

It's Not All Sunshine

In the year of 2019, my life completely changed. My mind had reached a point in which chaos was in control, and normality was a rare treat. I remember growing up, a happy young man always looking forward to the future. Raised in a somewhat normal middle class household, I never really knew much about mental illnesses. It seemed like everything was always bright and sunny... but little did I know how big of a problem that would become later on.

Most people think I'm crazy when I tell them about how negatively sunny weather affects my mental state, and perhaps they're right. Even when I was as young as 6 years old, my mother noticed how much I dreaded sunny weather. I would project subtle complaints about "how ugly it was outside." Yet on overcast days, I always had a boost of energy.

Of course, it never really seemed like an issue at the time. Everyone has their own weather preferences, it's normal. However, in the midst of my Senior year of High School, things began to get bad. I began to feel hopeless when I saw the sun arise in the morning before school. As the day commenced, I would develop a severe tension headache that decided not to go away. This pattern continued whenever it was sunny outside, with my only remedy being the rainfall every so often. At home, I would escape to my dark room whenever I could, and just lie on my bed.

This sudden change in my mental state occurred after a dreadful breakup I had experienced with my ex-girlfriend, whom I will call "Judy" as to not reveal her actual name. Going into the relationship, I felt as though I was at one of my happiest points. That was, until she told me about her Manic Depression. I knew next to nothing about really any mental disorders at the time, so I panicked at the thought of Manic Depression. The only experience I had prior was my OCD, but besides turning the lights on and off thirty times, I never really acknowledged it.

I eventually stopped worrying about her bipolar disorder, since it was somewhat common. That was until one night when she told me about the voices in her head. The idea of having "voices in your head" scared the shit out of me. Judy had a few bad voices, and one good voice that she named "Mauve." She told me the voices all disappeared when we started dating. At this point I began intensively researching these occurrences, and typically found a link to Schizophrenia, which had only made it worse.

Perhaps John Horgan said it best in Chapter Five of his book "Mind-Body Problems," stating that "we fear what we don't understand." Schizophrenia has always scared me, especially because of its negative stigma. However, I found hearing voices and psychosis to be related to Manic Depression in some cases as well. According to a study by Mind.org.uk, "you may hear voices as a symptom of some mental health problems, schizophrenia, **bipolar disorder**, schizoaffective disorder or severe depression." I found several links to severe manic or

depressive episodes and psychosis throughout my research, and each time I felt more and more unsettled.

I started having nightmares about her bad voices telling her to kill me, and I ended up having to tell her about it because it felt wrong to hide. Of course she wasn't happy to hear about it, and it almost destroyed our relationship, but she loved me enough to look past it, which may have been her biggest mistake. I began to have guilt trips, because I knew I was overreacting, but the nightmares kept returning. They often involved her in a straight jacket or an insane asylum.

At this point I knew I had to end the relationship. I couldn't stand these thoughts, and she didn't deserve my bullshit. Unfortunately, before I could, her mother was diagnosed with cancer, and deemed "untreatable." I felt disgusting for how I was acting, and I couldn't leave at that point; enough things were going wrong in her life. So I continued to deal with my guilt trips and nightmares that kept getting progressively worse, to a point where I often felt like I couldn't get out of bed, feeling lost and hopeless.

It was the end of February in 2019, and a rare occasion where I actually felt at peace in my head once again. I was visiting Susquehanna University with my sister who had just gotten accepted, and enjoying the cold, cloudy weather. I exclaimed to Judy how great I was feeling, and she responded by saying how depressed she felt. She told me she had SAD: Seasonal Affective Disorder, a type of depression defined by MayoClinic as being "related to changes in seasons." I began looking into Seasonal Affective Disorder, and at the same time the negative thoughts about her began to infiltrate my mind once again.

From my research, I found that phototherapy is a method of treating SAD, so I bought her a lamp specifically designed for combating Seasonal Affective Disorder, [as recommended by MayoClinic](#). Meanwhile, I began to think more about my own weather preferences. "Perhaps I have Seasonal Affective Disorder as well?" became a recurring thought as my mental dilemma continued to play out. The more attention I gave to it, the more I began to notice how depressed I became from sunny weather. My mind was in a downward spiral at that point, and I felt a dark aura surrounding me constantly.

Judy's mother seemed to be doing well in the hospital, which was about the only "good" thing that happened as Springtime approached. I was told that I was the only thing keeping Judy together, which made my guilt trips much worse as I continued to have horrible thoughts about her. I felt trapped, and on the first warm, sunny day of that Spring, my mind had gotten the best of me, and I broke up with her for the sake of my mental health. We tried to keep things okay between us, but it didn't work out because she knew of my thoughts, and wasn't happy about it. I wasn't either. I was disgusted with myself. I hated myself.

Even after the breakup, things only got worse, especially my guilt trips. Even though the nightmares were gone, the dark aura around me was not. I was severely depressed, and on sunny days I couldn't help but think about how Judy enjoyed that weather, and opposingly, I

wanted to die. I felt just as trapped as I did in the relationship, only this time, I was trapped in my own chaos, rather than Judy's chaos.

The final blow from the relationship came when her mother, who we thought was doing well, passed away. It caused everything to collapse, and I selfishly felt more guilt, as I had broken up with Judy only a week prior. She was very strong, and pulled through in spite of the situation. Even though I had negative thoughts about her, I was glad she was okay. Not long after, we stopped talking to one another, and there was evidently a lot of tension between us.

As summer got closer, my depression worsened. The thought of having to deal with more hot and sunny weather made me miserable. Knowing that everyone else is enjoying the "beautiful" weather while you sit in your dark room trying not to lose your sanity, that was the worst part about it. I felt isolated and confused, unsure of why this was even happening to me. There were some links to SAD, nicknamed [Reverse-SAD](#). There were also links to OCD, photophobia and autism. It was such an uncommon issue, and I couldn't really find an answer.

I began to have severe panic attacks, where my body would violently shake and tense up to a point where I couldn't move or breathe, whenever I thought about how isolated I was. Then, in June of 2019, my mother witnessed one of these breakdowns, and freaked out. She began closely monitoring my behavior and whereabouts, and I don't blame her. I was constantly having suicidal thoughts, and felt like there was no way out.

When my first semester at Stevens started, I was partially numb, but still miserable. I hid my feelings for the first few weeks to settle in and make friends, but I knew I had to get help, or I was going to hurt myself. Thankfully, Stevens has CAPS, where I went as soon as I could to get a psychologist who could help me. In fact, I owe it to my former counselor, Mike Carollo, at Stevens. He was an amazing psychologist, as he had helped me control my thoughts, and saved my life in many ways.

My issues with sunny weather were fortunately terminated (for the most part) when I was prescribed the SSRI [Lexapro 10mg](#) by my psychiatrist, who had also been a great help during my time at Stevens. However, as I have found through my own research and struggles, there is so much we don't know in this field. That is why most of the practices used today are decades old, even my experience with a working medication was all by trial and error.

Dr. Mike Carollo told me how "the first successful antidepressants were made in the 1950's by mistake, and just so happened to work." It's quite frightening to think about that, considering some of these medications, such as Prozac (which I had been on before), are still being used today. In the end, what keeps many of us going is the desire to be normal, or as the famous Dr. Elyn Saks said in her interview with John Horgan, "what those of us who suffer with mental illness want is what everybody wants: in the words of Sigmund Freud, 'to work and to love.'"

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