

Christina's Story
By: Christina Homer

What is depression? Growing up, I always thought depression was just feeling sad, and I didn't understand why people would end their life just because they were feeling a little down. In fact, depression includes loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities, changes in diet or sleeping patterns, lack of energy, feelings of guilt and low self-esteem, trouble concentrating, and of course, sadness. These symptoms must last for at least two weeks in order to be considered depression, but they often last much longer than two weeks and can be of varying intensity. I never envisioned this life for myself. I never thought it would happen to me too. The reality is that myself and countless others, about 300 million worldwide, struggle with depression, yet it is so often misunderstood or considered taboo.

No one knew about my depression for a while, including me. On the outside, almost nothing had changed. I was a little less energetic, but I chalked it all up to being tired. My grades stayed fairly consistent with my expectations. I still smiled and laughed with my friends and family. As for what was happening inside, it became normal. Every day, I heard my peers say, "I'm dead inside.", and I began to think nothing of the fact that I felt the exact same way. I pushed my emotions to the side as finishing my homework and doing well on tests became my life.

I first began to notice something was wrong when I felt very happy after receiving good news, and I realized that it was the first time in months that I had been genuinely happy. All of the smiles before had been short-lived and performed as a social obligation. Still, I convinced myself that this was what it took to succeed. I glorified my broken mental state and lack of sleep. To me, these things proved that I was doing enough and working hard enough. However, it ultimately became a stumbling block. Instead of doing my homework, I stared at the wall, not wanting to get anything done. I was numb to everything. I somehow kept going, but I was only barely hanging on. My suicidal thoughts woke me up to the reality of what had happened to me. I blamed myself for the way that others treated me, and I just wanted to die, because maybe then they would feel bad for treating me poorly. Even though I knew I needed help, I had trouble reaching out.

I thought that asking for help and admitting that I wasn't ok was a sign of weakness. Now I have learned that it is a sign of strength. Being open is difficult, and it takes an incredible amount of will to talk about such a personal part of who we are. I was afraid that no one would care, or that I would simply be made fun of for not being able to handle the stress of high school. One day, I reached my breaking point- I had to tell someone. As soon as I did, it became clear that I wasn't the only one. That first conversation allowed me to tell my other friends and family, and the support I received was incredible. I specifically remember one time when I told my friend that my depression was getting worse again. I started to feel bad for talking about something so dark, and I ended up apologizing for it. I got a response that I'll never forget. They reminded me that the people in my life are there to care for me and listen. That support is one of the main reasons why I'm still here today. Although I never attempted suicide or self-harm, I have reason to believe that if I had continued on in isolation, my thoughts would've eventually led there.

Depression's status as a taboo subject in society was another factor that prevented me from being honest about my feelings. I believed that if I was depressed, I was less of everything- less worthy, less intelligent, less capable. The exact situation that required a community to overcome actually pushed me into isolation. For me, even writing this is difficult, but I have come to view it as an honor that I get the chance to share my story and hopefully come alongside others who are facing the same thing. I hope that if you are struggling with depression, you will come to see it as an opportunity to better understand and help those who come after you and remember that you are never alone. Don't stay silent. Open up to those who you trust; it will help so much. Each individual is unique and needed- please know that the world will not be the same without you. To those who are not, we need your support. Encouragement and understanding are essential at a time when we doubt ourselves and feel unworthy of everything. Words are important, and even a seemingly small word of encouragement can go a long way in our journey towards healing. Your support is something we will likely continue to need, through both the good and bad days. It can be so easy to slip back into depression. It can be easy to stop fighting it and just give in. Every day, I promise myself that I will fight. Sometimes I lose, and that's ok. The important thing is that I never stop waking up every morning promising to fight again, and I hope you never stop either.