

Overcoming depression and accepting things one can not change

by Karen in Wisconsin

I am 30 years old, married, with one son. We are a happy family, but I still struggle from time to time with mental illness. It's something that runs in my family - my grandmother was one of the most severe cases, and had multiple suicide attempts; my grandfather committed suicide when he was 82.

As a child, I was extremely sensitive and very easily hurt. I remember I saw things that weren't there - faces in the walls and people in my room. I told my mother and she dismissed it as bad dreams.

I first noticed my depression symptoms when I hit puberty. I became extremely sad and, at times, fantasized about my own death. I went from being angry, sad and withdrawn to being wild and carefree. I was fearless - felt like I could do anything without consequence.

After three devastating events in my life, I was in a downward spiral. I started cutting myself. I felt like it was the only thing I could do. I was too ashamed of the things that had happened to me to tell anyone, so I was all alone with this big weight to bear. One day, I decided not to use the cutting outlet anymore, and I switched to anorexia. I lost almost 40 pounds in less than 4 weeks. My family started to really notice and I was afraid of having to talk about my depression - I was afraid of being ridiculed and humiliated, or worse, being ignored.

I allowed the illness to fester into a mass of hurt and anger and disgust and rage. Ten years or so after I started to feel these things, I was made to go to the doctor by my supervisor at work. I had cried for hours and couldn't explain to her just what was making me feel so horrible inside. My first insight into what was eating at me was when the doctor told me I most likely had depression. It was then that I realized, Hey, I do have something real - something REALLY real - and I don't have to be ashamed of it anymore.

It's been almost ten more years since I took that first step. It has taken this long for me in treatment to get to a point where I can accept the things that I cannot control. I can accept the wrongdoings of others at my expense. I can accept that I will never change it, no matter what I do. It took so long to get here, and the road has been really, REALLY rough.

Three years ago, I was hospitalized on suicide watch. Apparently I was just on the wrong medication and was unable to cope with life anymore. So, it's been really hard. It's also been worth it. I now appreciate life so much more. Sometimes, I find myself looking at the blue sky and the billowy white clouds, and I think how horrible it would be if I couldn't be there to see it. How horrible it would be if I hadn't reached out for help when I was ready to end my life three years ago.

I am so thankful that there are doctors and therapists out there who are willing to work with you no matter how long it takes. I'm thankful for my family and friends who supported me during some of my worst times. I wish I could help people understand how real mental illness is. It's no more made-up than cancer or AIDS or MS. It's real - and it's painful. But, it CAN be controlled. It takes the right combination of professional help and a major attitude overhaul, but anyone out there can overcome

it. I still take things day to day, but I no longer dread waking up in the morning. Life's good....