

Loving your disorder

Monday, 25 May 2009

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Hi, my name is Maggie and I am a panic attack survivor. It has been a week since my last panic attack, and before that, it was probably six months. I have to say, this last one felt like nothing compared with the first one I ever had 5 years ago, because with each one, I'm finally learning to care less and less when they happen. It's been an amazing journey, and I remember reaching out for support at the beginning, so I really would like to return the favor and share some words of encouragement.

My life changed forever when I had my first panic attack my junior year in college in Colorado. It was near final exams, and I remember that I was dating a guy I didn't really like. I was working too hard, partying way too hard, and generally coming to terms with growing up. I went to babysit for a family that I always took care of, and as I stood in the kitchen talking to the mom, the strangest feeling took over my body, and I had an overwhelming urge to flee. I don't need to relive the symptoms for any of you on here... Let's just say that when I made it home, I was close to suicidal. I suffered a couple days before breaking down and telling my dad on the phone that I thought I was losing my mind. Thank God for him and for the student shrink at the university clinic, who uttered the life-saving words that I was begging for.

"Many people have gone through a period in their life where they had panic attacks, and they never have them again." I wanted to kiss her, and I became determined to become one of those lucky people. That was a 5 years ago, and while I'm not quite there, it no longer has me. Here is my own personal healing journey:

I cut my classload in half the next semester. In retrospect, I could have handled more, but I felt it was important to respect myself and what I was going through.

I dropped any classes that required public speaking, which was my biggest trigger point. I wish that wasn't such a wimp about it, but I didn't feel strong enough to face it at the time.

I stopped drinking coffee indefinitely.

I stopped drinking booze, again indefinitely.

Same with any recreational drugs.

I started working out every day.

I tried an anxiety med, but gave it up after a couple weeks. Sure, the anxiety went away, but so did general feeling. I felt with true conviction that I could beat this thing faster, and more permanently, without the drugs, so that is what I chose to do. I am no way condemning anyone's personal decision about their body and mind. More than anything, I believe we

have to trust our own gut and bodies when choosing how to heal, and this was my choice for my body.

I talked to a shrink. This only lasted a couple times, because I had no rapport with the guy, and no insurance to see anyone else. Instead, I allowed myself, no forced myself, to share what I was going through with those close to me. Yeah, I felt like a hoo-ha, and I worried that people would judge me, but it was my only choice. I knew that keeping it inside kept it potent, which is the exact opposite of what needs to happen.

Over the last five years, I've had numerous panic attacks. I've breathed through them, I've told people while I was having one, I've wanted to die, I've felt sane again, then had setbacks, but mostly I feel more and more stable. I hardly ever have them anymore, and I feel like I finally figured out the reason why this year!

I used to worry about what would happen if I had one. What if I was with a client, or driving? During the panic attack, I was so terrified about what it was doing to me, what it was turning me into, what other people might think of me, that I might never heal, that I might die, that I might kill myself even. Something shifted in me a few episodes back where I just stopped caring.'

Mostly, I stopped caring if people thought I was crazy. If I lost a client, so what? I stopped caring about what was physically going on in my body, because I knew it would eventually pass. I stopped caring if I ever have one again. I feel like I have a full, beautiful life, so if I have to go through this every now and again, it's not a big deal, right? I stopped resisting the feelings going through my veins, and tried to lean into them, to accept them. My world no longer feels shattered after one. In fact, I had forgotten about this last one within 10 minutes.

I'm not sure what enlightened me. Maybe it was something I read. All I know, is that once I stopped trying to escape the attack, my mind slowly lost interest.

I hope that all of you respect and recognize your own personal journey of healing. I hope you know how much power you possess to beat these things. I hope you remember that if your mind is strong enough to create these monsters, it is strong enough to heal itself.

I hope you focus on the people you love, and the activities you love to do. The fuller your life is, the less room there is for unnecessary clutter.

I hope you can wake up one day and say "once, there was a time in my life when I had panic attacks." I hope you realize that if that never happens, that might be OK too.

I hope that you have plenty of love in your life, and that you may recognize it, wherever, however, and in whatever shape it possesses.

Oh, and in case you are wondering, I now drink lots of coffee and have red wine most evenings!Â I also have two beautiful children and a lovely partner.Â When I envision myself 5 years ago, mostly I give that girl a big fat hug. Â