

Living with PTSD

I have always lived with mental health issues from a young age. I suffer from PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), which is a psychiatric disorder that may occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event, such as, in my case, losing my brother. I also live with depression and high anxiety. I was always different growing up; other kids would look at me as though something was wrong with me. I was the quiet one and did not have very many friends, and many thought I was ugly as well. When I went to middle school, I then lost my best friend because our friendship was not healthy anymore, leaving me alone.

Then came eighth grade, when everything was the same as it normally was. I kept to myself until May 19th, when the life that I already thought was a nightmare got even worse. My brother, who was only 10 at the time, had been complaining about headaches and feeling sick all the time. My parents brought him to the doctors and were told immediately to go to the children's hospital. My sister and I went and visited my brother shortly after he was admitted, but we did not know that we were about to find out devastating news. A nurse took my sister, mom, and I to a special room and then proceeded to say, "Your brother has an inoperable brain stem tumour on his spinal cord; in other words, he has **cancer**." As I look back at that time, I was only 14 and should have only needed to worry about school, not my brother being sick. I still feel sick to my stomach each time I hear that word. It is a constant reminder of what I had to go through. For five and a half months, I had to just sit there and watch my brother slowly die in front of me, not being able to do anything. If I could, I would have taken all that pain he was feeling and put it on myself. Nobody deserves to go through something like that.

As a 14-year-old, I had to mature quickly, as I had a duty as a sister to be strong for my brother and family. Now, this was a really hard thing for me to do, as I am already an extremely emotional person, but I did my very best to keep my cool. My brother always hated when I would cry so he would always groan and say stop. I did a lot to distract him though. I would make Legos with him, play video games, and make him feel as comfortable as possible. For my parents, I would do everything I can to give them a break from my other siblings and constantly clean the house and do things around the house so that they wouldn't have to and could just focus on my brother, as they were at the hospital a lot. My 12-year-old sister at the time was sharing a room, so we were always hanging out with each other and attempting to distract each other. During this time, I had slowly fallen into deep depression and thoughts of suicide. I would always say to myself "Why me?" because this was a question I did not understand now and still do not understand even now. In those months, I felt alone, broken, and most of all, scared. On October 31st, 2017, my brother took his last breaths and went to live with my grandpa in heaven. I remember feeling so done with my life and so broken. I never, in my life, thought that anything like that could happen to me. To this day, I still struggle to grieve for my brother, but I try my best to be optimistic about the future and survive in this world. I look toward my education's future and imagine all the people I can help. I also try to just live my life to the fullest and try new things and try my best to be happy even though it can be hard sometimes.

I also see a counselor and have been receiving help with my mental health and problems in my life for a couple of months now. I have seen a lot of progress since I began counseling. I have learned many of my triggers and things that help me cope with my mental health. I also take depression pills, and since I started them a year ago, I have seen drastic changes and improvements in my life. I began getting better grades in school and not being so stressed all the time. It was probably the best thing I ever did. These steps have all helped my mental health and my life in general by making me feel more confident in myself and what I am capable of. By

going to counseling, I have been able to just sit there and say everything that I am feeling, and my counselor gives me such amazing advice and helps me to know that what I'm going through is normal and that I will get through it. Also taking my depression medication has helped me to lower my overall stress levels and not let things bother me so much in my life as they used to in previous years. It has also helped impact my relationships with my family and boyfriend by helping me to grow closer to them and focus on the present and not so much on my. I am beyond grateful for my loving family who has supported me through everything in my life and has always been there for me, my sweet and caring boyfriend who has not given up on me no matter how stubborn I can be, and my kitten and rabbit who have helped me to heal in so many ways. Without these things and people, I do not think I would be on this earth today. I am also thankful for my job and the opportunity to be writing this essay right now to share my experience with someone who might relate to it.

I plan to study at the University of Alberta (UOA) with a Bachelor of Arts from the Department of Psychology, where I have been admitted, and eventually pursue a career as a registered psychologist. I look towards the future where I see myself working in a clinic as a grief psychologist or potentially a social worker. Throughout my career, I eventually want to have my practice and make it a safe place for my clients. I want to help those who struggle like me and have had past trauma or feelings of suicide. I want them to feel accepted, loved, and cared for the way I wanted to be when I was in counseling. I hope that my clients can take away from their time with me that they are loved and that I will always be there for them no matter what. I believe that everybody has stories to tell and things that they have gone through that were extremely hard. I want to be the person who sits there and listens and helps guide them through these hard times.

I'm looking forward to beginning school and experiencing new things and learning new things. I know that even though I am faced with adversity, I have never once given up no matter how hard it is. I remember my family and my boyfriend and all that they have done for me and that I could never do that to them. I haven't fully overcome adversity and that's okay. It will be a constant challenge for me for the rest of my life, but I will always, no matter what, try to maintain a positive tone. I have undergone many immense challenges and know that I can get through them again and again. Without adversity, I wouldn't be the person I am today.