

Each Hour, Each Day: How My Family Anchors Me Against the Darkness of Depression

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by Kristina Brooke

I was diagnosed with [clinical depression](#) at 16 years old and [generalized anxiety disorder](#) at 17. My mother did not take either diagnosis seriously. She was a registered nurse, yet she often commented that my diagnosis stemmed from wanting attention. Like many Black parents, especially those who identify as Christian, it was easier to believe that I was being dramatic rather than suffering from a mental illness.

After all, God is the only thing we need to heal, right? Wrong.

Thanks to a teacher's intervention, I began therapy, although it was referred to as "academic intervention." It was clear that I was suffering and needed to talk to someone, as I was spiraling. Quickly.

I have continued therapy on and off since 1994 and am constantly learning my triggers and more effective ways to cope with being a depressed person. I have struggled with finding the right medicine to help control my anxiety and depression, but I have also found that there are other things that help: diet, sunlight, being with friends, art, and writing. However there is no cure. It is a battle that I fight every day and it takes a lot of energy to continue.

I concentrate on making it through each minute, then each hour, then each day. In doing so, I've become intimately aware of how my depression manifests itself.

The knot in the pit of my stomach is the first physical sign. It reminds that there is no peace. No true happiness. That beneath the surface, there is always a catastrophe waiting to snap me out of the dream and back into the nightmarish reality. There are tears. Uncontrollable and without specific cause. They begin as tiny drops of uncertainty but soon, they are laced with sadness and anger. My face, stained with the salt of my fears, now numb from the sting, is my tell. I've never been good at hiding my true feelings.

I am dark. It has happened. I whisper to myself only to have my daughter's worried voice ask if I am OK. I am not. I am honest, but I am also a mother and unwilling to relegate my child to the role of caregiver. But I will be OK. I am speaking more to myself than I am to her. I am taking a chance—speaking my wellness into existence so that I can muster up the strength to fight this fight again. To escape this place, this mental confinement that makes it impossible for me to see.

She slides beside me in bed and I breathe her in, taking her sweetness into me hoping that my Little Empath does not take on too much of my suffering. I know it is impossible to prevent her from taking in any of it, but if I can limit what she absorbs, if I can protect her from the full force of this low, I will.

I kiss her cheek and ask her if she would like me to read to her. Filling her with beautiful words is the best weapon against this darkness. Words provide hope and as we recently discovered in the last chapter of *A Wrinkle in Time*, hope pushes back the darkness. She is my hope, but I need to be hers. I have to gain my footing so that her foundation is solid.

Yet, the truth is that I am too weak today. I am too fragile to provide anyone with strength. So together we will escape into a world of time and dimensional travel. We will fight the dragons, the Minotaur, the giants, and the fury. We will build a rainbow bridge to lead us to hope because, in the end, I know that I am stronger. That we are stronger than this monster that threatens to destroy me.

Luckily, I have another soldier in this battle. He comes home ready to take up the reins of this fight. And while we both know he cannot make me better, he will not stop trying. Luckily he no longer believes that this is about him. He sees the truth: that this enemy is unnamed, but its army of darkness is aggressive and persistent. He knows that in the moments in which we celebrate a victory, it is regrouping and planning its next attack.

He slides into bed behind me. I am braced by his arms and calmed by her innocence. I am allowed these moments of silence. No, not allowed—permission is unnecessary. But these moments of vulnerability are made possible by their understanding, even if they don't fully understand.

We drift away into the serenity of togetherness. I am hanging on to them to steady myself. And for the first time in a while, I can breathe.

I can breathe.

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Kristina Brooke is a writer, web designer, and entrepreneur. When she is not running her business, Be Artful Media, LLC, she is relearning elementary school subjects as a homeschooling mom to her nine year-old daughter. She has also been married for twelve years to a man who has taught her that love can endure and heal. She is an advocate for the empowerment of Black Women and Girls and believes that now is the time to get real about mental illness and to remove the stigma associated with it.

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