



Each of us
is part of the solution
Let's end mental health stigma together



We need to talk about depression (so why not start with mine)

Depression has symptoms. They may be obvious or subtle, but mostly they have one thing in common: feelings. I've been writing since I can remember. I would write for everyone or just for myself, for specific groups or individual people. Some people need to run, to cook, to be outdoors or to see friends every day; I needed to write, even when I didn't read my own writings.

For two years I lost the pleasure in doing one of the things that I enjoyed the most. I lost count of the times I put a pillow behind my back and made myself comfortable with a laptop on my lap, only to shut it down soon thereafter since I could barely write a sentence. I tried it with new and old notebooks, with fancy pens, I tried in the evenings and in the mornings, I used candles and music, I tried at home and in cafés, while travelling or in random places. I even went on a winter retreat to a small town in the south of an island, to spend four days totally dedicated to writing. Yet nothing would come out. Nothing.

As I closed the notebooks or shut down my laptop I would lie in fetal position and close my eyes, tears coming out with no mercy. No matter how hard I tried to wipe out my emotions they would always find a way to escape, confused, through each pore in my body.

Today I know I spent two years facing blank pages because by writing I was trying to let out a soul that my depression had emptied. Like a clogged pipe or getting stuck in traffic; you stay there against your own will, you run out of fresh air and everything you see is blurry. There are thoughts and feelings crossing and running around, and you don't even know if they're yours or other people's.

Nevertheless – and for my own misery – there was clarity in some things. Mainly the clarity about that exact misery. My sadness, my emptiness, my apathy. The distress of not being able to articulate what was going on inside me, of not being understood, of feeling ungrateful and useless. And all that was wrapped up in a shiny paper called Guilt, a bitch that only made everything worse.

Sometimes the only relief was to switch off; to fall asleep hoping I would wake up thinking about work or some triviality to keep my head busy. And even when I managed to fall asleep I would wake up at five in the morning with eyes wide open and spend the day feeling tired. I went through long periods of apathy, facing my wardrobe unable to decide what to wear. Many hours searching for entertaining things to do, only to become exhausted and eventually give up. Too many tears for no apparent reason. Many days in the office wanting to insult colleagues simply because they were there or because I could hear some inaudible noises. And too many negative episodes multiplied in my head, catastrophising daily life as though the worst was about to happen.

Too many meals replaced by sugar, for chocolate and cakes would calm me down before they could – like with any addictive substance – warn me they would only make me feel worse. Few but intense psychosomatic episodes took me to the doctor – even to emergency services – with palpitations and numbness that I could locate in my body, not my mind. And for so many weekends it felt so much easier to stay at home, for going out implied putting on a mask and pretending or, when failing such a herculean task, having to explain something that I didn't even understand. Tiredness, apathy, sadness, emptiness. Guilt.

Thankfully, in the absence of my writings I spent endless hours reading – books and online. I was pleased to find a “me too” world through which I joined a global, virtual community. Science explained to me that all this was natural. So many people helped me while I remained an anonymous observer and reader, making me now want to help others too.

So I say to those who read me from the other side, even if you're anonymously silent, stuck in your own soul like I once was: everything is going to be okay.))

Déborá, 31, Portugal

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