

# Ending the Eighth-Story Blues

*Trapped by signs of depression, thoughts of suicide--and how it all turned around.*

## Author Anonymous

Some people walk through life successfully grasping opportunities. Others of us, like me, trip through life, off-balanced by relationships or addictions or chaotic events we don't foresee. Signs of depression can build from one bad decision after another.

For example, I made the mistake of mixing a hard drunken stupor with my first night of romance. All I remember was the guy shaking my shoulders telling me it was time to go home. And then there was the night of one dumb discussion about fake ID's, a fifth of Tequila, and three girlfriends. Tina pledged designated caregiver for two soon-to-be drunks. Twenty minutes later my glass was drained and the movie we were watching became funny. Then the plot started blurring as I frequented the toilet. Credits rolled and I hadn't left the bathroom. My condition was worsening. A phone call was made for someone to come get me. I slept for three days with a five-gallon bucket as a nightstand.

Events and poor choices continued. Too many boys knew my name and many nights couldn't be recounted in the morning. I should have felt exhilarated to know I was so seasoned in the affairs of fun. Yet emptiness and depression became the growing epidemic in my heart. My escapades were no longer bringing me the rush of freedom, individuality, and significance. In fact I was feeling the opposite. I was feeling trapped by my incessant need for a pick-me-up and plagued by recurring feelings of despair.

Seeking a new way of life, I drove to Colorado with a live-in boyfriend, Rich. We were making wedding plans on our way down. I thought this guy really cared. We had lived the last six months experiencing the wiles of hallucinogens. Now in Colorado we found a little house we could rent. Our



only argument thus far was which room would be designated for marijuana smoking. I told him the basement. I didn't want trouble with the law. Richard promised that if I worked and put him through college then he would do the same for me after he graduated. I was desperate to stay with him because he had the connections to keep my highs going. In just a matter of three months I could not function without Richard's goodies. He introduced me to a side of life I had never experienced and I was completely ignorant to its power. I could see sunsets trace into butterflies. My imagination was feeling alive, masking the depression I had been suffering.

## Demon-like playmates

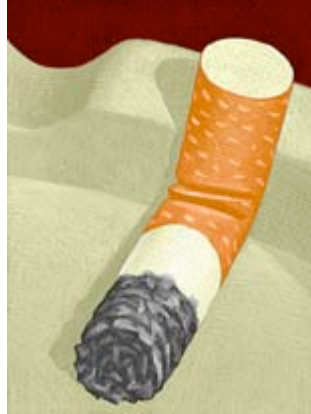
But as time passed, my active imagination started to recreate emptiness. It happened one evening when I was sitting on the porch of his mother's house. The street was dark except for the designated street lights. I was alone, Richard inside, the neighborhood sleeping. From the dark sidestreets and the roofs of the houses came groups of darkness with rowdy claws and laughs, excited they had recess time. The demon-like playmates continued about the neighborhood. I remained deathly still for fear they might notice me. Just at the moment of needing to gasp thus exposing my hiding place, Richard came out on the porch.

I continued my concentrated stare down the street hoping they didn't see him. The night started to hide their scaly movements to the point I couldn't find them. Richard distracted my attention and we started to chit chat. I rambled about my excitement about how thin my legs were and they didn't touch each other. I feebly tried to comfort myself. Tell myself I was okay and that I was still having a good time. Being skinny was worth it. The guys like it, besides it was just a bad trip as they say. But this reasoning did not answer all the ebbing questions. What happens if a trip doesn't end? What if next time they don't go away? What if I become their next joke? What if it gets worse? If I tell Richard, he will take away his treats, telling me I can't handle my candy. My emptiness spiraled downward as I realized I would be alone when suffering any more bad trips.

The next morning I woke earlier than normal and laid staring at the ceiling. My thinking for the first time in recent memory seemed so sharp and unconfused. As far as everyone else was concerned, I was living it up. I was partying until the break of day and doing things only the cop dramas talk about. I finally admitted to myself I wasn't living until that morning. I woke Richard and told him I was going to college and that I didn't want to live this way anymore. Richard was beside himself. He had never seen me so determined, unyielded from the grip of his maneuvering. I called my folks to tell them I wanted to go to college and would be over the next day to say my good-byes. Richard's family thought I was awful for abandoning him. He had done so much for me...how could I be so thoughtless? If only they knew.

I arrived at Washington State University and I will never forget my cold, concrete cell numbered 823, better known as a dorm room. Would college really change my life? I thought it would, but ironically I felt worse than this eyesore of a room. Empty again.

Depression started to set in and I approached the fringes of suicide. I would enviously watch my cigarette butts fall from my eighth-story window, jealous of their self-directed freedom. During this time I would scrape through my little black bag hoping there was just one more rail somewhere in its dark, leathery body. Please, just one more kick. One more bit of happiness before the morning. I would plead, frantically scratching through the case, but none appeared.



### Partying to overcome depression

I was distracted from my misery when my roommate arrived after the week of orientation. She was great; upbeat and excited to meet people. That made up for my crippling sadness. For the first week of classes we hit all the keggers. I continued to hope the emptiness would fill as I tipped each beer can, that the depression would go away. I wasn't willing to accept that every party ended the same. I was going to make this one different. "Hey, Bobbie, you got any clippers?"

I grinned as the clippers chewed a path through the middle of my shoulder-length hair. Clumps of hair somersaulted down my shoulders and chest. I heard gasps and looked up to realize I was entertaining the entire courtyard under moth-filtered porch light.

"She'll regret it in the morning," they sneered. "I'd like to see her face tomorrow," others murmured into their beer cans. I thought for sure people would be impressed at my boldness and zeal to be myself. My teeth grinned through my sloppy drunk lips as I rubbed my hand over the tight, Velcro bristles. I had always wanted to shave my head. I had threatened several boyfriends before. But now I had finally done it. I felt such triumph. Triumph over what, my drunken mind could not decide. I just knew I needed to feel good.

Two months later, my defiant self-made zeal had withered. If someone came to visit me they would find me in one of my favorite outfits, my black-cotton, bell-bottomed, spandex pants which accented my legs to look even skinnier. This thinness I was once so proud of, now a weakness. My legs couldn't

even carry me up a flight of stairs. Once strong to play soccer and bike, now useless. Even my feet were too skinny. Any walk down the thinly carpeted concrete floors of the dorm was miserable. The bones of my feet would grind against the hard floor. I eventually dreaded my trips to the bathroom. My once voluptuous breasts were now shrunken and my eyes joyless. I spoke in a gravelly voice, which was worth it for my only loyal companion, the Camel Wide. My lip was scabbed in the middle from an old lip ring. My formerly ringed naval was still pinkish, a wound that hadn't healed and had become infected. At least my nose ring still hung freely.

### The ultimate sign of depression...thoughts of suicide

I moved to the window to sit on my homemade perch, a green chair with black legs precariously propped on top of dresser drawers. From my lookout I would scan the other dorms and observe students walking among opportunity. Walking where I couldn't bring myself to walk. I puffed my cigarette softly through the new quiet of my thoughts. *Should I follow my cigarette butt out the window today?*

*Is this what I wanted to become?* Where had all my strength gone? I used to be so strong. Now my shoulders slumped, my gaze limp. Nights were dreamless, my alarm clock no longer rowdy in the morning. I didn't even bother to add money to my dining account. Dirty laundry became too sparse to be gathered. The only energy in the room was the university-provided fridge containing moldy pizza.

I flicked my cigarette over the crest of the eighth-story window. My eyes dreamily followed the cigarette to the ground. Slumping off my perch, I sat on my bed. I gathered my journal and wrote in hope I could write myself away from my emptiness. Aimlessly writing senseless words, void of creativity and value.

*uneasy  
anxious  
wilting  
starved  
depleted  
tormented  
bewildered  
confused  
disoriented  
blind*

I set the journal down and draped myself over my pillow and wished for some quiet from my dull thoughts. I was no longer discovering new ideas. It was

growing emptier. *How long could this go on?* How long would it be until I slipped off my perch?

### Seeking help from Rodney

My only interaction with other people narrowed to letters from family or friends of the family. My favorite letter was from Rodney M., an upstanding man, a preacher waiting for his own church. For that I respected him. He believed in what he did. Growing up I witnessed him taking in his sister-in-law's baby. He was raising her as his own without the guarantee that he would be able to keep his beloved treasure. When he would visit my parents, he usually spoke of God's kindness. While he talked I would be drawn to his peaceful countenance and confidence.

I had not seen Rodney for some time. In his letter he asked me how I was doing. He also told me how he met his wife at WSU. He said if they were in the area he would love to visit. The letter had such an exciting tone. He ranted and raved about WSU and the potential it had.

I started my return letter by letting him know WSU was no longer a nostalgic place of opportunity and future. He also had mentioned how great God was in the letter. Oh, he is great all right, I sarcastically wrote. I needed to tell Rodney about my depression, how miserable I was and that God was not doing a damn thing for me. I wasn't passing any of my classes and my roommate just stole my boyfriend.



I started to tell him about Jesus and how Jesus, this great Son of God, had abandoned me and left me in darkness. When I went to write the name of Jesus, I could not remember how to spell the name. Was it J-u-s-e-s? No, J-e-u-s-u-s. No, that didn't look right either. I was growing frustrated. I should know how to spell this name. I was raised in a Christian home and grew up singing songs to this guy. Wasn't he the one in the song who loves me because the Bible tells me so. I became agitated and nervous. I should know this. J-e-s-e-s? No.

Finally, I interrupted my roommate and asked her. She quickly prattled, J-E-S-U-S. That was scary. How could she know how to spell his name and I don't? Wait a minute, that doesn't match up. The parade of thoughts intensified. How can I be blaming God for all my misery if I don't even know how to spell his name? It doesn't seem we know each other, or for that

matter have even met. I finished my ramblings of woe-is-me and sent the letter, not admitting to my guilt of blaming the wrong person.

My mind continued to reel with clarity and logic after writing that letter. How many other people had I blamed for my misery and unhappiness, who actually weren't responsible? What if I am the reason I am unhappy? It had never occurred to me. Had I been blaming and looking to the wrong people? There was that thought again. Had I been waiting for them to fail so I had an excuse? Had I been waiting to say, "See I told you so!"? You mean I can't blame others! I can't blame God because I didn't even know how to spell his name. Who is left? Me?

Silent. I needed a plan. I had exhausted all the resources I knew of. I left college. I had failed the first semester. I withdrew in November even though the semester ended in December. The semester could not be salvaged.

### New job might help

I began working again at the nursing home I worked at during high school. My position, certified nurse's assistant. In the veterinarian world the person would be called a pooper scooper. This line of work gave me a chance to start connecting with people. These grandmas and grandpas were non-threatening and needed love and acceptance as badly as I did. We were a good fit.

In this line of work you are not supposed to have favorites but we all did. I couldn't help but love a little woman named Helen. Alzheimer's has a nasty way of being a living death. By the end the person is unable to move, communicate, and eventually unable to swallow. I made a little deal with God.

Now any preaching man will tell you don't do this. It is not good to make deals with God. Well, I bargained anyway. I told God that if he was to take her quickly and my little lady would not have to suffer, I would start following him again. I had made this deal with God the week before my lady moved from my ward and went to the ward where they can no longer walk nor take care of any of their own needs. This was the last stop for our residents.

Two weeks had passed. I was on my dinner break smoking a cigarette when my wing's med nurse came to the door.

"I wanted you to know, Helen passed away."

So suddenly? I snubbed my cigarette and walked to the floor. I peeked into her room, dreading the appearance of her. But, light seemed to fill the room. She was so peaceful. The aide explained she gave Helen a bite of food, walked to another resident, and when she walked back Helen was gone. She went that quickly. She did not have to suffer or spend years on the ward. Snap. She was gone. No pain, no suffering. I remembered my deal.



I had a good friend, Heather, who worked with me on the Alzheimer's ward. Like me, Heather was struggling with the Why's of life. I invited her to attend a Wednesday evening church service with me. She eagerly accepted. Both of us agreed we were going to do this "God thing" together.

### **Finally, a way to be free**

The pastor of the church was an average Joe, no pun intended for that was also his name. He was excited about God and excited about giving people the opportunity to meet God too.

His sermon was simple. He told how God loved us and desired to have a personal relationship with us. He reminded us that we have nothing we can give God that would earn his love. That was not news to me, considering I was there because I was empty-handed. But that thread of God's love being life-sustaining kept cradling my heart to listen. Joe continued to speak of the forgiveness God has through his son Jesus Christ. Jesus was God himself dying on the cross so that we could hang out with God.

The evening closed with a simple prayer. Joe said, "I don't want you to pray and promise God anything. I just want you to open your heart to God and say, 'Lord, here I am.'" I agreed with this. I had nothing to offer. I had a broken heart, shot academic career, no boyfriends, and I served old people. I was damaged goods, but I was willing to try to be available to God to see what he could do with this mess I had made. I stated that simple prayer, "Lord here I am. Do with me what you can." I was willing to make another deal. Such a warmth and brightness flowed into my heart. I felt I was given a protein shake. My strength of thought warmed. I opened my eyes and the room seemed to almost glow.

Before we were allowed to open our eyes from prayer, we were asked to raise our hand if we prayed that prayer. I sneaked a peek to see if Heather had raised her hand. We had both raised our hand in the same secret way.

Elbow on the knee and palm up quickly. I felt so full of joy (as they call it) that I couldn't help but walk up and shake Joe's hand. I told him I prayed the prayer and I wanted to thank him.

The ironic part about my time at church was it fell on the calendar day known as April Fool's Day. In the Old Testament, the first part of the Bible, it says only a fool says in his heart there is no God. I had been a fool.

### **A new challenge**

God being invisible and I am only left to imagine him, I needed something written that I could hold onto in order to remain confident in this new relationship with him. The verse that I clung to was from First Thessalonians, a book in the New Testament. "Faithful is he who is calling you [to himself] and utterly trustworthy, and he will also do it [fulfill his call by keeping you]."

Now here was something I could stand on. No matter how ugly it got, God promised in His word, the Bible, that He is faithful and trustworthy. These were qualities I had long been separated from. I no longer needed to try to protect myself. He was going to take care of it. The second reason why this was so encouraging is because I knew how empty I was inside. God in this verse promised that he was not going to give up. He promised to finish what He had started. The deal was sealed.

My second chance in life did not eliminate work from my life. There was still tremendous work involved to turn around my academic career. When I withdrew from school my transcript read a 1.0 grade point. (I am curious if they gave 1.0 grade averages as a compliment just for coming to WSU.) Due to my high academic achievement, I qualified for the highly esteemed Student Advising and Learning Center. I was told to come back Spring semester and make something of myself. So sure enough I came back only to continue flunking.

It was hard returning to school, knowing I was now loved by God. The pressure. I couldn't check out anymore. Here I was with a purpose now, and meaning. Someone who loved me expected something from my life because they had made a lot of plans for me. It was so much to handle that when I returned to my apartment (second semester I moved out of the dorms), I locked myself in my room and smoked weed all week. Life was overwhelming. I had contemplated death for so many years, it was hard now to contemplate life.

I felt a darkness slung about me. It was heavy. Suffocating. I couldn't quit and I couldn't make an effort to begin.

My thoughts suddenly stilled. Wait. I no longer had to contemplate such thoughts and depression. God freed me from my guilt. I suddenly remembered another story in the Bible about the adulteress woman who was dragged out of her sleeping quarters by accusing men. The accusing men were of religious standing in the community who wanted to test Jesus and see how he would answer their questions.



They challenged, "The law says that anyone who commits adultery must be stoned to death." Their condemning words bit the air as their hands tightened around the dusty rocks they held. The woman whimpered on the sandy ground. Jesus calmly crouched in the sand and casually dragged his finger across the sand. As he drew he replied, "He who is without sin let him cast the first stone." He continued to crouch listening, as each stone plopped into the sand, evidence that those who once held the stones self-righteously were also guilty and deserving of the same punishment they were eagerly willing to dish out.

The woman, slightly confused and anticipating Jesus to proclaim her sin, now waited for how he was going to deal with her.

"Where are your accusers?" he asked.

"They are gone," she replied.

"Go and leave your life of sin."

The woman left realizing that 1. she was not the only one with sin; and 2. Jesus did not throw a stone either.

### **He is the cure**

Why does it matter whether Jesus threw a stone or not? Jesus was the only one there who had the right to throw the first stone. He was the only one without sin. Being God himself in the flesh on earth, Jesus was perfect. In being God he had the authority to forgive or judge sin. He said, he who is without sin throw the first stone. This had two-fold meaning. In saying that, he exposes the sins of the woman's accusers; but he is also the one who is without sin, and he did not accuse her either.

Jesus is the one to say, "I do not hold it against you either. Just stop sinning and turn your life around to me." I too was working on sinning no longer, but I was starting to forget the truth that if Jesus does not accuse me, then who does? No one. Life does not have to be a walk down death row. We do not have to be partially paralyzed by life's unexpected hurts and disappointments. Through Christ we can have hope.

A relationship with Jesus Christ is the cure for any sickness of heart. As a result of him being alive, he breathes life into me. The character that protects that hope is God's faithfulness and trustworthiness. He let me fall into incurable emptiness so that I could see that he is the solution.

I still struggled with my physical appearance. I was still working to believe that God loves me, unconditionally. I simplified it in my heart to, God loves me *no matter what*. I hadn't captured that fully. I dreadfully feared weight gain. I was still not eating, for I didn't appreciate the fifty pounds I gained after I quit taking speed.

I was still smoking cigarettes. I figured if I quit everything at once, I might die because my body was so dependent on all of it. The truth be known, I think I had become so dependent on so much else, that I really didn't know how to live dependent upon God.

### **Freedom**

Yet even though life was still painful, I was living for the first time, not just for that day, but now eternally with God rather than with emptiness. AAAH! This is the God people are talking about. The One who gave up everything so that we might have life to its fullest. This is the person I want you to meet. This person, Jesus Christ, is who kept me from eventually following my cigarette out the window. To all who are willing, he says, "Come to me."

If you would like to know how to begin a relationship with God, please visit [www.EveryStudent.com](http://www.EveryStudent.com). If you would like to email a question, someone will email you a personal reply.

If you have already received Jesus Christ into your life, here is a site to help you grow in your relationship with him, [www.StartingwithGod.com](http://www.StartingwithGod.com).

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