

"It's a battle we have to fight EVERDAY"

by Jamie in Tennessee

I'm not sure when it all started, but I think I've always dealt with depression. I just didn't always understand it. The first memory I have of it was when I was six and my grandfather died. I remember trying to hide my feelings because I thought I felt different than everyone else. I wouldn't even cry. Everyone thought I was too young for it to bother me, so I didn't let them know it did. I was always socially withdrawn because we moved around a lot, so I didn't have any friends except my sisters and brother. When I was seven, my oldest sister (who is 10 years older than me) started to molest me.

I'm not sure why, I guess now I think it was just a normal sexual curiosity she had. It didn't last for long, I'm not sure how long, but she got pregnant and ran away before I turned 8. Life just went on as normal from then on. I didn't know there was anything wrong with what she had done at the time.

When I was 13, a guy I was talking to raped me. It was the turning point of my mental health. I knew that was wrong, but I didn't say anything, partly because I was scared he would hurt me again and partly because I was so embarrassed and ashamed. It ate away at me until I couldn't take it anymore. I started telling my teachers that I didn't want to live any more, but my parents just ignored it, even when I cut my wrist. A teacher sent me to the hospital and I was admitted for 32 days. I was put on meds, but my parents took me off of them when I got out. They thought all I needed was some prayer. I tried to battle it on my own after that. I never let them know anything was wrong. I would cut myself, but only in places that I could cover up so they wouldn't know.

I was raped a second time by a guy that I knew, only this time it went on for a few months. He would come over to the house a lot and every time he did he would do whatever he wanted to me.

I got married to a guy that I only knew for 3 months so I could get out of the house. I did okay at handling things until after my first 2 boys were born. I had two miscarriages before my third son. That's when I began to notice a change. After he was born, my husband left us and cheated on me. We got back together, but things have never been the same. I started to get so depressed that I couldn't do anything, I just didn't have the energy. I started cutting all the time. It became like an addiction and I couldn't stop. It got so bad that I went to my primary care doctor and he admitted me in a mental hospital.

I had to go to the state hospital because I didn't have any insurance. After I left the hospital, they set me up with state insurance that covers only mental health and I was also set up with the mental health facility in my area. It was the worst place I'd ever seen and just made things worse. I was scared to say anything to anyone because I didn't want to go back. It became so bad that I couldn't hide it from my husband anymore. I quickly spiraled out of control and became a regular at other mental health hospitals. Over the summer last year I was admitted 8 times in a 3 month period. I began drinking all the time because I had to drown out the emotions. I had never experienced something so strong that I had no control of. I was set up with weekly appointments with my therapist and bi-weekly appointments with my psychologist. It didn't seem to help. I was dealing with a husband that was emotionally and sexually

abusive. The husband hasn't changed much, but I have.

I had three suicidal attempts, one by cutting my wrist, and two by trying to overdose. The last suicide attempt was just this past January. I tried to overdose. I thought I would take some pills, go to sleep and never wake back up, but it didn't turn out that way. I woke myself up having side effects to all the pills, it scared me so I woke my husband up to tell him to take me to the hospital, but I couldn't even talk. I started having convulsions and the medics had to rush me to the hospital. That was my turning point.

I'm not sure what changed, but I started to take my mental illness very seriously. I've changed my weekly appointment to biweekly with my therapist and I'm seeing the doctor bimonthly..I also have a case manager that comes to my house once a week, I'm going to a group therapy called DBT and I have couples therapy with my husband every two or three weeks.

I've been learning skills to use to cope with life through my DBT groups, which has really helped a lot. I've learned how to self-soothe and use distractions when I feel overwhelmed. We've had a lot of problems with the meds, I think we've tried almost all of them and nothing seems to help, so the skills I'm learning is very important, they're what keeps me alive. It has really affected my relationships in life because I'm ashamed of having this illness. I don't want to get too close to any friends because I don't want them finding out there's something wrong with me. My husband and I argue all the time over it because he thinks it's just something I can decide to get over. I've quit drinking and I haven't cut myself in a while, but it's still a battle that I have to fight every day of my life.

I've realized just how important I am to my boys so I'm really trying hard. It's just so hard not to have anyone in my life who really understands. Nobody understands how hard it is to fight this, how hard it is just to stay alive and not give up. My family thinks all I need to do is get more involved in church and my husband thinks everything is fine and I just need to get over it.

There's never a day that goes by that depression doesn't affect me in some way. It's just by feeling lonely or more extreme like feeling suicidal. To answer some of the questions: I'm 29, I work for my parents, I've been married for 11 years, I have 3 boys ages 10,9 and 4, my highest education is the first year of college,

I was going to school for sign language interpreting but I got pregnant with my third son so I quit school. I live near Nashville, my only hobbies and interests are my kids, they are involved in football and baseball so that pretty much takes up most of my time, and since I don't have any friends they are the only ones I do anything with. If I could change one thing about the way people view mental illness it would be that it's nothing for them to be scared of, we're not all serial killers, and just to educate them on the fact that it's a battle we have to fight EVERYDAY and it's not just something we can decide to just get over and it's magically all better.

I think if other people knew how much we have to fight to just have a normal life they would be a little more caring and understanding.