuals with mental illnesses may seek out treatment with trust and assurance, while other individuals may develop understanding and compassion. The doctors say that I am high-functioning. I'm not so sure about that. I have accomplished a lot, but I have also been down a lot. I am so good at putting on the perky-Deborah face that I can talk my way out of any hospital, regardless of my actual mood. However, I now manage my illness based on structure and support--regular, healthy meals, frequent exercise, ample sleep, and consistent medication schedule, while surrounding myself with only healthy relationships. And, of course, writing--the best therapy and it's free!