

I live in a world where time doesn't exist

by Cierra in Colorado

I have been fearful, sad, and anxious as far back into my life as I can remember. It created social problems, family problems, and isolation/loneliness. The first time I started thinking about suicide, I was 10 years old. I didn't know anyone in the whole world that felt that way.

But I thought if I could die, the pain would finally stop. Suicide isn't about doing something to hurt others. It's about pain so big, so consuming, and when you try to find ways to help yourself, nothing helps. Ending it sounds like a gift. I experienced mood instability through school. At times I could make good grades and it wasn't hard at all. Other times, no matter how hard I tried, my mind wouldn't retain information. All these things, including the sadness and lack of energy would cause severe punishment by family and school teachers. I often dissociated and couldn't get grounded. It was hard to be disconnected from the world in which I had to live. I felt so lost.

I married at age 18, and life seemed mostly good, with some serious bouts of depression. We had 2 children after several years of marriage. Life seemed good, but I still had these terrible crashes. I first asked for medical help for the depression when I was in my 20's, when the children were young. That began a long, painful journey, with many medications and diagnoses and misdiagnoses.

By the time I was in my late 30's, we found a psychiatrist in Denver who was really helpful. Still, the breakdowns were more frequent. They hospitalized me for a whole month, and when I went home, it was even more difficult to function. While in the hospital I began to understand that the flashbacks, terrifying memories, and horrific nightmares I'd always had were related to severe sexual and emotional abuse from the time I was 2 until I was 6. As the walls of memory blocks came down, I unraveled. Each new group of memories that broke through the walls of my mind created shock.....I would be physically ill, my body temperature would drop.....it was like having a sudden onset of the flu. It went on for years, these new memories, when I thought they had all surely surfaced.

More than three dozen medications were tried; then they began to try combinations of medications. I had ECT in 1994, with the hope that I could stave off suicide until my youngest child graduated from high school that spring. It helped for a short time, but freed more memories and things continued to get worse. Now, I'm 58 years old. I had the VNS implant in June of 2006. It hasn't helped. After 29 years of marriage, we were divorced in 1998. My children have not been able to cope with me, so they have had to remove themselves from my life. My mother and sister don't believe me, and are furious that I don't have their high energy levels. My family believes mental illness is real...just not in their family. There are few people in my life who have stayed with me.

I moved to a place where I didn't know anyone. I have no contact with people in my daily life. I rarely leave my home. My only contact with the friends who have stayed with me is by email and telephone. I can't deal with people in person. I'm not able to go to lunch if a friend comes through town. I poured my heart into getting well; being a good wife and mother; I volunteered for years, working with foster children, a domestic violence program in our community, and I was active in church.....but as I

came undone, those things faded away. When I lost my faith, that was one of the great losses. It felt like God was just "another back, walking away."

There is much compassion and wisdom from my years of suffering, but no place to put it. A friend asked what my days are like. I live in a world where time doesn't exist. Sometimes I am lonely. Then I remember it's much better than being beat up by those who have no patience with my illness. I don't have patience either, but everywhere I go, there I am. I sleep a lot. I tried working part-time a few times in recent years, but couldn't remain stable enough. I've tried volunteering several times, with the same results. I read a lot. I continue with a spiritual quest, as well as reading for comfort, distraction and a place to 'crawl into and hide.' Reading was a gift from childhood. It served as a good escape since I was old enough to read.

I have been diagnosed with everything from Bi-polar Disorder to PTSD to Personality Disorders to Treatment Resistant Depression. I don't think I'm bi-polar. The meds for that only made me terribly ill and didn't help.

There have also been years of different types of therapy in all this. I worry what will happen if I need someone. The nearest person who might be willing to help me is about an hour away. Mostly, no one is available to help me.

If my children could even tolerate me, which they can't, it wouldn't matter because they both live hundreds of miles away, one in California and one in the Midwest.

I don't celebrate any holidays, which used to be so important. There isn't money for help with housework, etc. Sometimes I think I can't take care of myself. Then I realize the alternative would probably be worse. I might have to live in an institutional setting, and that would be the worst.

Living is not what I do. I'm marking time until I die. That's all. My psychiatrist now is very good. She explained my inability to experience pleasure is called "anhedonia." It helps to have a word to put to the way I feel. Many suicide attempts have failed. People say it's because I don't really want to die, but I did things that worked for others who succeeded. Right now I'm too depressed to hurt myself. I spent almost two years at a clinic in Topeka, KS., mostly in the trauma program. The clinic was sold, and our programs were closed. There has been help for me--help wasted on me that could have helped others. But most people

I know with mental illnesses live in areas where there is nothing available to help them. Nothing to give hope or help. But many people I know have responded to medications and therapy, and to VNS. That makes me happy, and it's wonderful to see people getting their lives back.