

"Lifelines"

What should have been the beginning of a new chapter in my life almost became my last. That's the thing about depression: you never see it coming. It was my first semester away at college - at my dream school, nonetheless. I quickly found a group of friends and joined a sorority, and I was happy. Merely two months into the school year, I became severely ill with mononucleosis. I suddenly found myself far away from home, sick, and terrified.

My story isn't about 'mono'. My story is about the depression that quickly followed my diagnosis. For anyone who has experienced or witnessed depression at its worst, I am sorry. Each of us who have lived through it have our own way of describing what it felt like. In my case, life was worthless. Every object in my room became weapons of suicide. I hid my scissors, knives, and even pencils away, for fear of what I would do to myself. My mind was plagued by 'the dark thoughts,' as I called them, and they never stopped. Not even when I was asleep. Sometimes I would clench my hands over my ears and scream just to drown them out. I stopped trying in school because I knew I would be dead before long - what would be the point of it all?

I remember thinking, 'I am my own murderer.' - and there was no place to hide.

I withdrew into myself, away from my loved ones. I slept all day and cried all night. Everyone who knew that I was physically sick wrote off my emotional suffering as a side-effect of my illness. The Epstein-Barr virus lingered in my blood for seven months. My depression left a permanent scar on my soul, and to this day I live in fear of its return.

I was advised to conceal my clinical depression from the outside world. They feared the stigma and rejection that unfortunately comes with the diagnosis. They told me that once everyone found out I was depressed, my friends would run for the hills, people would talk, and I would be treated differently. I knew I couldn't go on faking a smile and a laugh when I was dead inside. I told my closest friends and family about my depression in the hopes that they would understand.

My closest friends did understand. Other friends did not, and quickly fell by the wayside. (They must not have been my friends to begin with.) But those who did care were by my side through it all. I was able to call them and say, "I feel like I can't be left alone right now," and a friend would come running to see me through the night.

I am proud of the choice I made to open up to the people in my life. Even if they did not understand depression, they understood that a person needed help. Not once was I ever made to feel weak or like a burden by anyone who knew. Instead, I was met with compassion. Now that I am rid of my depression, I proudly wear it like armor. I feel lucky to be alive and in my heart I always remember that I am strong enough to overcome it.

Ego has no place in illness, whether it be physical or emotional. If a friend came to me about her depression, I would rather she call me a hundred times a day, every day, than to never hear her voice again.

~When it gets dark enough, you can see the stars.~