



#depressionhurts

My Story— Madeleine

I'm in my 40's, a Mother and a qualified Accountant, working in a busy practice. I want to tell you my story of Panic Attacks, Panic Disorders.

I had my first panic attack when I was 23, about 20 years ago now.

It hit me like a blot out of the blue, I didn't know what was happening to me.

I was away on holiday, sitting in my room getting ready to go out and all of a sudden I got an overwhelming fear that something bad was going to happen, I jumped to my feet, all I wanted to do was run.

The feelings lasted for about 10 mins, then subsided, leaving me numb and in complete shock I didn't know what was happening. With a week still left of my holiday, I managed to keep it together, counting the hours till I would be home and then I would feel normal again.

However, when I arrived back in Dublin Airport I didn't feel relieved or back to my normal self again.

Sitting in the taxi looking at familiar places, the feeling, the panic rose within me, this in Dublin, my home town where I'd see my parents in the next 10 minutes! Why didn't I feel normal, why was everything so familiar to me, making me scared ? I remember the feeling of extreme panic but in my mind I kept thinking, once I see my mother everything will be ok, she always makes things better, always has and no reason why she won't now.

At home, I was greeted by my mother, she knows me inside out and she knew immediately that something was wrong. I broke down and pleaded with her to tell me what was happening to me, unfortunately for the first time she didn't have the answer.

The next day we went to the doctor, my mother determined to find out what was wrong. He told me what had happened was a panic attack!

I wasn't going to believe that, I didn't feel like I was having a heart attack or couldn't breathe. I told him it was a such a horrible feeling. I must be going mad, that could be the only explanation. I asked, when would I feel normal again, I **needed** to feel like me again.

My Doctor gave me a prescription for Anti-Depressants and told me that it could take at least 4 to 6 weeks for them to have an effect.

We rushed home, I took my tablet and waited for it to work, totally ignoring the fact that he told me this would take time. I desperately needed it to work and **FAST**. I had to return to work next day but couldn't go feeling like I did.

But next day, I did go to work. Sitting at my desk, my old familiar desk, I got the overwhelming feeling again, a horrible emotion, absolute fear. I looked around at my safe, familiar surroundings and couldn't believe it was happening again, I ran from the office, managed to get a bus home and just collapsed.

This time my mother took me to Beaumont Hospital but they didn't help. Having queued for hours the doctor told me I'd had a panic attack, that I'd be grand, sure it was bad and can happen to anyone and sent me on my way, telling me to keep taking my tablets. The next few days, saw me getting panic attack after panic attack. I couldn't sleep, couldn't walk outside the house, couldn't even relate to my friend's—my old, amazing friends who I'd known all my life!

My mother saw our Doctor again and arranged an emergency appointment with a Specialist. I had to wait 2 weeks to see him, the earliest appointment. During that time, I was steadily getting worse, I didn't feel safe anywhere, not in the family home, not on my walks on the seafront, nowhere.

Instead I felt lost, extremely frightened and I couldn't rationalise what was wrong with me. The day of the appointment came and en route, I was paralysed with fear that I was going to be locked away by this psychiatrist and he would administer electric shock therapy.

On arrival, I wouldn't go in, instead I curled up in a ball in the car and cried like a baby. The Specialist came to the car, he calmed me and told me that I wasn't going mad, I wasn't going to be locked up. He said I was ill and needed help. Eventually, I went into his room's, my mother holding my hand. I was 23, young, attractive, intelligent and my mother had to hold my hand!.

What was going wrong with me, what had happened to me, who was I, what was I, would I ever be normal again ?.

On that first visit, I stood in the corner of his room, not letting him close to me, asking him "is this a nervous breakdown". Had I lost my mind, would I ever find my mind again, was I going to be like this for the rest of my life ?

He explained I had had a complete emotional breakdown, that it was going to take time but I would be myself again and in fact I would be stronger. I was diagnosed with an acute Panic Disorder. This Specialist helped me no end and I will always be grateful to him.

I was afraid of my own shadow, I was completely agoraphobic, I couldn't function properly, was scared beyond belief, afraid of my thoughts, afraid of what new fear would manifest itself, afraid of living.

Nobody would ever have suspected that this would happen to me, true I had always been a worrier but to everybody who knew me, I appeared strong, confident but this illness can happen to anybody.

Throughout the worst, the one thing which never left me, which kept me going was my overwhelming need to live, laugh and enjoy life again.

My specialist was wonderful and gave me tools which enabled me to get my life back and be "normal again". He taught me to:

'Remember it's only a thought, a fear, it won't kill you' - Repeat, repeat, repeat, over and over whilst going through an attack.

'Remember your mind is like Pandora's Box. It's stored years of emotions. Once opened, it needs to be gradually closed with those memories and emotions restored'.

'Walk—regardless of how hard it is. Make sure you get out of the house, bring somebody with you for the first while. Walking makes your breathe in a way that reduces your adrenalin'.

'MOST IMPORTANTLY STAY AWAY FROM ALCOHOL DURING THIS TIME, IT ONLY MAKES THINGS WORSE'

'Emotional illness (or mental illness) as some people still call it, doesn't heal in a straight line, you will have good days, and bad days, but on your recovery your worst day is never as the day you hit rock bottom'.

Eat! Hard though it may be I know but you need strength'.

I would follow all of the above good advice and repeat, repeat and repeat 'this too will pass'.

He told me, you won't wake up and it will all be gone but once you reconcile yourself to that, it makes it a little better, each day.

I gradually got better, he was right!

I got better enough to return to work but the day I did, I was called into the office and told I was being let go. "Nothing to do with the nervous breakdown I had." Yeah right I thought but I coped. I didn't care, I felt normal again, I was me again.

'I rang an agency the next day and immediately had 3 interviews lined up and for a while, I temped.

Life was good, I had control of my life again even though for the first couple of weeks I needed the support of my parents, driving and collecting me every day!

With the wonderful support of family and friends, I got life back on track and life was great again!

Time has moved on, I'm working Full time, a homeowner, independent, single again and the mother of a wonderful teenager.

Have I ever suffered another emotional breakdown again? Yes I have—twice.

Have I survived them ? Yes I have.

Do I still have Panic attacks ? Yes I do.

Do I still fear them? Yes I do.

In my battle with panic, sometimes I beat panic and sometimes he wins but life is for living!

I will always have to live with the fear of panic and what it may do but I will fight it every time and I ALWAYS win.

If you met me, you'd never recognise me as the person I've described here, I no longer live in Dublin, I'm attractive, intelligent, gregarious, a busy Mother and professional woman, a homeowner, financially independent, working as an Accountant, with good family and friends in my life.

No one would think I had a care in the world but I live life one day at a time.!

I hope my story may help and give hope to some of you who suffer from panic attacks or have a panic disorder.

It can feel like hell but the other side of it is heaven, strive for that and you will get there. x