

My Mental Illness and Addiction

By Jim Rachels

I'd like to start off this article with the fact that I suffer from clinical depression and bipolar one. I also suffer from OCD and ADHD. I mention this only so you of those reading know that I have first-hand experience with this topic. I'm not just regurgitating facts and numbers that I've heard or read somewhere. I have lived with this all my life and would like to use my experience to hopefully help someone someday. I know sometimes just sharing about your experience can end up helping someone somewhere in a time of need. To show someone they're not alone.

This morning I woke up, then immediately tried going back to bed. I tossed and turned. I tried laying on one pillow then I tried laying on two pillows in hopes that would help me fall back asleep for some reason. I was doing anything to go back to bed and avoid the day I was going to have to face. Finally, I decided I would lay in bed but watch the show on Hulu I just started watching. Again anything to distract me and avoid having to get out of bed which means I now have to face the day.

I looked over at the plethora of prescription bottles on the side of my bed. I then took my handful of pills for my OCD, ADHD, Bipolar and anxiety. I then finally made my way outside the bedroom and onto my couch. I was wearing nothing but a robe. Couldn't even gather the strength to put on a shirt and a pair of pants. Not that I had a clean one available to wear. And I hadn't brushed my teeth in days. Finally, I looked at a picture of the three cats I used to have with who I had an incredible relationship with and just started crying hysterically and quite loud. Definitely loud enough for my neighbors to hear but they are used to hearing that. It's nothing new to them.

Those cats saw me through a lot of times that I was depressed. They especially helped me along in my "dark times", which lasted about two years and was just a sad state of affairs. I lived in filth. That's the only way to describe it, just utter filth. There was mold on the sink full of dishes. There were maggots crawling around in my garbage. And I had more flies than I'd like to talk about right now. I was the epitome of a depressed man through and through.

All in all, it's safe to say the depression sucks. Especially clinical depression. The reason I say that is with clinical depression or bipolar disorder we never know when it is going to happen. We could be having the time of our lives one night and by morning questioning why we haven't killed ourselves yet. That was always my go-to saying when I got really depressed; "Why don't you just go fucking kill yourself!" or telling myself that I would never ever be able to find someone to love my crazy ass. And when I'm at my worst I truly believe this is how everything really is and that things will never go back to the way it was before. Anyone with any of these issues know exactly what I'm talking about.

To try to describe what happens inside my head is quite difficult, but I'll try my best. The first thing is when I wake up immediately I feel a heaviness that was not there the day before. It's hard to explain. The best way to describe it is you know when your sick with the flu and your body just feels exhausted? It's very close to that. Not so much the aches and pains but the tiredness is all there. There's also a fogginess of the head that comes along with all of this. You just feel a bit off and a little slower than usual. It also affects the entire body. For me it comes with a little indigestion sometimes. Or sometimes I'm completely not in the mood to eat a thing and other times I just can't stop eating. I never understood that.

I eventually got myself up and into the shower and shaved and even brushed my teeth for the first time in a few days. It took some strength but I was able to gather that. I then had to go meet a friend before I went to work. I was able to do that and make it to work on time. Most take for granted how such seemingly easy things to do can become impossible-seeming tasks for people like me.

So where do my addiction and mental illness cross paths? For me today it was food. This might sound dumb to someone reading this that may be addicted to meth, cocaine or heroin. But guess what people do eat themselves to death. I do have alcohol and substance abuse problems as well but I consider this one just as deadly. If I don't get my act together I'm a walking candidate for a young heart attack or possibly diabetes. I've got terrible blood pressure and cholesterol issues. Yet today I have eaten about fifteen maybe twenty cookies that they were serving at the holiday party my job was hosting. That's in addition to a dinner plate. The food gives me a high and the addict inside of me just keeps saying "just one more" and it won't stop.

I truly believe if it wasn't for the food addiction along with my caffeine addiction I would be back to using drugs and alcohol. I definitely feel this is a replacement and that is no good. I might as well as consider it a slip in my mind. Why not? I said that I wasn't going to eat garbage anymore and I did it and it has negative consequences for my body and mental health. The bigger you are the worse you feel. Physically, mentally and emotionally.

As the day went on I noticed something that should've been more obvious much sooner which was I had not had any espresso the day before. Sometimes you just don't realize how much you rely on something until you don't use it and it affects the mood you're in for the rest of the day. The second I got some caffeine in me I was feeling better. I'm not one hundred percent but I'm feeling much better.

So the question I keep asking myself is now that I see right in front of my face that I am addicted to things that drastically affect my mood do I continue using them or not? And how does my mental situation come into play as I make these decisions? I think all of us with experience know that the decisions we make while we're down and out are not always the decisions we make when we have a clear and level head-on. I guess this in a way can fall into the "Harm Reduction" model. I'm simply replacing drugs and alcohol with things that are not as bad for me. That's a discussion to be had in another article.

As of right now I'm feeling much better. To speak more about recovery and mental health I want to talk about the group. Addicts Anonymous has become part of my heartbeat and a reason to always get up and go even when I'm not feeling up to it. In the traditional steps programs, it is step twelve but here in Addicts Anonymous, it is our tenth step. To take the gift of sobriety and pass it on to the still-suffering addict. Doing this has immense benefits. It's a time-honored thing that we see which is that one addict talking to another has more power than any other conversation that addict may have with another person. It shows that the founders of AA were onto something and as Bill W. always said to take this gift and just "pass it on."

The day has passed by from when I first started writing this article. I started writing this morning and now I'm in bed typing away late into the night. It's funny how little things throughout the day can change your view of things. I hopped on one of our Chill and Chat Zoom meetings and it completely changed my mood. Being around my fellow addicts where I feel welcome, loved and understood really changed my mood around. It shows that fellowship and community are vital for my recovery.

And as I'm writing this ending to the article it is now the next morning and I'm feeling much better. I woke up this morning and was able to get my routine done with no problem without getting upset over anything. I got to work early and now I'm working on this. That is why community is the fourth pillar of our program. With the right people around you and being part of the right community so much more open up for you in this new life of sobriety. Yesterday was proof of that for me. I ended up being on one of our Zoom calls for three hours. It was great and I needed it more than I wanted to admit at the time.

For now, I'm going to keep fighting the fight and hang in there for the long haul. This is something that I can't let defeat me. I know it's a battle day in and day out but it is worth fighting. I have seen the positive sides of life and I want more of those. This is a fight for my life and I don't intend on losing that fight.

So for those of you reading this that are suffering from depression or bipolar just know you are not alone. There are many people just like you and me that face the battles on a daily basis. This is something chronic and there is no cure. But you can manage the symptoms to the best of you're ability and lead a life worth living. Never give up hope because as they say "it does get better."