

"Lynlee's story"

From very early in my childhood I experienced long bouts of depression. I had not developed skills to manage stress or to be able to articulate my feelings of abandonment and lack of self-worth.

At age 12, I began taking Zoloft and Ritalin. I remember the first visit to the psychiatrist. I wanted her to help me, I felt lost and very alone in the world. I saw that my peers seemed to enjoy life and feel comfortable in their own skin. I envied them and desperately wanted to join them in their happy world. The psychiatrist validated my feelings that something must be wrong with me. She didn't look me in the eyes very often but I left her office feeling hopeful. She said I probably had a chemical imbalance and that I could be fixed with the medications she would prescribe. If I followed the directions on the label I would soon find myself included in the world of normal children.

My mother was waiting for me in the car. I remember she was talking on her car phone. I silently showed her the prescription and she drove in the direction of the pharmacy. I went into the pharmacy by myself as my mother was not finished with her conversation. I waited while the prescriptions were filled and added to our family's tab. I got back into the car, mom asked if I got what I needed and then made another call which lasted the duration of the ride home. The next morning I began taking the pills as instructed.

For the next 14 years I was prescribed almost every SSRI on the market with lithium, anti-psychotics, anti-convulsants, tranquilizers and even the outdated drugs, Pamelor and Melarill. Over the years of psychiatric treatment I was diagnosed with major depression, ADD, bipolar disorder, schizoaffective disorder and borderline personality disorder.

At age 21 I went through my first round of ECT at Wake Forest University. I went through 2 more rounds in my mid-twenties, both at Wake Forest. As my mother said, we were looking for the "silver bullet", the magical pill or procedure that would cure me of my "madness". I am convinced that the combination of shock treatments and medications have permanently damaged my memory and some basic cognitive functions.

Finally, at 26 years old, I started to wonder why none of these medications or shock treatments had worked. My husband refused to accept that I was fundamentally flawed and encouraged me to break free. I stopped taking the medications. My childhood was gone and I had never come close to that dream of normalcy. I still hated myself without really knowing why or what I could do about it. I had followed the doctors' instructions carefully, I had done what my parents told me to do but I kept fantasizing about suicide. I wasn't happy enough to consider living to be worthwhile. I wanted answers or I wanted death.

Dialectical Behavioral Therapy was recommended to me by the counselor I was seeing. This therapy involved a weekly group session as well as an individual session. I began to pick apart my patterns of behavior. I began to see the dysfunctional tendencies

within my family and to comprehend the *why* of my pain. I mourned my unhappy childhood (sometimes I still do). I distanced myself from the parents who had hurt me and continued to manipulate me. I was ashamed to learn some things about myself but I also learned that as long as I was making an effort to improve my life, I could also learn to forgive myself a little bit at a time.

I am now 29 years old and have been off all medication for 3 and a half years and have never felt better. I realized that the doctors and my parents were telling me that I was not in control of my life. I needed to sit back and let them fix me as I was helpless to help myself. My intensive work in Dialectical Behavioral Therapy with some very insightful counselors has helped me to learn to take responsibility for myself, a lesson I learned rather late. I will always have to work hard to battle my demons. There is no finish line, no cure, no end to the need to strive for self-awareness and improvement. I still experience depression but the utter hopelessness is gone.

My husband and I have an 18 month old son and he is the best teacher I have had to date. I know that I have already made mistakes with him but I also know the importance of taking responsibility for those mistakes, apologizing and working harder for his sake. Of course, my son is his own person but sometimes I can't help but see myself when I look at him. He needs my love, guidance and unwavering support to feel essential and worthwhile. I endeavor to offer him what my parents were unable to give me. I have hope at last.

I do not feel comfortable telling others what they should do to improve their lives. My path is unique to me. My answers are not necessarily valid and sound for anyone else. I feel strongly that many people are being damaged by the very unscientific practices of psychiatry. I want to help and protect those people but ultimately everyone must make their own way up from the depths of depression. Self-improvement is gratifying but it is frightening and at times, humiliating. I think the best we can do for someone suffering is to offer a hand; it is always their choice whether to accept our help or to turn away. Emerging from the fog of misery is an individual choice that can only be made when the time is right.
