An Open Letter to Students with Depression,

Hey Guys, how’s it going?

Honestly, it would be tactless if I decided to open with a “Top 10 ways to beat your seasonal depression!” article rather than simply addressing depression.

**Family Ties**

I have depression. As I recently found out, I am the most recent link of a generational chain of Manns, Biskeys, McParlands, and Mahoneys to have it. I feel bittersweet in this revelation because it upsets me that this has happened to so many of my loved ones and that they were silent for so long. Then an odd sort of euphoric calm washes over me:

“Good lord,” I mutter to myself. “I’m not the only one!”

In my family, we tend to deal with things head on and personally, but rarely dive deeper than the surface conflict. We would much rather handle a situation by ourselves so we don’t worry those around us. As I have quickly come to realize in recent years, that doesn’t make people less worried, but more so. Plus, it does nothing but create internalized pressure that eats at you. Depression often worsens that complex.

**Yeah, It’s Complicated**

Instead of having a sort of eventual resolution as a conflict with a resolution, my depression simply lives with me. I think of it in two ways: I’m driving in the middle of a valley; some weeks, I’m at the peak, other weeks I am traversing its bottom. However, I know I will soon move to the top.

The other way is a small creature is slowly digging into me, as I look at it, it simply stares at me, not moving. When I look away, I can slowly feel it digging all the more subtly, planning its position in my life. As I stare into it, I learn more about it, I focus too much on it. As I am distracted, I lose sight of the fact that it’s there, and risk the naïve notion that it’s gone.

It’s an undeniably weird feeling, what it’s most certainly not is an excuse, an idiosyncrasy, or a confirmation of the world’s end. It’s simply a layer of my existence.

**Dealing with It Can be Complicated Also**

How I healthily deal with my situation is a combination of things: being productive, taking moments to let myself have fun, surrounding myself with good people and good coffee. All of these are an important part of my process. But, more often than not, I slip on all of these. I’ll have moments of anxiety, truly wondering if I am alone. These brief moments of paranoia are often shook off by rationalization, it undoubtedly happens. This is where that “valley” metaphor comes in.

The crazy thing is the differing reactions and engrained senses of depression that range from each individual. This makes articulation nearly impossible depending on the person.

**Yes, There is a Point**

It’s funny that seasonal depression starts with an “S.” Because it sucks. It’s real and it affects millions. On a broad level, it turns out that spending most of your time indoors while overcast grows across the horizon isn’t conducive to happiness. There’s a good reason why winter activities is a billion dollar industry in Minnesota and the rest of the Midwest. If it wasn’t, you would be seeing cabin fever cases popping up all over the country.

More specifically, I have a friend whose grandmother just passed away recently. She never met her grandmother in person, but it’s obviously upsetting. She is my friend’s nearly unknown matriarch. She shows signs of depression, and is not the type of person who would ever admit that. She was a lot like me, up to a recent point. My friend, in most regards, is the matriarch for her little brothers. So I admire her strength of character. When my grandfather was killed, my family went through similar issues.

**We Need to Talk**

I write this, not as an avenue for sympathy or to spin a story, rather as a means of normalization. According to the Mayo Clinic, depression affects more than 3 million Americans per year. This isn’t something to ignore, or use as political rhetoric. This affects us all, both directly and indirectly. Not talking and being open with our symptoms is not a solution.

This conversation does not have to be dramatic, nor does it have to be fatal, but it does have to happen on a real and meaningful scale. If politicians are going to scream “It’s a mental health issue!” in response to hard hitting issues such as gun violence, then maybe conversation followed by initiative, such as greater funding into the public health care system, needs to actually happen instead of just being hollow political rhetoric.

**Happy, The End**

In my experiences dealing with my depression, I have been fortunate to learn that happiness is not the end goal. If it were, that implies abolishing depression was achievable, rather than depression being manageable. I still have happiness in my everyday life. It simply comes from my realization of fortune:

I have good family and friends. I have a writing staff that I can rely on, as well as a wonderful reader base from whom I have received encouraging feedback. I have music and art that I love, and would never act like I’m above it. I live in a state that has a lot of problems, however is full of people who look to seek solutions. On top of it, too, my sister and I are the first generation in my family to have a college degree!

That’s so crazy for me to think about.

It’s easy to lose sight of that. When we’re enveloped in our own demons, we convince ourselves that anything could be better even though we know fully well that it could be so much worse. Working hard through the pain and anxiety towards what I love has saved me more than once. The people that worked through things with me, and waited patiently as I dealt with whatever issues, have often helped me come back to “normalcy.” The difficulty makes me love my life. Difficulty makes me appreciate it.

As you read this, I will have just come back from ice fishing up north with my dad and my brother. Even with that thought in mind, I know that I am not lucky. I am fortunate.

Thanks for reading.

Sincerely,

Brayden Mann