

Anxiety and work

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My story is about how anxiety and panic attacks were triggered by work pressures and my struggle to manage them over the last eight years. Learning to make the right choices, enjoy the small things in life and laugh at its absurdities has been part of my journey.

I was first diagnosed with panic attacks and depression in 2001 when I landed up in the local medical centre unable to breathe, my right arm shaking like I had palsy and an inability to speak without stuttering. I was referred to a psychiatrist by my GP and spent two weeks in the local psychiatric clinic while they tried to sort out meds and I participated in group therapy sessions followed by CBT with the lovely psychologist/ psychiatric nurse working at the clinic. When I looked back over the past three years of my life I could understand how it had happened - a toddler, completing a Masters thesis and working in a very challenging and difficult job that entailed considerable long distance travel and underlying fibromyalgia had finally taken their toll.

It took me two years before I started to work again seriously. Things went fine for a couple of years but I made the mistake of taking a job that meant I could only spend weekends with my husband and young son and that turned into a bureaucratic nightmare with again, considerable long distance travel. I started weeping at the slightest thing, when under pressure the arm shaking and stuttering recurred, and I was less and less able to work effectively. So I resigned, had a year working mostly from home and then took a new job - local that required some travel, but manageable.

My husband retired about three years ago and has been working as a home based consultant in his particular field. All well and good, until he spent six months working on a project last year and still hasn't been paid. Our financial situation became more and more dire until we had to go to a debt counsellor. So my old friends anxiety and panic came to visit again and I found myself once again back with the psychiatrist, the clinic, the meds and the psychologist. I'm once again fairly stable but it only takes a bit of a financial crisis, like being paid late, to trigger the anxiety attacks.

I'm surviving but I know now that this is something that I will have to deal with for the rest of my life. It's manageable but not curable given the current state of psychiatric medicine. My husband is my rock, feet firmly placed on the earth, and my son is my joy. I've always been a keen observer of nature and I take pleasure in the birds on the bird feeder and the humpback whales playing in the sea that we can watch from our balcony. My life is good in so many ways and I thank God for that and the loving family I have who care about how I am. My mom has had a really tough ride through life with her health but her ability to find laughter in darkness is something I treasure. Sometimes I fall off the J-board of life but I still manage to get back on and keep riding.