



# The View From My Window

~ a personal journey through mental health

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## Chapter 1

Hindsight can be both beautiful and cruel. As an analytical person, it can be a fun experience to look back and see what could've been. A small decision with time and the butterfly effect can mean major differences. It's interesting to think about but with mental health issues, it also can be dangerous, it can lead to negative loops of thoughts that often only lead to trouble. In general, when you get in your head too much you'll likely begin overthinking and start worrying about things that shouldn't matter. The important thing is to not panic in these situations and to talk yourself out of it. With that said the first part of the series is going to be me looking back for when my anxiety/panic disorder really began affecting me. Being analytical and self-aware from a young age, I always knew I was an introverted person. I didn't like being away from home and was just in general uncomfortable in most social situations.

I always assumed I was 100% introverted and didn't learn until I was deep into my recovery process that, although I am introverted, I'm not as introverted as I had believed. In reality, the split is closer to 70-30 meaning roughly 30% of the time I do enjoy extroverted things such as socializing in groups. However, that 30% was masked by anxiety, even though I do like certain social situations the anxiety in me was telling me I didn't. Subconsciously I built a defensive mindset that I was fully introverted because that meant there was nothing wrong with me, I just didn't ever like being social, plain and simple. In reality, and the truth that I subconsciously blocked out I was sick, I was suffering from mental illness and never really wanted to admit that there was something wrong with me so I taught myself to truly believe it was just my personality not something wrong with me. This subconscious defense buildup can theoretically be attributed to many different things; perhaps it's because I was praised for results instead of effort, maybe it was the subconscious need to meet society's standards of men or just the stigma around mental health.

Truthfully it really doesn't matter why it happened it matters that it happened. This mindset didn't only affect my mental health it affected physical health as well as school life. Growing up (and to this day) I loved hockey, being in an arena playing or watching is

an unmatched feeling for me. Even deep into my fight, hockey was the one thing I could count on being normal. I was always comfortable playing hockey, in the dressing room etc. even when I was in a room full of strangers and when I was unable to attend school. I took hockey very seriously and because of this I was often banged up. I loved putting everything on the line for the team and often blocked shots and put my body in danger for the love of the game. No matter how bad I was hurt I wouldn't go to the doctors. This could be attributed to many different things as well but the important point is it made admitting that I wasn't mentally well that much harder.

How was I supposed to say I was having trouble being at school when I openly walked around with suspected broken bones in my feet? I had trouble focusing in school. I acted out as a distraction. I have always been quite successful in school and it took until very recently for me to be comfortable and open when I didn't understand something. I was always expected to be smart so, when I was struggling, I couldn't ask the teacher or friends or my parents for help. This is in part caused by my mental illness and honestly also by a fundamental flaw in society but that is a topic for another day. The important thing to note is that we all build our own levels of defence. Whether they're obvious to everyone or even to ourselves, is never consistent but those defenses are there and that is okay.

Mental illness is especially hard because there really isn't an enemy to fight and focus on. It is sometimes hard to know what is real when dealing with mental illness and was the illness is tricking you with. For months after I was diagnosed and in therapy, I still had nights where I laid awake wondering if it was real or not. I can without a doubt confirm mental illness is real and although it will play tricks on you, the problems it causes aren't your fault. It's very hard to keep track of who you are when you battle mental illness and even harder when you're young because you don't fully know yourself regardless of the illness. It's not easy but through the process of recovery you will discover yourself, you will get better and you will realize that although the problems were real at the time, they no longer have power over you.

Another important thing to remember is nobody can go through this alone. I went from being able to walk off and ignore any physical pain and seemingly never struggle with school to sitting in a doctor's office crying while my mom explained to the doctor what I had told her the morning before and doing school from home because I couldn't gather the strength to get to school. This was very hard for me to come to terms with and even now hurts me a bit to type out but it is important to share I thought I was strong enough to keep going and I wasn't. Without the support from my team of doctors, my family and friends and my school support I wouldn't be here today to share my story. I don't say this to make you feel bad but rather to confirm you will need help and that is perfectly normal and okay.

It's hard to ask for help or to even admit, to yourself or others, that you need it but the fact that you're reading this likely means you're at least entertaining the idea and that is a good first step. As a species we are group survivors but we can only fight alone for so long. Believe me I tried it, and because of that I crashed harder than I ever should have. If I had just accepted that I needed help and gotten it sooner I likely never would've fallen as far or as hard as I did.

Never be afraid to ask for help. It is our job to help each other and I promise you will get help and get better.