

How I Breathe While Swimming Through Depression

By Ian Thorpe



Even though I may at times struggle with depression, I've decided I don't want it to define me.

I have been able to accomplish many great things in my life and I am working on achieving many more. At times it does feel all-consuming, but in the race of life I just think everyone else gets a small head start, and perhaps rightly so.

In understanding, knowing and accepting the cards you're dealt you gain a tremendous insight into yourself, attaining a greater understanding of what it is to be human in all of its shades. You then have a capacity to not only know yourself but to also understand others. You can approach daily life with empathy and begin to act in a way where YOU are the change in the world you wish to see.

I am someone who has struggled with mental health issues since I was a teen. From the outside, many would not see my pain nor be able to relate to the sometimes-daily struggle I was facing. It would have appeared as though I had grasped the world with both hands -- a gifted athlete, student with a youthful naivety and innocence who chooses to believe in the best the world has to offer (I hold this view to this day, while accepting without delusion the myriad of struggles the world faces). My future seemed boundless. This is part of the deception of depression and also mental illness: what may appear at face value is a stark difference from the agony that lies within.

Depression is irrational, what may seem to be a near-ideal life can indeed mask what is an ongoing hell. It's difficult for others who have not lived through this experience to understand. I can see why, when I look at my life from the outside and recognise the plentiful gifts that were bestowed upon me to succeed and excel, I understand people's apprehension to comprehend my struggle.

I have fallen into the guilt of knowing how fortunate my life is compared to those who were not born with the advantages I have. I grew up and live in a country where my mere existence is not

challenged day to day. I have many opportunities and access to the best people to assist with my illness.

Having all of this and still not being capable at times to enjoy, embrace and experience life in a substantial or meaningful way that gives a true sense of satisfaction, really troubles me the most. When I dissect my life and look at it externally I feel a burden from my privilege and often struggle with the expectations that come with this. To have so much yet feel so little may be the disease that the majority of us suffer from, in the modern-day developed world.

This is only exacerbated by depression.

Weighed down by guilt and a revulsion for who you are leads and perpetuates the cycle of depression, where self-loathing feeds the darkest part of your mind, playing and toying with your emotions that make it nigh on impossible to leave the house or even your bed. You withdraw from society and your friends. Unable to work, you are left in solitude with yourself and the emotions that have incapacitated you.

I believe that each of us has the ability to shape and create our own reality. I know how hard it can be at times and I too struggle at times with this. We may be in the grips of our depression but we do have some control over how it impacts us. If you concede to your illness and accept its reality you fall into the trap of not only being depressed but also taking on the depressed mindset.

I am not trying to trivialise what anyone is going through. At times I have certainly become a hermit and tried to shut out the world. I've chosen at times to remove myself and give myself a few days to struggle on my own, but in choosing a few days you've enacted a level of control and acceptance, a level of respect for what you are up against.

We need to get back into the world, you have an opportunity to rebuild your resilience to your torment. You can regain a sense of self but also you feel as though you're taking part in life again.

Today, I appreciate my life and am not only grateful for it but I embrace it. I am tremendously happy and I want to remind people that it's worthwhile to pursue your happiness. I do not take for granted each and every opportunity that I have.

Previously I had conceded that I only wanted to be content. I had felt in some way that I was undeserving of happiness and that I should be realistic with my expectations. Now I choose to want and expect more from myself. It makes me feel that those dark times are only at the back of mind. Although it may have taken me a while to get to this point and realisation in my life, I assure you it's worth it. I realise the wonder of the world and I approach each day with an enthusiasm that I haven't felt for what seems like an eternity. In reality it hasn't been so long, nor was it ever too far away.

I look to the future with zest, without trepidation of when or if I may have another depressive episode. I'm mindful that I work each day on not allowing myself to be a depressed person.

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