

**Never.**

*A Collection of  
Benzodiazepine Withdrawal Success Stories  
(revision 2)*

**Lose.**

*June 16, 2015*

**Hope.**

# **A Collection of Benzodiazepine Withdrawal Success Stories**

**(revision 2)**

**Disclaimer:** The success stories contained in this document have been taken from a variety of sources. They have been compiled for individuals currently in benzo withdrawal for use as a source of hope and also as a way to distract. Their presence here is in no way a claim of ownership. As such, the names of authors of these stories have been excluded. All stories have been extracted from the original source as verbatim as possible in order to retain the author's intent and meaning to the greatest extent possible. Misspellings, typos, punctuation, and grammar have not been corrected.

This document will be revised periodically to include additional success stories (and there are many more).

## **Purpose**

These stories are provided as examples to those currently suffering through benzo withdrawal that individuals in withdrawal do heal and get well. That is the overarching theme of every story in this collection of stories, and it is the one thread that is common to each story. The only other commonality is that the universal "cure" for benzo withdrawal is the passing of time - for time is needed for the central nervous system to alter and/or repair itself back to a non-withdrawal state. Withdrawal is purely an exercise in survival often requiring monumental patience and always requiring hope.

## **Cautionary Note**

Every story in this document is different with respect to specific symptoms of withdrawal; the intensity of those symptoms; type of healing (window/wave versus gradual); time to heal; methods individuals used to get through withdrawal; individual beliefs, opinions and philosophies; amount of time on benzos; type of benzo; benzo dosages; tapering versus cold turkey; use of supplements and other drugs; age; gender; environmental/situational factors; genetic composition (obviously); personality; spirituality; and many more. Not only does one size not fit all, but taken even further, one size does not fit any two people. Everyone is different in many ways – including time to heal. As such, the reader should not superimpose the withdrawal healing experiences (including time to heal) contained in any of these stories on himself or herself. Each reader will ultimately have a unique healing experience and story.

Each of these stories differs in both writing style and content. As they say in AA:

***"Take what you need, and leave the rest."***

## Story 1

I've always promised I would write a success story. I think it's very important for the people who come after us. I know I depended heavily on this section during the really bad days when I didn't believe life would ever be worth living again.

I'm not going to spend a lot of time on the how and why I found myself on benzos. It's like everyone's story; the doctor said it was safe and I stupidly believed him. My total time on benzos, including my 22 month taper was about 12 1/2 years. I was on Xanax, Klonopin and Valium, with doses up to 120 mg Valium equivalent. Today I am 17 months benzo free.

I now know that I entered tolerance very early on. I had small amounts of Valium with dental procedures three different times over about a month. It was at that time my muscles started aching and burning and I felt sick and "off". I had the mother of all panic attacks and my journey with Xanax began.

For the next decade, I declined. I was running a moderately successful business at the time. I went from being independent and traveling widely to being home bound, afraid and so hopeless. I couldn't even go to the grocery store. Any time I was not in my home environment I was in a state of panic and had high pain throughout my body. I thought I had a terrible disease that my doctor wasn't finding. His solution was to try different ADs, muscle relaxers and frequent increases in my doses of benzos. I would feel better for a while after a bump up in dose. No one saw the correlation.

I went to many specialists, including endocrinologist, rheumatologist, gastroenterologist, otolaryngologist, cardiologist, nephrologist, naturopathic MD, holistic practitioners, several chiropractors, two doctors who had written books and promised a cure, a Jungian therapist, a Feldenkrais therapist, a bioenergetics practitioner, a Qi Gong master, and even traveled to Vermont from Oklahoma to spend three days and 5,000 dollars with a spiritual healer. My sweet, supportive husband and I went from being financially secure to near destitute.

During the course of these years, I was diagnosed with fibromyalgia, Celiac disease, Lupus, cardiac arrhythmia, irritable bowel, GERD, essential high blood pressure, Dupuytren's contracture, thyroid deficiencies, sleep apnea, metabolic syndrome, adrenal fatigue, major depression, acute anxiety and PTSD.

About 10 years into this process, I simply gave up. I had no desire to live this life. The single thing that kept me from suicide was having had a friend who hung himself, and I saw the devastation it caused his family. My husband is significantly older than I and I reasoned when he died, I would gladly follow. I just settled in to wait.

I started self medicating with alcohol, which surprisingly made life more bearable. My doctor had taken me off Klonopin abruptly, put me on about a third of the equivalent dose of Valium. When I went back to him telling him how horrible I felt, he told me to

supplement with alcohol for a while until I evened out. I remember his words, "Valium is just alcohol in a pill form". I actually felt quite well while drinking. Now I know it was simply the effect on my weary, down regulated GABA receptors. Of course, I needed more and more alcohol to have the same effect. At my worst, I spent a few weeks getting up, feeling hung over, pushing the button on the coffee pot, and going to the garage to have a beer and smoke a cigarette while coffee was brewing. During this time, after a day of consuming 22 beers in a 24 hour period, plus whatever amount of benzos I was on at the time, I experienced an episode of nystagmus and a hospitalization. The effects of that left me going to the same therapy that stroke victims go to recover balance and equilibrium. I was a mess. It became a daily struggle to live. I wasn't living, really, I was just existing.

By chance, I was at the library and randomly picked up a newly released book. The title was "The Anatomy of an Epidemic: Magic Bullets, Psychiatric Drugs and the Astonishing Rise of Mental Illness" by Robert Whitaker. The cover had a picture of the brain and the different drugs were written on different parts of the brain. My doctor had just prescribed yet another antidepressant and I wanted to read this book before I tried it,

I got to the chapter on benzodiazepines and might as well have been reading about myself. Practically every symptom I had was represented in stories there. I remember one poor soul in particular who could not take a shower; the water burned his skin and he was terrified of losing control. That was me, too. He had quit taking Klonopin and the symptoms never went away. He started again and felt better - for a while.

I read where care must be taken to taper off and it should be under doctor supervision. I talked to my doctor. He negated my concerns, and said I couldn't possibly be addicted because I took only as prescribed. That was true. I did. I kept looking, and eventually found a free, county operated detox facility. I checked in on December 30, 2010. Before I went that morning, I took 10 mg of Valium, a 1 mg Klonopin and drank two quick beers, just to even me out so I wouldn't be so scared. 11 days of hell ensued. Unfortunately, I remember it all. It took many months for the deep horizontal grooves on my fingernails to grow out. I later learned they were trauma lines from a profound shock to my body. My curly hair overnight looked like a wire haired terrier. I aged a decade, at least.

Librium was used to "taper" me. I came out benzo and alcohol free but was dehydrated and having auditory and visual hallucinations. I literally could not see what I looked at, no matter the strength of the glasses. Riding home, it felt like I was in a boat and the rear end was fishtailing. I did little shrieks and hid my eyes because it seemed like traffic was coming directly at me. Once home, I hid in bed. When my husband had to run out to get anything, I would cover up my head and be so afraid I would die before he got home. I saw a constant stream of pictures on the wall, like a slide show being played and I saw patterns everywhere I looked.

After three days of this, I found a psychiatrist who would see me in one day. I just remember the hope I felt when her receptionist said "she will help you". I had both

Klonopin and Valium in the house but I was determined not to take it. The day before I was to see the psychiatrist, I went to my primary doctor, the guy who had prescribed for 12 years and assured me I wasn't addicted. He blanched at my story, wrote me a prescription for 25 mg Librium with a 5 day taper schedule. He never again wrote a benzo prescription and never believed me when I told him how difficult it was to fight my way back. He blamed everything on alcohol. Everything -- even though I wasn't drinking at all for at least two thirds of the time I had been so sick.

Sitting in the psychiatrists waiting area, the walls seemed to be breathing in and out and were rapidly changing colors. When I closed my eyes, I saw cartoons playing. When I stood up to follow her into her office, it felt like most of me kept going up a few feet past my normal height and it took several minutes to settle back into myself. I had great difficulty trying to find words to describe to her what was happening to me. It turns out, she knew very well what was wrong. She had me take a couple of Librium while sitting in the office and told me to go home and take Valium, to reinstate, stabilize and then we would begin a taper. A "proper taper" she said. I still see this lovely woman from time to time. Sometimes we reminisce about how bad it was and how scared I was. I'll always be grateful for her willingness to take me on.

Since I still couldn't see, my husband gave me the Valium when I got home. He thought he gave me 5 mg of Valium. Instead it was 1 mg Klonopin, which is equivalent to 20 mg Valium. Before I took it, my heart was flopping like a fish, my muscles were so contracted I literally could not straighten my legs, I was hearing loud pops every time I tried to doze off and the walls were wild with swirling colors. Within 20 minutes of taking that 1 mg Klonopin, I felt perfectly normal, completely at ease, could see clearly and all the effects I've just described were 100% gone.

I've told this so anyone who is getting ready to go down this path will know the truth of it. I think it's important to tell the truth.

The rest of the story is well documented here on my blog. It's on the long side, though, since I've been here almost three years, so I will summarize it.

The psychiatrist reinstated me on 35 mg of Valium and tapered me at a rate of rate of 5 mg a week. As you might imagine, I didn't do well. I eventually found another forum, then this forum and started following the Ashton protocol. The psychiatrist worked with me and allowed me to taper at my own speed. I never took another Klonopin after that mistake my husband made. I used Valium all the way down.

By the time I found the forums, I was at 7.5 mg of Valium. It took me 22 months and 9 days to taper off. I tried Roxane liquid and experienced intolerable nausea. I honestly can't remember everything I tried now. I do remember the last four months were a daily reduction of about .01 mg and I was using a small amount of vodka to dissolve the Valium.

Symptoms during the taper were truly brutal but they were nothing compared to not knowing what was wrong with me. I slowly began to want to live. Perhaps the biggest miracle of all was making deep connections on this and the other forum. I started laughing again. I would be up in the middle of the night, huddling in my recliner, sweating, fish heart flopping, feeling like I just might die, and one of my friends would post something that would make me laugh out loud. They probably saved my life. We were all going through the same things and we all chose distraction to get through. Of course there were also many moments of profound sharing and deep insight among us that got me through. That time is easily in the top ten most valuable things that has ever happened to me in my life, not just in my benzo years. I won't attempt to name everyone. If my friends are reading this, you know and you remember how sacred our bond was and is. I humbly thank you.

I'm one of the lucky ones who just slowly began to feel better. It wasn't dramatic. Sometimes it wasn't even noticeable. I started driving again at 1 mg. I made some real progress socially at about 8 months off. At 15 months off, I entered a masters program in psychology. My goal is to become a counselor. This is very ambitious and maybe even silly, considering I'm 59 and we have no money.

Some people have said they feel reborn during this experience. I think that would be a fair statement. Only the Celiac diagnosis remains. All the rest of the medical diagnoses I was given no longer apply. Even the sleep apnea has gone away. I still take .1 mg of Clonidine for blood pressure, and that's down from .4 mg. I'll eventually be able to stop it entirely. I quit smoking and lost 85 pounds after my taper ended.

There are days when I feel absolutely wonderful in my body. I'm usually full of energy and well being. I've recently begun sleeping 7-8 hours straight through after years of no sleep, little sleep, intermittent sleep and hover sleep. A sleep study during the benzo years showed I woke up 29 times an hour and never reached REM sleep. Last month. A other sleep study showed normal REM sleep and waking a normal once an hour.

I don't think I've mentioned this to my friends but the Dupuytren's in my palms is subsiding, the tendon cords are going away. I no longer need the surgery or radiation to keep my hands from further curling and the fingers are beginning to straighten.

I'm cleaning house. I'm almost to the point where it's not embarrassing anymore. When the doorbell rings, I answer it instead of running to hide in the bedroom. I can talk on the phone again. I can shop for groceries and cook a meal and enjoy doing both. I'm volunteering at a prison diversion program as a GED tutor, getting fairly active in a neat little church, and regularly attend a twelve step meeting called Emotions Anonymous where I'm making friends and building intimacy.

I started seeing a therapist four months before my taper ended. He has been so valuable to me, teaching me that life could not be lived well in isolation like I was doing. I honestly don't know if he fully believed me on the benzo story. I'm one of two people he sees that have gotten off benzos. He commented recently that we were both getting

our lives back and he wished his other patients would consider coming off. The therapeutic relationship has proved transformational for me. This is why I am so intent on becoming a therapist. I would very much like to help someone as I have been helped. I'm hoping to find a niche in the world of substances, particularly benzodiazepines. I don't have the heart to fight litigiously. I do have the heart to help people one at a time. That's my goal.

Today I sat down and wrote three papers for school, they weren't long or difficult papers. They were simply digesting and summarizing some outside assigned readings. I was focused and disciplined, and I polished off the assignment in about 6 hours. Then I walked the dog a mile, returned a phone call, and sat down to begin writing this story.

I planned to say more, but it feels like it's well covered. I hope you can get a feel for how sick I was, how hopeless I was and now how hopeful I am, and how well I feel.

People usually want to know if we are 100% healed. My best answer is that I don't know. When this started, I was in my 40s. Now I'm almost 60 and post menopausal. My body is different. My priorities are different. I'm more content with simplicity. I can honestly say that I'm living life fully, and that I can make plans far down the road with a high degree of comfort I'll be able to keep the plans and not cancel because I'm too sick.

Relationships have become so important to me. I feel less anxious, less self-monitoring, more self-accepting and more relaxed with people. It's as if the internal critic has been almost muted.

Life is about to get too busy and I'll undoubtedly begin to spend less and less time here. That is the natural flow of life and it is a healthy thing. But as I said before, I have many friends here. This is still my chief social outlet. I still come here first to report successes and failures and to celebrate and commiserate with others.

If you have managed to wade through this and have questions, I'll be happy to try to answer them. If you are still suffering so much that you think life is just not worth it, please take heart and do whatever you need to do to endure it and let time pass. Passing time is key. It simply takes time for the brain to heal. I really believe now that we all heal. There is no set time frame and we are all truly different. The body and mind are amazing, though. Given the smallest of chances, both heal.

I'm ever so grateful for the support of friends here, to Colin for maintaining this amazing forum, to the administrators, moderators and all the BB team who give so selflessly of their time and hearts. Without all of you and my steady husband, I would be a casualty. It's just the truth.

Thank you for listening.

## Story 2

Here is my story:

I was suffering from insomnia and visited a therapist highly recommended to me by my doctor. This therapist believed my insomnia was likely due to work related stress. At the end of the appointment, he told me to take this pill called Risperidone. He said it was harmless, and would help me with my daily business routine and make sleep possible. I remember him saying, "it is a baby dosage and won't do any harm." This pill worked really well for a month. I felt good.

I was able to sleep well and thought I had discovered a magic pill. Then, I began having minor episodes of depression, anxiety and rage. I had never had these before and began to worry that something was wrong. I went back to the therapist and he told me to take Fluoxetine along with the Risperidone. I followed his directions but started feeling even worse. When I told him this, he then gave me Alprazolam (Xanax) and another drug I cannot remember. I was now taking 4 pills and before all this began, I had never used pills before. In hindsight, when I was put on these pills, I had no new stress in my professional life that I wasn't able to handle prior without medications.

I called the therapist and told him I was feeling badly, and he said it was me and I should take it easy! He also told me I could discontinue all the pills if I wanted to. Since they didn't seem to be working, I listened to him and stopped the pills on a Friday. Within 8 hours of discontinuing the pills, I suffered my first panic attack at a restaurant with my family. My wife immediately drove me to the doctor who said this was NORMAL and just a middle age crisis. He injected me with 2mg of Valium, told me I was okay and sent me home.

I went to sleep and after a couple of hours all hell broke loose. I started having hallucinations, paranoia and felt totally out of my mind. I spent the weekend very sick and unable to eat or sleep. Food tasted like metals; noises made me afraid of my own shadow. On Monday, we visited him and he tried to put me in a mental hospital. I refused. He then reinstated me on 3 mg of Xanax daily, with Paxil and Alprazolam as needed. This did not work. He then increased the Xanax to 6 mg daily, and added Wellbutrin. I felt even worse.

I couldn't handle it anymore and I discontinued most of the pills. I kept only one Xanax pill at night for two more weeks, but felt worse still. I then cold turkeyed (CT) the Xanax.

Going CT, I was now totally out of my mind, disabled, unable to work, drive or be by myself. I lost weight. I was a human train wreck. I thought this would last only a couple of weeks, or I would die.

My business suffered, costing me a lot of money. The only thing I could do was pace around my house due to the akathisia and anxiety. I couldn't be around people, even

my parents. I also spent thousands of dollars on therapists trying to find the magic cure. None of them worked and only confused me more since no one had the right diagnosis. I was labeled OCD and co-dependent since no one recognized this as withdrawal. It was only after I began searching the internet that I discovered the videos on youtube. That was my life!

Once I discovered the Ashton Manual, I realized I was in withdrawal. It took me 14 more months of my life to heal and I had only taken those drugs for 3 MONTHS!! I suffered windows and waves and the whole package of symptoms. Thank God I am finally done with that nightmare. All the symptoms are gone. It was a very slow process. The first 8 months I couldn't notice improvement, but then I started having windows and more hope. The last 2 months my windows got longer and my waves got smaller in intensity until it was gone!

It is incredible how much damage was done, but it is also incredible that our brains and body have the ability to heal all that damage. Withdrawal has probably been the hardest experience of my life, but I now understand it was only temporary. Long, but temporary. I have my life back. Life feels good again. I am exercising like never before, eat only healthy food and enjoy every minute of my new life! Healing happens. Please believe that and **DON'T LET ANYONE TELL YOU ANY DIFFERENT!!** Everyone heals sooner or later. I know that now.

### Story 3

Well, how does one quantify one's healing? It's been a question that has weighed heavily on my mind during the last few months...am I 90% better, 80%...and does it even matter. What I do know for certain is that I am miles from the pain I endured during acute withdrawal and even further from the days on the medication.

My first blog entry: One day at a time. When I realized what clonazepam was doing to me I decided to get off of it immediately. I spent one week titrating down off the medication and haven't regretted my decision once. Through the severe stomach pain, the dizziness, the inability to focus, the headaches, the tightness in my jaw, the electrical bursts, the slurring, the gastro issues, the tachycardia, the brain fog and all the rest, I have held on to the fact that I am clearer in thought than I ever was while on the medication. All the pain I am enduring now is secondary to the need to be off this drug so I can be the woman I am without it.

There is not a day that has passed that I have thought of reinstating the drug to alleviate the withdrawal symptoms and I am thankful for the unambiguous nature of my commitment, and it is a commitment. I am committed to getting my body and mind back from the grip this benzodiazepine has had on me.

Peace be with all of you who are struggling, myself included. May we all find the compassion we so easily bestow onto others and give a generous amount to ourselves. Being patient with ourselves is the surest way to ease the pain.

In love and light,

P.S. My choice to cold turkey was a very intimate decision. I do not encourage any one else to follow this path, it's highly discouraged.

What followed that entry was an unknowable hell that tested my strength and faith in a better tomorrow. But I survived and I am now on the other side, looking back and extending a hand to all of you who can't see through the thickness of despair.

Hang on to the truth that this is not permanent. Trust that you and you alone know what is best for your body and your life. Love each moment and know that there is a better tomorrow laying ahead.

Peace be with you,

## Story 4

I started taking Klonopin for panic attacks 18 years ago. Which did seem to work for a while. Through the years my dose slowly increased and my personality changed. I had become someone that didn't care, weather a person lived or died ,succeeded in life or failed. In fact, I liked watching others fail. I didn't like what I had become. So, without doing any research I jumped off Klonopin 11/30/09.

The first day after quitting, I woke up with a hot metallic taste in my mouth and decided to do a quick search on Klonopin withdrawals. The site I found listed symptoms such as metallic taste, increased anxiety, panic attacks and insomnia. Those symptoms I already had and thought, well I should be able handle the symptoms fine. Well, day three hit and everything let loose. On that night I woke up in sheer terror and panic. The days that followed were even worse as I had the most terrible pain along with my skin feeling like it was on fire.

Note: I had several tests done before jumping , from brain scans to a colonoscopy. Since being cleared with a clean bill of health, I knew the symptoms I had were from Klonopin.

Because of the pain and severe insomnia, I started to increase my Ambien dose and made up an excuse to have an old Percocet Rx renewed. My addiction to Ambien and Percocet soon became out of control. My Doctors became aware of my abuse and wouldn't give me another refill. So, at the end of April of 2010 I ended up doing another C/T. Although I stopped these drugs fast, it didn't seem to really change things for me mentally or physically. While I was on Percocet and Ambien and even after I stopped both , the waves kept happening.

I'm not proud and feel disappointed that I let this happen, but that's who I was and I am not that person anymore.

Even though things did seem to be improving somewhat, I felt like a lost soul and wondered if this would be my normal self. My family even pressured me to reinstate and said, some people just need to stay on this medication. After they said that, for some reason my wife started to do some research and found Benzo Buddie's. I'll never forget the first time reading some of the posts. I felt so happy that so many questions were answered, I almost felt healed.

After joining this forum, I had many ups and downs. One of which was a Cipro steroid reaction and that felt very close to the C/T I had done earlier with Klonopin. That was another very dark time for me. I even told my wife to be ready, because I didn't think I had the strength to make it this time. Well, don't ask me how but I managed to push through it. In time the intensity went down and the windows started happening again.

About three weeks ago, I woke up and my wife told me to go look at the whites of my eyes. When I looked they were white! Since that time my sleep has returned and have had not had anymore mental or physical problems.

I have also been testing myself by going out in public and doing a really intense workout. I have no more muscle weakness, or anxiety when I'm around people. I'm symptom free and feel very confident I'm totally healed.

Although I did everything the wrong way. It shows you even a long time benzo user such as myself can heal.

Take your time, follow your taper, get support from your Buddie's, ask questions and research as much as you can.

You will heal from this and realize the fight was all worth it.

## Story 5

So I have been hesitant to post any sort of success story as I keep going back and forth on whether I am recovered or not, or recovered enough to say I'm recovered lol. But I decided if I can give someone hope, it'd be selfish of me to withhold . 😊

My story started last summer when I had something that equated to a panic attack. I was put on Paxil for a bit but took myself off due to some side effects. When I got back to college I got back into the drinking scene again and suddenly found myself riddled with anxiety. One point I couldn't move for fear of making it worse, and ended up asking my gf to take me to the ER. It was here I was given my first klonopin. This made me feel instantly better so I went on a journey trying to obtain and abuse the prescriptions. After a week I started to get panic attacks when I didn't take anything so I went back on Paxil and continued abusing alcohol and klonopin. 3 months later during Thanksgiving I realized I had a problem and quit everything cold turkey.

This started my hellish withdrawal that included nasty d/r, brain fog, inability to speak, anxiety that I thought would physically kill me, depression, and vision deterioration among other minor stuff. I was forced to withdraw from university and move home because I couldn't hardly move or think. The first two months I was bed ridden, but things started to let up after that slightly.

Since then I have subsequently moved to a new city, Chicago, and have found a new job selling computers and technology. I speak with people all day and answer their questions, which takes a lot of brain power lol. I am happy to say that every single symptom has gone away for me except some of the anxiety 😊 I tell myself I did all this stuff in spite of my symptoms, but I really could not have held a job two months ago, absolutely no way, and it makes me realize how much better I actually am.

For those of you still going through this, my symptoms, usually one at a time, let up in a period of a few days, but before that they were horrendous. It's strange how that happens. You have to notice the things that do get better or else you only focus on what's left and feel like you haven't gotten better at all, when you really have made strides. I fell victim of this until recently as my anxiety is bad sometimes, and I felt like I had so much further to go. But when I look back, I've come so far...far enough that I think its appropriate to label myself a success story 😊👏

Never let go of hope because things WILL change and they WILL get better, and I hope my story can help show that. Yes I only took it for 3 months, but I drank heavily for the past 7 years so my body has been affected for a long time.

I look forward to my new sober life and my continued growth as a person 😊

## Story 6

I just wanted to post my "Success Story" for those of you out there that feel like this will never end. When you're experiencing the withdrawal symptoms it feels like eternity and it's the worst nightmare you never even could have imagined, whether you've been going through it for 2 weeks or 2 years. I was one of the lucky few who was only on Benzos for a short time and even luckier that my withdrawal only lasted about 3 weeks. But the terror and memories of it all will probably always stay with me the rest of my life. It was definitely a learning experience and finally I feel back to myself again.

The last 5 weeks of my life has been a rollercoaster and I can only imagine how awful it must be for those of you who have had to endure it for much longer periods of time. I had almost every symptom there was and most of the time thought my hearing, vision, and sleep patterns were permanently damaged because of those pills. The anxiety was terrifying, but I thought I could live with it if I had to, but, the intrusive thoughts made me think I was going out of my mind. I could relate to so many of the threads I read in the forum and it was both comforting and scary all at once. I was scared I would never heal or that it would last for months, but comforted that I was not alone.

A wise family member told me, "If you're worried about losing your mind then you're definitely not going to! People who have lost their mind aren't even aware they've lost it." This made me think back to the Psych hospital and I remembered the majority of people I encountered had almost no idea what was going on or even what their name was. So I realized, "hey, I guess you're right!" I referred back to that comment many times during this experience.

Please know that if you were "normal" before you WILL be normal again, I was told this over and over by friends and family, and it was the only thing I had to provide me some comfort. I can honestly say now, that they were right! I finally feel "normal" again and can sleep a decent night's sleep and it's just as wonderful as I remembered! I have a new found appreciation for the small things in life and I know that it will happen for all of you too. I wish you all the best of luck and always include the members of this sight in my bedtime prayers. Please have faith that you will get through this and don't be discouraged when you have a bad day. Push through it and keep on keepin' on.



## Story 7

Boy, what a nightmare.....I didn't find this site until I had already been thru 5 months of a rollercoaster ride that I would never wish on my worst enemy. I only took xanax for a couple of months for a health scare that had me panicked (all is fine) , but 2 short months of taking a little pill really screwed up my life for almost a year. I stopped cold turkey, not being told anything about tapering or withdrawal, and spent the first month at doctor's offices spending a fortune running tests on everything, with no answers. I finally ran across the benzo.org website, and discovered that what was happening to me was withdrawal. I had wonderful support from my husband of 25 years and just rode out the storm. I think I had every symptom on the withdrawal list except for seizures at one time or another.

It always seemed like symptoms would disappear only to be replaced by others. The last symptoms that started in January were the morbid thoughts, sore scalp, continued insomnia, and continued anxiety, which had me searching again on the web for answers and that's when I found this wonderful place. Coming here seemed to ease my symptoms, as I read about others going thru the same thing, and took my mind off of me for a while. Thanks to all of you for your encouraging words, humor, and ideas on how to ease some of the symptoms.

Well, finally I started some natural progesterone prescribed by my doctor, after some blood work revealed that my progesterone level was almost zero. It took about a week to start working, and by the first week in March, I started feeling perfectly normal again. I am 43 years old, so maybe hitting early menopause, but I did read somewhere that benzos deplete your progesterone levels, so regardless of the reason, it has helped me become normal again, which I thought at times was going to be unobtainable.

Today is April 23rd, and I had to come back, after my first trip out to Atlanta to visit my sister (something I didn't think I was going to be able to do just a month earlier) We went to the Bon Jovi Concert, and I had a blast!!! I think about you guys often, and say a prayer for you all to get thru this quickly. Dont forget to exercise, read your bible, and eat healthy. These will all help you to get better quickly. God Bless you all

## Story 8

June 26 of 2010.. i cold turkey off of Ativan 1mg and my world was turned upside down i never knew someone could go through so much pain. I wished many nights that i wouldn't wake up.. I had every symptom one could have except for seizures.. the worst ones for me was the constant pains in my chest felt like i was having a heart attack and the heart palpation's was on real resting my heart rate would go up to 130 and some times higher couldn't sleep choked on food felt like i was being choked 24 7... i could go on forever on all these symptoms but i won't cause they no longer exist i am 100% healed and happier then i have ever been ..all i can say is be patient healing does happened when you don't think it does .and then one day you will wake up and realize it is all gone and the pain was worth going through ... i still will continue to pray for fast

healing for everybody.... 😊 🧡 🧑

## Story 9

Hi everyone...

Today I am celebrating 3 yrs freedom from benzodiazepines and thought I'd just update for anyone who doesn't know my story. I'll try not to get too long-winded.

Klonopin entered my life for situational anxiety and depression in 2003 after hastily giving up an 18yr well-paying job. The transition was difficult and I regretted every minute of it...Enter therapy and meds. Klonopin 3 mgs, Wellbutrin 200 mgs, Lamictal 200 mgs every day for 5 yrs.

I took my meds every day and never did much research into them except to glance over the pharmacy print outs. I was assured time and again by my doctor that they would never be a problem, so never felt the need to look any deeper. All I knew is that I did not have a problem in the world while taking these meds..... until tolerance set in. Sadly, I was in tolerance long before I realized it. Having enough healing under my belt today to be able to clearly look back on this process, I know for sure that I was sick at least a year before I started trying to get off the meds.

My physical and mental health were deteriorating, but I was too drugged to realize it was the meds. One day a little light bulb went off in my head... "Hey lady, maybe it's the medications?" Started poking around the net and found the Ashton Manual.

I weaned off the Wellbutrin in over one month and did fine with that. Then I cold turkey'd the Lamictal one month later. Then I started cutting the Klonopin a few months after that. I cut way too much, way too fast...crossed to Valium seeking relief. Only stabilized a few weeks and fell into a very, very deep depression and feeling of toxicity. Never slept...etc. I knew deep down that I would never survive a long taper off Valium. The symptoms were just too intense.

Went to a detox facility... had the experience from hell and came home a more broken and sick woman than when I went in. To anyone considering a typical 12-step detox off of benzos...try plan B instead. The cut/paste approach to detox in those places addresses ZERO specific to the long term process of benzodiazepine withdrawal. You are lumped in with everyone else, expected to make progress quickly, and treated cruelly when you don't. Then you will go home sicker than ever and be expected to do outpatient rehab immediately.

The climb out of the hole to hell that I landed in due to the cold turkey has been, hands down, THE most intense, profound and life changing experience...EVER for me. I had pretty much every symptom in the book...and some.

Instead of getting into an emotional long winded story here, I thought that leaving a time line of symptoms might help to remind those of you struggling to make your way off these awful drugs, that healing DOES happen. Although mostly in teeny tiny increments early on, the huge chunks of healing have occurred for me mostly in the last year (2nd yr.).

March 21, 2008 cold turkey 15 mgs Valium.

Months 1-6....Intense acute symptoms. Hallucinations, agoraphobia, terror/fear, depersonalization, derealization, complete cognition misery, insomnia, burning skin/mouth, chemical taste in mouth, shaking, blurred vision, hypersensitivity to light/sound/stimulation, extreme social fear, tinnitus, hair loss, severe gastro problems (malabsorption, constipation, bloating, gas) food sensitivities, vitamin/otc med sensitivities, severe depression, severe crying spells, rage/anger, thoughts of suicide/homicide, complete loss of a sense of purpose, tight band around my head/jaw, inner vibrations, very severe headaches, off the charts anxiety, very heavy fatigue, body/brain zaps.

Months 6-12.....Some drop off of symptoms, with addition of new ones. Still fearful out in public. Very sensitive to all stimuli, food sensitivities, band around head and face, throbbing teeth. Some mania and euphoria spells set in during these months. Was getting out more because of them...LOL, but they would always drop off as quick as they came with depression waiting in the shadows. Crying spells fading out now. Starting to sleep more.....about 5 hrs/night. Unfortunately, during this time, the fatigue did not improve, and severe joint/back/neck pain set in with muscle rigidity. Tinnitus still louder than ever. DP/DR still there, but not as intense.

Months 12-24.....Some really good healing here. Became more noticeable....in chunks instead of trickles.....able to interact better with people. Cognition improving, sleep much improved (7 hrs/night). DP/DR very manageable now. Much less depression and lessened anxiety. Digestive problems GREATLY improved during this time. Food sensitivities under control with good nutrition. Starting to get a grip mentally. Physically...not so good. Fatigue/pain/tinnitus.

Months 24-36....This has been my very, very best healing time. I rarely become depressed, but do still battle anxiety under duress. The healing during this period of time has been mostly in the area of improved cognition, improved coping mechanisms, better decision-making, and improved social skills. A vast drop off of mental symptoms. I am now actually enjoying being around other people. I pushed myself to go back to work in month 26 and have never looked back. I can't stress enough how much staying active and as plugged into the world as possible has helped me. I do believe that getting a job and stepping away from my safe little cocoon away from the big bad world has been my saving grace. It is a very stressful job and I am handling it very well, and it is helping me to regain coping skills. Starting to make new friends now. Much improved family ties as well.

Unfortunately, pain/fatigue and tinnitus are still hanging with me. I do get some days every once in awhile where the fatigue lifts, but the pain issues have not gotten much better.

Some of the things that have helped me move forward:  
ACCEPTANCE

Distractions  
Self talk  
Research  
Good nutrition  
Good hydration  
Staying active....can't stress this one enough  
Keeping with a routine  
Never looking past the next 10 minutes  
Pushing to socialize  
Music  
Staying medication free.. including OTC meds

Well, that just about sums it up.

I like hanging around the forum as much as I can so that those of you just starting out, or those of you in the thick of things, can see for yourself that those of us that have come before you ARE healing. I am not 100% by any stretch.....but I am SO much better than I was even 6 months ago. The lingering pain issues and tinnitus may very well be with me for some time, but I will just keep doing my life exactly as I am. Being active actually keeps the pain in check. Simply, I know I can live contentedly just as I am for the rest of my life. As much as I would love to have complete healing, I also know that the healing I do have behind me has been HUGE. I am so very grateful for that.

I've got a real good handle on the anxiety, and my wholesome nutritional lifestyle has been a very positive addition to my recovery. There has been a large amount of emotional processing during the last year that has been extremely helpful in getting me past the guilt of what I did to myself and my life while dependent on benzodiazepines. When I look back at the complete destruction of my physical, mental and spiritual health that benzos have caused in my life, and I compare it to the humbled, grateful, calm and mentally healthy person I am today...I am awestruck.

I can easily say that, in spite of the few struggles I am left with, I haven't been this happy, this healthy, or this content with myself EVER.

Life without benzos is just about as sweet as it gets for me.....

Good luck to everyone here and thank you from the bottom of my heart for the support. In spite of the craziness that goes on here [meaning BW - not BB], I really do consider this a part of "home" in my heart. I've made some very close friendships here that I hope will last the rest of my life.

Keep moving forward!! Never look back.....

## Story 10

Hi Everybody!

It's here, it's real.....I'm out of the woods and having ZERO symptoms now.....Truly a miracle! After 20 years of prescription drugs I am now completely drug free and feeling better than I ever have physically, mentally and emotionally.

I owe a big thanks to my husband who stuck by me through all 9 months of my taper and who encouraged me to keep making the cuts even when I thought I couldn't go on.

Thanks to the lovely people on this website who encouraged me as I was in the last stages of my withdrawal symptoms.

Here's a list of the symptoms I had.....

Symptoms:

Electric shocks throughout whole body (felt like someone stabbed a metal fork in the top of my brain and sent electrodes through my body.....very painful!)

Shaking, trembling, tremors (constant)

Nausea, vomiting (lost a lot of weight, was worried about keeping enough calories down to heal; drank powerade and ate snickers for calories)

Headaches, migraines

Hot/cold flashes (heating pads and ice packs were my best friends; felt like I had a constant fever/chills)

Itching/burning skin

Felt like my skin was on fire (literally would scream and cry from this, began to wonder if this is what Joan of Arc felt like...I would tear my clothes off and cover myself in ice packs)

Teeth hurt all of the time like they were made out of metal

Insomnia (began taking Ambien at the beginning of my taper/withdrawal which was a mistake, I then had to taper/withdraw off of it too....the night terrors were the worst, even hallucinated)

Hallucinations

Distorted sense of smell and taste (everything metallic)

Intense irrational fears (agoraphobia, paranoia)

Heart palpitations (it was like revving an engine and keeping your foot on the gas.....my heart could never stop pounding)

Chest pain (thought I was having a heart attack....felt a pulling across my chest, strong tightness that wouldn't ease off.....had to keep a heating pad across my chest and that only slightly eased the pain)

Sensitivity to light (wore sunglasses all the time, during the day and night as well as indoors, the computer screen was too much for me even dimmed to the lowest setting)

Sensitivity to sound (every sound was explosive and painful, was like a hangover that seemed to never end)

Nerves were shot (nerve sensitivity, like my nerves were wires that had been stripped of their protective plastic coating; bare nerves that if bumped in any way was very painful)

Fear of losing my mind. Unable to think, reason or organize thoughts. I felt as though I'd gone mad. Felt violent and did not trust myself. Thought I should be locked up for fear I might hurt someone I loved. An intense feeling of being out of control, like I was Alice falling down a dark hole that would never end

Very weak (Was unable to care for myself, couldn't prepare food, take a shower on my own, dress myself, it was agony being that dependant)

Near the end it just felt like a bad flu that hung on and wouldn't let go.

Vertigo (dizziness which caused me to stumble into things and fall down, so most of the time I just stayed down)

Also near the end, I felt as though I was being pulled upward into outer space; like I was being sucked upward....this was terrifying. I knew that this was an irrational thought, but the physical sensation was so real I fell to the floor and held onto the bed/furniture to keep myself from flying upward. This went from dizziness to madness very quickly right before I took my last Ativan.

Unable to care for myself. (unable to shower, change clothes, do laundry, cook, shop, drive, type, read.....the list goes on.)

Top 10 things I did to help in w/d.....

1. Eat well and stay hydrated.....that means force food down when you don't feel like eating and choose to eat the right kinds of things.....whole foods are always best. Try to avoid over processed foods, caffeine and alcohol during w/d.

2. Exercise when you can. Even if it's a small walk, it's important to keep your muscles moving.....and it helps a lot with sleep.
3. Hot baths and showers.....helps ease muscle pain and relaxes us.
4. Distracting.....Distract yourself from the pain. I did this by watching a lot of TV when I was too sick to read....trust me, this works.
5. Lots of positive self-talk. I had to tell myself repeatedly that I was strong enough to do keep tapering. This is more important than people give credit for.
6. A belief in my bodies ability to heal.
7. Coming to the realization that adding more drugs was not going to help me. There is no magic cure for w/d....it's about patience and persistence.
8. Prayer and meditation.
9. Journaling or blogging your progress is great in seeing how far you've come and to keep the positive self talk going.
10. Staying close to friends and loved ones. We need all the love and support we can get because this is a long and lonely journey.

I just want to encourage everyone to take this one day at a time and know that healing is absolutely possible.

Happy healing,

## Story 11

I was a police officer for 12 years but had to leave the job due to panic attacks. The police doctor said that I had an "anxiety disorder" and put me on Xanax. That was the worst mistake of my life!

I stayed on Xanax for the next 12 years while going to therapy to find out why I had this "anxiety disorder". During these 12 years I tried, by myself, to taper down and go off of the Xanax without any success. Each time that I decreased the dosage I felt like I was going to lose my mind. I would run to my doctor and tell him all my symptoms and he would say that I had this "anxiety disorder" and that I "needed" the Xanax. He would instruct me to increase the dosage and, sure enough, my symptoms would disappear. What he never told me was that I was experiencing a severe withdrawal reaction and not some "anxiety disorder". I never abused this drug or exceeded the dosage but I did take it faithfully for 12 years.

My family noticed a gradual change in my personality. They noticed that I didn't laugh anymore or show much emotion about anything. They said I would just sit there like I was frozen. I felt I was a vegetable! I continued to see therapists, thinking that one of them could cure me of this "anxiety disorder", but I was only getting worse. I was barely leaving the house, and when I did, someone had to be with me. I was so afraid and still suffered from panic attacks, depression and paranoia.

Thank God that I met a Christian doctor, and after 2 years of therapy and getting nowhere with me, he said that I would never improve until I got off of the Xanax. I could not go on living like this anymore and somehow made it into a rehab. They took me off "cold turkey" and put me on phenobarbital so that I would not have a seizure. I then became allergic to the phenobarbital so they put me on Klonopin and sent me home. After I stopped the Klonopin ALL HELL BROKE LOOSE! My wife called the rehab doctors for help but they said that I would have to come to their office. I could barely walk, talk or sleep, much less travel. So with the help of my wife I dug myself in at home and stayed there for the next two years, waiting for these symptoms to leave. I felt that all my doctors had abandoned me and I was totally on my own. All I had or knew about withdrawal was what I read from a book by Shirley Trickett called "Coming off Tranquilizers".

At first I thought that I was losing my mind and wanted to be committed but I was too paranoid to leave the house. I kept my wife prisoner in her own home pleading with her to stay with me and she did for the next 2 years. My nerves screamed out at me from every part of my body. All I wanted to do was die but was too afraid to kill myself. I cursed God, neighbors and family members. I was in so much pain that I didn't care who heard me and screamed out loud. I busted up furniture and threw chairs. I made holes in the walls and floors. It wasn't fun for me or my family to watch. I cried for months. The tears just wouldn't stop. While being sedated for 12 years I had never dealt with anything and now everything that I had buried was coming to the top. I weighed only 149 lbs and my family thought I wouldn't make it. They pleaded for me to see a

doctor but I refused, believing that more drugs were not the answer if I was ever to recover. After 2 years I was able to leave the house and I learned to drive all over again. Little by little I started to get my life back.

This month I will have four years of being TOTALLY DRUG FREE! Most of my troublesome symptoms have left. Mentally, I feel great. I exercise daily and eat a very healthy diet. Physically, I still have nerve pain and get fatigued once in a while, but I have confidence that this too will go away in time. I am working again and have gone back to school to take computer classes. Oh, by the way, I don't suffer from any more panic attacks or depression. Looking back at my rehab I feel these doctors didn't know what they were doing by taking me off "cold turkey". They also suggested that I take anti-depressants and BuSpar which I refused. I felt that the only way that I was going to make it was to NOT swallow any more pills but let my body heal on its own. Thanks for letting me share my story.

Update I am now 5 years drug-free. I do not have the fatigue or nerve pain that I did when I wrote that story at my 4 year mark. The healing still continues. I don't believe we suffer permanent damage. Some of us just take longer.

## Story 12

It's been a long 13 years on Clonazepam. I was sicker than a dog for many years only to find out I was experiencing tolerance withdrawal. I was taking it to "help" me sleep. I started my taper Feb of 08 and just finished on 3/29/09. I must say I, as others on here, have very thick skin. My body and mind were pushed to the limits over the past year, but the good news is I'm a survivor.

I'm a very analytical guy...I'm a mechanical engineer...what else would you expect? I've made some very good observations that may help others through a rough withdrawal. I'm going to write some things I noticed help me through this and eventually made my taper virtually pain free. Unfortunately, I had to go through at least 8 mos of hell to figure this stuff out.

1. Get in the right frame of mind prior to tapering. Don't be afraid, be strong.
2. A slow taper wins the race! A quick taper will bite you in the butt...and sometimes very hard.
3. I found the water titration method made me focus too much on my withdrawal. It was a serious painful nightly exercise. Clonazepam wasn't water soluble so it was difficult to get an even mixture of water and medication. The only blender I could find that would mix such a small mixture was terrible...it leaked, so god knows how much med I was really getting. I could never get my body dialed in to the right amount of taper, so my withdrawals were bad. It wasn't for me.
4. I used a compounding pharmacy. I found the sweet spot in dose reduction right away. I tapered .0625mg every 2-3weeks. I didn't even feel some tapers. I would do just fine. Although I still had some tolerance withdrawals between drops. I would get a months supply of a specific dose with 1 refill encase I had problems. It went smoothly and never had to go past 3 weeks on a specific dose. My final taper was to .03125mg. I stopped taking it after that and I had 2 days of anxiety, but that went away as it always did. I had a bunch of other w/d symptoms, but why dwell on it. Anyway, the cost of compounding for me was \$40 per prescription.
5. STAY AWAY FROM THE NEGATIVE POSTS! I would have serious anxiety attacks after reading some of the crap on here. I firmly believe we have to retrain our brains to handle many situations while withdrawing. I look at it as my brain was a blank canvas. If you're throwing nothing but negative horror stories on that blank canvas, you'll be in trouble for sure. My advice is to put happy positive things on that blank canvas (okay..am I sounding like Bob Ross?). I kept my mind busy with good things. I read good books, I watched fun movies, I started to draw/sketch again, I would plant my butt outside and enjoy the fresh air...HAPPY STUFF. This was key to my smoother withdrawal for the last 5 months (my first 8 months were very bad, but I won't dwell on that). The moment I stopped reading the negative crap was the day I started to heal!

6. MAKE SURE YOU USE THE SAME DRUG MANUFACTURER THROUGH YOUR WHOLE TAPER. Generics can fluctuate up to 50% in potency. Now that's a surprise none of us want while tapering...or anytime while on this stuff for that matter. Your pharmacy can make sure you get the same manufacturer. Most pharmacies go with the cheapest manufacturer and that can vary month by month.

7. Take your med at the same time every day/night.

8. DO NOT EAT RIGHT BEFORE OR AFTER YOU TAKE YOUR MED! YOU WON'T ABSORB YOUR MED! This one through me for a loop for a long time. I spiraled out of control for a while til I figured this one out. After figuring this one out, I waited 2 hours after a meal before taking my clonazepam and waited one hour after I took it. Wow...seriously, this one hammered me for a while.

9. EXERCISE! At first, I could barely walk...once I got on the right track with my taper, I was able to do 20-30 minutes a day on my nordic track. I couldn't believe it myself.

10. Eat foods high in protein, I had and still am having issues with my low sugar levels. I crave carbos, but they make me even more hungry if I have sugary foods.

11. I had to eat every 3 hrs...strange, but it minimized a lot of the withdrawals for me. Go figure.

12. NO SMOKING...I used to enjoy an occasional smoke....NOT ANYMORE. This was another thing that exacerbated my withdrawals.

13. NO CAFFEINE! Caffeine = severe anxiety

14. Don't sweat not sleeping. I am living proof you can get 3 hours of sleep a night and live. My sleep is far from perfect, I get 5-6 hours a night, but I feel sooooo much better than I did when I was getting 7-8 hours on clonazepam.

15. Expect a few hiccups post taper. Just expect it. I've been on Clonazepam for 13 years. I don't expect to be cured overnight. A few bad days for months will still be better than the hell I was going through on this stuff for years.

16. You will get better. My good windows turned into weeks near the end of my taper. At first I would have 2 good days per month, but near the end that flipped. I would have 2 bad days a month.

I hope some of my observations are helpful. It's been a hair raising journey to say the least. Feel confident, you will be a stronger person once you're done. I'm glad to be off and I'm no longer a hostage to benzodiazepines. Oh, the doctors always tried to poly-med me...I just said NO!

## Story 13

It was right after my 25th birthday. I drank too much in my teenage years and carried over into my early twenties. I wanted to make a positive change in my life so I quit drinking. About two weeks later I had an anxiety attack. I ended up in the ER not knowing what it was and they said I was fine and sent me home.

I started having a lot of these attacks and went to see a psychiatrist (This, as I look at it in retrospect was the biggest mistake in my life.) I went to see this doctor and explained that I had a problem with alcohol in the past and did not want to take anything addicting and was basically looking for some type of therapy to help. Well, this guy explained that this was a "chemical imbalance" and that I was self medicating by drinking. (Funny, I never had this before the drinking.) Then he recommended Klonopin which he said was the least addicting drug for this condition and that I would have no problem stopping it if I wanted to. (What exactly does "least addicting" mean?)

Well, he started me out on 2mg a day which would work for a while and then stop working. He would then up the dose. I was a zombie on this crap. I could barely remember anything and would often get lost driving in areas I knew well. I was going to school at the time and not doing too well. I wanted off this crap so I stopped on my own. All kinds symptoms started happening and I had no idea it was withdrawal. I lasted a few months and went back on the Klonopin. This did not help much but my psychiatrist said: "This is all due to your anxiety disorder and you need this medication like a diabetic needs Insulin." (Funny how there is no test for this imbalance.)

After 4 years of this crap and numerous attempts that ended in failure I started losing weight and having problems with my esophagus. I was also having incredible anxiety attacks and the Klonopin was doing nothing for them. I was hospitalized for a heart arrhythmia known as bigeminal PVCs for which they could find no cause. I was also hospitalized for extreme abdominal pain. I went to see a gastroenterologist, had all kinds of expensive and unpleasant tests, and nothing wrong was found.

After 2 more years of this, multiple doctors (who all said: "Klonopin does not cause that" and of course the psychiatrist and his whacko chemical imbalance, diabetic, insulin theory) and a worn out welcome in the emergency room I just gave up. Over the next few months I got much worse. I was having reverse peristalsis which is when the muscles in the esophagus go in reverse making it almost impossible to swallow. I lost another 50 pounds and looked like a skeleton. I was so sick I went on disability and went back to the emergency room where the doctor told me this was from depression. Well, at this point I was suicidally depressed. He gave me Xanax and on the next visit, Ativan. I just wanted to die.

I have twin boys and was wondering how they and their mother were going to get by without me. They were 6 months old at the time. I was also completely going insane, I had fits of hysteria and I cried all the time. I went to see a supposed expert psychiatrist who put me on Remeron. I broke out in a rash and itched from the inside and felt like

peeling off my skin. I called him and he said to keep taking it and see what happened. That was it for me and psychiatry! This is a professional, "one of the best"! What a sad state of affairs!

I then went to a gastroenterologist that a friend of my wife recommended. This was the first good doctor I had seen since this all began. He gave me tests for cancer, aids, an endoscopy and a colonoscopy, all kinds of blood tests and tests for parasites. All were negative. I did not want any more tests so they gave me the maximum dose of meds during these tests and could not put me under. It was horrible.

A few weeks later I went back to the emergency room and was given another prescription for Xanax. By this time I was almost too weak to stand up and spent most of my time in bed. By chance a miracle happened, or at least I think it was. My wife pulled a muscle in her back and went to see a doctor she had picked out of the blue on her health plan. During her visit, she was explaining my problems to him and then mentioned the meds I was taking. He said: "Wait, back up, he's been taking what? For how long? You need to get him in my office right away." I was not too optimistic at this point and was mentally ready for my death but went to see him anyway thinking what could it hurt now anyway.

I went into his office on Monday, October 22, 2001. I was shaking like a leaf all the time at this point and completely psychotic. He explained that all my problems were from the benzodiazepines. He then told me he was a recovering addict himself and took Dalmane for 20 years and knew first hand what benzo withdrawal was. He told me that he did not feel any better for 18 months after stopping and that this was not going to be easy. He said that I could taper over a 8 month period and it would be less intense but, from my current condition, he did not think I would make it that long. I was sent to Las Encinas Hospital where I almost died that first night. I had seizures, hallucinations, my body burned like it was on fire and every muscle in my body twitched. I was loaded up with Phenobarbital and Neurontin for two months. But, almost immediately the esophagus thing stopped and I was able to eat. I put back on 50 pounds in the first 2 months. I stayed there for 16 days and spent 6 months at home, mostly in bed.

At first I could only walk up and down the street and was exhausted. My skin and scalp burned, I shook all the time, I had muscle spasms and everything looked like it shimmered. I had hallucinations, felt like I was going insane, had wicked nightmares that I would wake up screaming from, barely slept at all, had anxiety and panic attacks that were indescribable, jaw pain, tooth pain, derealization, depersonalization, electric shock feelings in different parts of the body. My brain felt as if it was moving around in my head. I had fatigue, irritable bowel (though nothing like when I was on), squeezing pains in the center and under the right side of the ribcage.

I am now 10 months off and I am much better and slowly recovering. I still get waves of symptoms but just had a window of relief that lasted a week where I felt pretty good. I get windows of feeling fine and know I will recover in time. I go to 12 step meetings for

emotional support although these people can in no way understand benzo withdrawal. Coming off alcohol was a piece of cake. This is pure hell.

This is the worst addiction there is. These drugs should be banned as I can see no legitimate use for them unless there is a market for brain damage. When in rehab I saw the speed freaks and heroin addicts get better. They were playing basketball after a few days while I could barely move. The GP I have now is great. He understands first hand what I am going through. He does not prescribe them past 2 days and says even people not prone to addiction get hopelessly addicted to them. The drug companies are indiscriminate destroyers of lives, driven by profit and hidden by lies.

I have faith this will all end and I will get better. It is slowly going away. I pray to God to get me through this and that all who are suffering can find the truth about this medication and start their recovery.

Take care and God bless,

Here's an update. I am fine now, took awhile though. It took about 3 years before I was completely symptom free."

## Story 14

I want to begin by saying that this IS a recovery story, and for all of you out there who are still suffering to varying degrees, please, don't give up. I wanted to share my story to provide hope, because I share a common thread which each and every one of you, and stories like these were the difference to me on days when I thought I was completely lost, and would stay lost.

I have been an anxiety and depression sufferer for as long as I can remember, bullied as a child, through my teens, always being the 'sensitive' one. Hitting my hormonal late teens, many elements came together to create a final boiling point. I started experiencing feelings of unreality (DP or DR as many of you know it as) so a trip to a local psychiatrist, was, at the time, the best point of call for help. I couldn't afford to pay her, so she started seeing me at no charge. I was immediately prescribed an anti-depressant, I remember taking it for the first time and experiencing, what I know now, to be side effects of a drug entering my system.

I called my psychiatrist and my local doctor in a panic, feeling awful, and my dosage immediately increased to 3 times the amount, and an anti-psychotic thrown in for good measure. This was now a couple of months down the track, and I was now a depressed zombie, so drugged up and feelings all over the place. My psychiatrists enthusiasm quickly waned, after all, she wasn't being paid. I was in a bad way, 17 years old, still holding on to my full time job, panicked because I just wanted my life back.

Now, enter the Xanax, 1 pill, just one was all it took, I still remember taking it for the first time, swallow, 20 minutes went past, relax, another 20, I felt better than I had in my whole life! Not just better, I was a super me, all the troubles of the last 17 years had been wiped, I was now confident, happy, enthusiastic.

1 daily pill quickly became 2, 2 became 3, then another added in when I needed. I was always chasing that initial feeling, and my doctors were happy to prescribe, never questioning the speed of the bottle disappearing.

2 years later I was alpha me, I was taking copious amounts of Xanax, I was reckless, rude, aggressive, self destructive. I saw shrink after shrink, by this time, I had been prescribed every drug in the book (and every type and class), It even got to the point where I would research the drugs myself and tell them what I wanted and it would be given to me. Not one of my psychiatrists questioned the Xanax, that it could be now causing my problems and that I had been on it far too long.

At around year 4, I had stopped taking any other drug but the Xanax, and I had stopped seeing any psychiatrist, just a monthly phone call to my GP for a Xanax prescription (which came with a few repeats so I didn't run out)

By the end, I had been taking Xanax for around 7 years, I was going through a bottle a week, the little 0.5mg tablet that I took initially had turned into a frightening 15mg per

day. I was a train wreck, but because I had a full time job, I was NEVER questioned or refused a prescription.

I didn't understand addiction, and I didn't know what I had become, I was completely unaware of my situation, I lived in a Xanax world.

Until one day.

I went to work as normal this day, I hadn't had my morning Xanax, but thought, I'll just get it when I get to work. The chemist was still shut and I was busy at work, the day was speeding by. Around mid afternoon I couldn't get off the chair, my brain was shutting down, I thought I had a really bad virus. I managed to get home and to the chemist for my prescription, swallow, 20 minutes later, no symptoms at all, debilitating sickness magically gone, I knew there was a problem.

I did my research, found my internet groups, the ashton manual, and a local drug and alcohol support group (The Buoyancy foundation in Melbourne were truly amazing, natural therapy based and provided most of my support)

Quit my job, moved back in with my parents and quickly started my taper. I went from 15mg per day to 0.5mg in about a month, and yes I was sick, but nothing compared to the sickness I felt when I took my last pill.

Hallucinations, paranoia, major depression, anxiety, tunnel vision, no energy, constant suicidal thoughts, every symptom on the list I had in full force. I was 24 years old and on a disability pension, I couldn't even walk 5 minutes to the local shops without having to sit down. No medical professional believed that after a month that I could be still suffering withdrawal, I had to hold on to my own beliefs and intuition, the support I had from the internet benzo groups and the Buoyancy Foundation was amazing, I kept going.

It took 2 years for the paranoia to stop, 3 years before I would take my beanie off (I would wear a beanie, even in summer on a 40 degree day because I thought everyone was looking at me thinking I was hideously ugly) and 4 years before I felt like I had recovered enough to return to work.

My moments of recovery would happen over night (which also no one believed). I would get severe headaches the day before, then I would wake up and a symptom would be gone. This would happen once a month, then every couple of months, getting further and further apart as I got better and made progress.

After 4 years, I considered myself 85% healed, and that's where I thought it would stop, I hit a plateau for a long time, maybe years. I opened up my own business, I went back to work 6 days a week, in hindsight I probably wasn't quite ready but when are you ever?

6 years has now passed, it's been almost 9 years since I have taken Xanax. I have fully recovered. I still run my own successful business, I exercise every day, I am an educator, I can talk to a room full of 100 or more people with confidence. I tell you this for no other reason than that there was a time, not long ago at all, were I thought it would never be possible.

**\*\*HERE IS WHAT HELPED ME** (for the people who don't want to read my very long story, and I don't blame you, there were moments for years when I couldn't even read without falling asleep)

\*Diet is everything – I considered myself 85% healed until I started intermittently fasting, this has been the biggest help out of anything. I always had a great diet during my recovery, and that helped immensely, but until I found my way too intermittent fasting, I was still depressed and anxious and had no energy.

I eat healthily for 8 hours a day, then I fast for the other 16. After 3 days of doing this I was completely symptom free, I believe that fasting gives your body a chance to heal and pay attention to the things that it has been neglecting for years, because all of our energy goes to digesting food! 95% of it! My mind is clear, no more depression, I am anxiety free, and I have a lot of energy.

\*My recovery was at a standstill for a few years, no changes, then fasting changed everything, and quickly!!

\*Exercise is essential; you don't have to become an Olympian! Just get your heart rate up for a short period every day.

\*Meditation, 20 minutes a day of just sitting and letting my thoughts flow saved me and I believe, led me to find the things that helped me recover. You don't have to become a Buddhist! Just sit, nothing more.

\*Water, water, water, enough said.

Please don't give up, I didn't, recovery is waiting. It's a journey, life, everything. I look at my life in ways I never thought possible, I believe I have an understanding of things that I would never have had without going through such hell. It has made me strong, I have gained just as much as it has taken, it is a balanced equation.

## Story 15

In 2001 I went to my doctor complaining of indigestion and gastric reflux. He did all sorts of tests but couldn't find anything wrong. He said it was due to anxiety and prescribed Ativan. It seemed to help in the beginning but then I began to feel ill all the time. He told me to stay on it and increased the dose. I still didn't feel any better. I started having panic attacks, couldn't sleep properly and other side effects that I didn't like. By the time I came on the internet I was on it for 6+ years. I found this site when it was called Benzo-Wise and contacted Bliss Johns. She said she couldn't give me advice but told me to get hold of a copy of something called the Ashton Manual, take it to my doctor and discuss what could be done. She said if I decided to taper to make sure I didn't rush it and that I was comfortable with how I was reducing.

Anyway I tapered over to Valium staying at 6 weeks for each dose as I reduced. I had problems – the classic symptoms that tend to appear – some scary and some I could live with. I would feel my adrenaline rush would pace up and down. I was in pain most of the time. I mean everywhere, sometimes it would travel around.

My hearing, my vision, tasting, smelling — all my senses were distorted, my memory left me, I could not think or make sense of anything and I was scared of everything. I felt like I had gone completely crazy. I don't want to scare you by writing everything that happened so let's just say it was so frightening, it would have made a horror movie seem like a romantic comedy. The nightmare continued for around 10 months and all this time I didn't have any windows.

I was very worried and wrote to Bliss every single day saying I wouldn't get better and she would reassure me. Every day she reassured me and told me to keep holding on. I kept the Benzo-Wise book under my pillow to read because most nights I hardly slept. It was difficult not having windows. My agitation was so bad I couldn't focus on anything. Never meditated in my life but I gradually started breathing exercises and would listen to meditation CDs, buddhist and hindu chants and similar stuff. I was very agitated so sometimes I would be pacing while listening. It was weird but helped me a lot. Sometimes a line from one of the chants or meditations would stick in my head and replace the repetitive thoughts I was having. That was powerful and helped me to cope better.

I also started telling myself positive things like I was getting better and that I was healing. Even when I didn't believe it and was feeling like hell I would say until it. I printed off the emails from Bliss and read them over and over. In the book it talked about what you focus on magnifies so I didn't research any benzo stuff or compare notes. Sometimes I would give in and lurk on a forum but I mostly protected myself from anything I felt would not help me.

At the beginning of the eleventh month off I noticed the symptoms going one by one. Within two weeks most of them were gone. They never returned. Bliss asked me to tell my story because those of us who heal quickly disappear and this is why there are ones about long withdrawals. LOL True!! So here I am telling anyone who hasn't tapered yet

that it is possible to get better early o'clock. But even if it's taking longer man we all get there in the end. If I could give one bit of advice it would be to try one or two breathing exercises. I swear this is what helped me to calm down. Breathing is not meditating. It's the one thing we must do to stay alive and something as simple as noticing it going in and out of the nostrils is pretty powerful. Withdrawal is scary but in the end we kick it, we survive and we win.

## Story 16

I'm finally benzo free after years moving in this one direction. I started tapering off of xanax in 1997. For years I have been diagnosed with panic disorder and agoraphobia. I didn't even start to truly connect the dots until I was nearly done with my taper. The xanax really did cause the agoraphobia and panic attacks.

I had muscle pain and joint pain and weakness. I had weight gain and intolerance to exercise. All the time I thought I was ill but now I know that it was inter-dose withdrawal or protracted withdrawal from the couple failed attempts I made to get off the drug.

At a high dose I had very odd behavior and that definitely played into my going up so high in the dose and to me staying on the benzos. I won't even go into how damaged my family got.

I reduced from 10 mg xanax to zero in four months. It was unbelievable how sick I got. I reinstated back to 1 mg and slowly moved up to 3 mg and I somewhat stabilized. After about 18 months I felt much better so I continued my taper from 3 mg to .25mg xanax.

Something went south in my life so I had to go back to work or lose my house. I worked full time while I remained at .25 of xanax for several months. I lost a lot of weight because I refused to eat. I was incredibly sick.

When I first started this journey, I had really no clue what a computer was. Even without outer influences, I still was able to realize that the xanax was my problem and that I didn't need to take it anymore and that it was making me so sick.

I journaled daily all that I was going through. I was very detailed and insisted that antibiotics at one time and a cortisol cream at another time gave me mega setbacks. No one believed me but I knew it was true.

It would be another couple years before I had contact with anyone else going through withdrawals. Once I got a computer and went online, all that I have gone through was validated as I met several more people who were going through the same thing.

Eventually, after much illness at .25 mg, I went back up to 1.25 mg xanax and when I stabilized, I went to school to become a massage therapist so I can finally work out of my home and get off the benzos. I also studies relaxation, positive thinking and meditation and practice this each day. This would turn out to be saving grace for me once I hit acute withdrawals.

Everything went smooth until the economy collapsed at the end of my taper. So off to work I went again. This time it was easier because I was working in a calm environment, doing massage and not working at a busy retail store. Also I'm sure that switching to a long acting benzo made a world of difference for me. For me, not much compared to trying to dry cut off xanax.

Everything was manageable until 10 days after my last dose. I don't know why, but I thought the worse would be over once I was off the benzos. At this time, I needed to take 4 months off of work. I was home alone and running my home and our small apartment complex while my husband was living and working far away.

The first 3 weeks was the most horrid and hair raising experience I ever had. Somehow, the house didn't burn down, none of our many animals or fish in aquariums died and neither did I. That was a miracle. My doctor called my husband and told him that I was sick and should not be alone. It took 3 weeks for my husband to get home. Then he had to leave again and it took him another several weeks to get medical leave from work (FMLA).

If I made it through that? I can get through anything. The whole experience of the withdrawals, although it was so hard while going through it, has changed me for the better forever. One of the few awesome positive changes in me is that now I don't worry about whether or not I can handle an emergency. I can. Problems came up with tenants and my pets, I handled everything.

Most of my friends, and I thought I had many, they disappeared. That was a very difficult thing to cope with. Very few, two people actually checked up on me and they are forever my heroes.

I had every symptom on every list I ever found. I can go into details of the nightmares I went through but if you are reading this, you already know. One year off of benzos and I was doing much better. Actually driving on the freeway again and flew to San Diego to visit friends. I went camping to celebrate one year off of benzos then decided it was time to get off the beta-blocker.

That was in many ways harder than the withdrawals I felt from benzos. I didn't expect that and it was depressing being so sick like back to square one again. Now it is almost one year after my taper off Inderal (beta-blocker) and I am finally getting back out of the woods.

Very little remains of all those symptoms. I was starting to doubt I would ever get better. It took me so long. I am not 2 years off benzos yet and I feel I have maybe another year to heal but I feel so much better now.

The healing I recognize most is that I am not living so deeply within the misery and constantly trying to survive. These days I often wonder "what just happened?"

I'm here to tell you that I was 25(+) years on benzos. Half of that time I was on a very high dose. I had every symptom on every list I ever found. And I recovered. I feel pretty good right now. I'm still healing but I feel good. Recently, I was kicked off of my permanent disability that I was placed on almost 20 years ago while on a high dose of xanax. When I found out that I lost my disability, all I could do was laugh.

I'm not disabled anymore.

Please follow your heart.

## Story 17

I suffered with terrible symptoms for over 4 years and I almost gave up. I quit cold turkey off xanax, valium and effexor and had awful obsessive thoughts, paranoia, the burning and pain was a nightmare because I had it all over my body, nightmare head pains which were the worse, muscle spasms, electric shocks, digestive problems. I cannot name all the symptoms because had about 80 in all and they were very intense. I was confined to bed some of the time and house bound for the rest of the time. I didn't have the windows like some people do, it was hell 24/7.

I came here to tell you folks out there that you must never give up. If I healed, anybody can. I did try supplements, green drinks and other things but they did not help and i think made me worse. I stuck to a bland diet, no vitamins, no alcohol, no caffeine and no sugar. These things rev up the system so if you are in a bad way like i was don't take them.

I haven't had any symptoms for months now. I feel 100% recovered and it is a great feeling!! Hang in there. Don't give up, don't give up, don't give up.

## Story 18

I started writing to you more than three years ago when you had the old 'Lights' blog. I was off xanax and valium for almost two years and I was in hell. My doctor first prescribed Valium for menopause symptoms after I had a hysterectomy, and later Xanax when I developed anxiety due to Valium tolerance... go figure.

As you know, many times I felt I wouldn't make it. My doctors told me my problems had nothing to do with the benzos, it was anxiety due to the menopause. They offered me more drugs including antidepressants. I am a single mother but my children are grown up. They ran out of patience with me and in the end, hardly kept in contact. Now that I am better they are angry with the doctors and I think also angry with themselves. But that's water under the bridge.

I did not have many windows. Much of the time my symptoms were constant. I spent a lot of time in bed. I had no energy, a lot of pain, my digestion was whacked and the psychological symptoms were horrific. I had awful unwanted obsessive thoughts, paranoia, my head felt as if someone was sawing it in half.

The muscle and joint pain was bad and the burning was unbearable at times. The head pain made sleeping almost impossible. I didn't know a human being survive on less than 3 hours sleep each night for two and a half years. But I did! : )

At one point I was so desperate to heal, I kept trying to find other reasons for my problems. I was tempted to believe my doctors and doubt myself. Your website helped me to keep focus and I can't say enough about your book. I read it every day. Thank you. You are an angel.

I was on Valium for over a decade and Xanax for seven. How I feel now is amazing. I still get emotional when I think that I suffered for so many years. When I think about it, I was in tolerance withdrawal for years and post-benzo withdrawal for over 5 years. Don't be discouraged if you read this. I met many people along the way who healed long before me. Some took months, some took 1 or 2 years. My situation is different. I was taken off quickly – almost a cold turkey and I was on the drugs for a long time.

Do not give up hope. Benzo withdrawal is not a pleasant experience but we do heal. I will be honest and say that many times I doubted whether I would or not. I have lost many years of my life – all spent in a tiny apartment. I had no money and life was a struggle. But life comes in cycles. When you get down the way I was, the only way is UP. When I first read about affirmations on your site I thought it was a lot of new age nonsense – sorry, but I did! LOL Now I am an expert affirmer. I used them to keep me company when I was stuck on my own.

They made a difference and helped me to cope. Thanks again.

My life is wonderful now. Having survived the benzo nightmare, I feel confident about my ability to handle difficulties. I met a handsome, kind, gentle guy and we are very happy and in love. Benzo withdrawal was tough but it taught me a lot about life and

what is of real value. I used to take so much for granted. Love your family, be thankful for everything – the food you eat, the clothes you wear, the roof over your head. Most of all, Love yourself. Treat your body and mind as if they are precious because they are the most precious gifts of live. Stay strong.

## Story 19

Although each recovery process is unique, it is good to hear when someone in protracted withdrawal has had a breakthrough. This person had terrible burning sensations, obsessive thoughts and insomnia which all surfaced during her taper more than three years ago. She never had a 'window' of clarity and all these symptoms had been relentless. I recently received an email from her. Here is what she wrote (shared with kind permission):

*"I gave up on ever being able to sleep properly again. Never had more than 2 hrs since coming off Klonopin 3 ½ years ago. I was always agitated. I had two awful thoughts that stayed with me the whole time. I felt I would have them forever. The burning was so intense all I could do sometimes was lie in the tub in cool water. It would make it bearable for a while. I cried every day. Monday I noticed the thoughts were gone, now the burning is gone and last night I slept for more than 7 hours.*

*I am crying now but this time it is not because I am scared or sad. I feel like this is a rebirth. It is taking time to sink in. This is a miracle. I refused psychiatric treatment because I knew it had to be withdrawal. I was taking Klonopin for anxiety and they told me the anxiety came back and this is why I was having the thoughts. When my doctor said maybe I have OCD I was scared. Now my mind is quiet for the first time in years. I am in shock. This is awesome."*

## Story 20

This person is now in his third year of withdrawal. One of his symptoms was a constant buzz in his head. He described it as feeling like two drill bits on either side of his head were drilling into his temples. He felt as if his nerves were ‘jumping’ inside his head. Like Story 20, he has had a remarkable breakthrough. This is what he wrote (shared with kind permission):

***“...my head was quiet and it continued to be quiet until this morning. If I were to characterize it, I would say something like “usually the benzo symptoms feel like they are in the driver’s seat of the car and I’m in the back seat. For perhaps the first time in a long, long time, I was in the driver’s seat and the benzo symptoms were in the back seat”...”***

This is welcome and wonderful news — more reassurance for anyone who has had bizarre symptoms for a prolonged period. Pardon the cliché but there really is a light at the end of the tunnel!

As his symptoms persisted, Tim devised a wise, effective coping strategy which he has permitted me to pass on.

***“I’ve learned recently to not bring my expectations to the table regarding recovery. And I will continue with the steady focus of being the champion, despite whatever life may bring to me. But I am encouraged and find I’m watching with great interest to see what comes next. It’s been a long time since I’ve had a window, rather than a wave. But I’m hoping that I see a door opening before me — and that I can walk right through it to the other side! Whatever happens, God will give strength to deal with the situation.”***

## Story 21

This person was put on 0.5 mg Xanax three times (tid) daily. It was prescribed for bereavement-related anxiety. She quickly developed a tolerance (when more of the drug is needed to be effective) and the dosage was increased. This kept happening over a period of 6 years until she was taking 8 mg daily. Her withdrawal problems began during these periods of tolerance and she thought she had developed a serious psychological problem.

When her doctor stopped increasing the dose and tolerance withdrawal once again set in, she got her husband to check her into a mental health institution.

They stopped her medication without tapering. What she experienced during the cold-turkey detox would be too disturbing for me to write here. As you can imagine, it was extremely traumatic for her. She was faced with every conceivable symptom and more. It was only after her discharge when her husband found the Ashton Manual online, that they realized the source of her all problems.

When she first started writing to me, she was 2 and ½ years off. She was experiencing nausea, blurred vision, severe head pressure, head pain, confusion, dizziness, fatigue, restless legs at night, tinnitus, constant muscle spasms in her leg, constipation, benzo belly, burning pains in her leg that would come and go, stiff and painful neck with a burning spine, memory problems, repetitive thoughts, understanding conversations, itchy rash and withdrawal induced depression.

Most of these symptoms came in waves but some were constant. Around 34 months off she noticed that some were beginning to lessen in intensity. This was short-lived, however, and she was hit with a very intense wave of severe symptoms. She described it as worse than any of the previous waves had been.

I was relieved to have received another email soon after the 3-year mark saying that the restless legs, repetitive thoughts and muscle spasms had stopped suddenly. She was, at last, able to sleep for more than two hours each night. Other symptoms persisted but she was beginning to feel much better. At 38 months off more symptoms disappeared and she was left with just blurred vision, dizziness and the itchy rash.

A few months later, at approx. 41 months off, she emailed to say that apart from the odd symptom surfacing for very short periods, she felt completely healed. Although she was thrown and very discouraged by the severe wave, she kept telling herself that her healing was taking place. This was difficult with the withdrawal induced depression but she could not allow herself to give up hope. She kept telling herself that she had already been through so much, her situation could only improve.

Her final email brought tears to my eyes. She sounded so ecstatic. After more than three years of terrible insomnia she was enjoying many hours of sound, refreshing sleep. The silence after the tinnitus was, according to her, "like heaven". Being symptom

free and back in charge of her life was a joy for her. She even joked about her husband not being able to stop celebrating the return of his beloved wife. The best thing for her was knowing that she did not have permanent damage which was her greatest fear during the whole journey.

I love her story. At the time of our email exchanges I was still having waves of symptoms and so found her last few emails very encouraging. Like me, she and her husband absolutely adore Professor Ashton. They strongly believe she would have been misdiagnosed and given inappropriate treatment had her husband not found the Ashton Manual.

I hope that you, too, will find this story reassuring in some way. As you know, the recovery process is unique and hers unfolded according to her schedule. But just being reminded that we do heal should bring new moments of hope. As she said in her final email, **“There is no way that I have permanent brain damage! My life after benzos is the coolest ever – nothing sucks and everything is great. I deserve a special medal!”**

## Story 22

This person was nineteen when she was first prescribed lorazepam (Ativan) for panic attacks. She quickly developed tolerance and the dosage was periodically increased until she was on 10 mg daily.

After eleven years on the drug, she began to feel much worse than when she initially took it. She experienced cognitive and other problems and, as she said, “was in a total mess.” Her doctor was reluctant to help her discontinue the drug and she decided to taper off without his assistance. She tapered off over a two month period. She was worried about missing work, was not aware of the Ashton or any other method, and just wanted to be benzo free.

She had a very intense withdrawal with just about every symptom conceivable. She refers to it as ‘true benzo hell’. When she wrote to the Helpline she was on her third year off and was very frustrated and quite depressed at what she felt was slow progress. She was still experiencing terrible brain fog, muscle pain with burning, insomnia, high anxiety, mood swings and a host of other problems. She felt that her worst symptom was the terrible feeling of impending doom.

Most of her family and friends were no longer interested in her ‘drama’ which they felt was self-inflicted. She said that on many occasions she felt like giving up and was worried that she would sink into a deep depression or give in to the suicidal repetitive thoughts she was having at the time.

Thankfully, in early 2008 she stumbled upon the old “Lights In My Windows” website and for the first time in years, began to feel encouraged. She started doing the diaphragmatic breathing technique and kept talking to herself positively. She wasn’t keen on affirmations but found that positively talking herself through the symptoms had stirred something deep inside her. A will to survive her nightmare was ignited.

A few months later, She experienced her first ‘window’ of clarity. She was overjoyed but also quite tentative and still unsure of her recovery. It was a brief window and another wave soon came crashing. This setback threw her off-course; she said it almost broke her completely.

It was also at that time that She became more determined than ever to survive. She felt that letting go of the process was important and made the decision to totally surrender. That way, she would be allowing her recovery to unfold in its own time. She started to observe her symptoms without becoming upset. Though they persisted for a few more months, this new attitude made the experience a lot less unpleasant than it had previously been.

By late 2008 her symptoms started disappearing. She wrote that she had not wanted to say anything in case they returned. After being four months symptom-free she felt ready

to celebrate her recovery. She still has the occasional re-emergence of the odd symptom but nothing worthy of concern.

She is now in her mid-thirties. She lost a lot of her prime years to Ativan but is relieved that that chapter of her life is over. She is happy to be given another change and is carving a new life for herself. What has been her biggest blessing is that since her recovery, she has had no panic episodes or any return of the pre-existing anxiety. She has been using all the coping techniques she learned during withdrawal to cope with her underlying condition and has no intentions of ever again taking medication for anxiety.

## Story 23

8/23/08: The day my dad died and my grenade incident. I cried for a month straight and so I tried a couple of Ativan 1mg pills, so that I could stop crying

4/16/09: Ativan 1mg. Took 10 pills in a month's time. Had my first W/D, but was under the assumption that I was having the worse ever Lupus flare up. Went to ER. They administered IV of morphine; was allergic, so they gave me Benadryl. My skin was crawling and heard I was, at that point, going crazy, so they gave me Ativan for the next 10 hours.

For next two years I went through the ER revolving door every two weeks; them putting Ativan into my veins. Two years of that, of course I had every test known to mankind run on me, not knowing that it was Ativan making my life hell.

10/5/10: Switched to a homeopathic doctor. Switched to liquid Valium 5 mg/5 ml, medicinal marijuana, Mediterranean diet, 20 min. of exercise/day. 6 mo. wean starting at 5 cc/day and weaning down every two weeks. 5cc was too much, so dropped down to 3 cc/day and weaned down every two weeks. Hardly ever left my house, better yet the room.

1/11/11: I jumped at three months on Jan. 11th at .5cc which gave me sickly consequences. 1month benzo free went back to work and became social again. 2months benzo free I went to Hawaii for my uncle's funeral and got stuck in a tsunami and surprisingly no anxiety. 4months benzo free the brain fog lifted and felt really angry. 6months benzo free started the insanity work-out, Mediterranean diet, acupuncture and seeing a psychologist because I felt mentally traumatized. 10months benzo free started to feel really good, but still got the shakes on occasions and still had no emotions besides content.

12/7/11: but now I'm almost 11 months benzo-free and almost feel normal. Key word: almost.

1/31/12: so, I started to feel emotion lately, but its anger and irritation and honestly those are the least like me. oh well, here's to being a bi%#@# until the next emotion decides to come back to me... peace and aloha... 1yr and almost a month benzo free and counting... p.s. don't ever take a psych med after you all finish weaning because it makes you worse than when you started, I mean, I'm a year off and still feel side effects.

2/16/12: Anticipation for my life back, full of happiness, adventure, family, friends! I want to be at my best and no longer depressed. Feeling paradise surrounding me, but my heart feels empty! Trying to make a routine, but still skeptical of what I seen! I been well for quite some time and I say this time is all mine! Family makes my heart beat; Maui is full of heat;) Maui no ka oi, Ohana aloha oi! I want to cry, but no tears come out! I want to scream, but no voice comes out! I want to laugh, but no happiness do I feel! I want to dance, but lack the energy! I want to climb, but feel left behind! I want to jump, but

skeptical of the landing! I know eventually all my emotions will come back to me, so I'll settle for content for now

9/11/12: 20months benzo free, woopwoop... Physically 100% healed, mentally not quite there yet, but I just got my emotions back and let me just tell you how great it feels to have all of my emotions back, at first it was overwhelming, but now it's better than any drug ever taken and it's mine to keep, woopwoop. I love emotion, hehe.

## Story 24

Hi I'm 31. I been med free here's my benzo hell x

Lorazepam the drug to hold my hand the reassuring voice when anxious and unsettled on an inpatient ward became one time dependent on.

You were the voice and hand hold I became once hooked on the drug of choice take before maybe needed as knowing was their called out you know it works you know am here just one ill pill ill reassure you before you know it can't live without it.

Lorazepam's not a friendly reassuring voice or hand to hold it's a lull a fake security blanket or hook the people who dish it out too say aww this will help you through it yeah right lights out more like

Lorazepam's their friend not mine as were too lazy not busy be the voice that reassures me am ok n am safe and nothing to fear.

Lorazepam's your friend not mine as you can give me that rather than chat n bring me through my agitation N my fear dished up a pill pushed that fear a Lil more in.

Lorazepam n psychiatry a relationship for two not three. Glad I'm no longer in that equation but I live with weakness in vulnerability could cave as still hear your voice but then my tummy twists in knots, foods n smells once could cope but withdrawing from you caused extreme pain n nausea in 4 that I remember you were one of my suppressors and not a friend as I started back at the beginning once withdrawing me facing my fears n agitations n only this time I became my best friend n an all-natural girl  
x

## Story 25

I came off 20 years' worth of psych drugs after one year of tapering. The drugs included Klonopin, an anti-depressant, an anti-psychotic and a mood stabilizer. I had been diagnosed at the age of 35 with "Bipolar" following a 10 year period of intense stress in my marriage.

I am now 45 months off and about 85% improved on my good days. I went to Wal-Mart today and was light and happy which is a complete miracle especially if you knew how much I hated that place and swore I would never go back. I do not know how I survived the drug withdrawal except by some supernatural force giving me the strength to endure. I almost always believed that I'd recover and it's finally, miraculously proving to be true.

The Bipolar label has proven to be a misdiagnosis and I'm not sure that that illness even exists. I remain on desiccated thyroid hormone for hypothyroidism which often presents with bipolar symptoms when untreated.

My most egregious symptoms were: Severe, extreme burning, stinging nerve pain deep in the neck, back of head (occipital bone), shoulders, collar bone and spine/constriction of throat, chest and torso, which made breathing difficult  
derealization/depersonalization/a feeling for a solid year of my body being electrocuted along with the total inability to sleep for that year so there was no escape/intrusive thoughts from hell like demons screaming/terror attacks/unbelievable bizarre head pains like steel rods in there or sometimes jagged rocks/band around the head squeezing so hard I could hear the bones crunching/teeth clenching that caused 3 cracked molars/constant suicidal ideation ("I wanna die" thought on repeat)/severe cog fog/existential crisis/PTSD/fear/rage/confusion/ frequent urination/sensitive to noise/strange putrid smells that weren't there/inability to concentrate, remember things or talk/paranoia/RLS/psychosis/PTSD/urges to rip off clothes and go running down the street screaming and all these were occurring all at once. I wanted to shave off all my hair, pull out all my teeth and go naked ... I could not stand anything touching me. Thank God I did not do that or drive into a brick wall as the derealization had me thinking nothing was real and I could do that without getting hurt.

The best way I can describe what it's like to have a hateful tormenter in your mind is to include part of an entry from my journal written at 2 years off when things calmed down enough that I could even write out the thoughts in that moment. Before that I had to focus all my attention very, very hard on the present moment constantly and that distracted me from paying attention to the part of my brain that was going "insane". That technique disallowed the insanity to take over my consciousness completely. I never acted out once. This was how I coped, I put the mind and the body on ignore.

Don't read the following if you're sensitive as I've left the swear words in. (The names of the people I talked about have been changed, otherwise verbatim.)

“My brain feels like it could explode with the pain and all the thoughts. I am trying so hard to figure out why? Why I am here? Who am I? What is the fucking use of this stupid planet? I feel like God is trying to drive me to insanity ... complete and total. It is amazing that I have not completely cracked up already. Ben ... I gave up so much for him because I thought I cared for him but now I feel only resentment. I do not like that little bastard at all. Who the fuck is he? Who stole the real Ben? This is a little freak who I don't want to have anything to do with. Do you know what that is like? To think that you are this GRANDMOTHER who cannot stand her grandson who she thought she loved. So fucking bizarre. I am completely insane. This world is completely insane. I go into a chat room and get attacked. What the fuck is that? I am searching for connection and that is what I find? This world is fucking completely insane and so am I. I am not supposed to listen to or believe my thoughts. What kind of crazy making shit is that? It is making me completely insane. So why would God give us a mind that lies and lies and tries to destroy us ... destroy each other and this planet. It is insane to live with this fucking horror show in my head and body day and night. Day and night. Day and night. It is so strange that I don't want to kill myself right now. So strange when things are so much more brutal now than they have been ... NOT TRUE ... this has been brutal for years and years. I cannot be loved on this planet. I cannot be loved or cared for or understood. I am alone. Completely alone. Separate. I trust NO ONE. My fucking neck is killing me. I chose to live in this fucking hell ... why would I do that? For my fucking entertainment? That is just crazy ... I must be completely crazy to have gone off the drugs. I did this to myself. I am doing this to myself. If there is a Satan ... Satan is in my mind right this moment. People think they know things and have understood things but I don't believe them ... I don't believe any of them. Who are all you freaks? WHO THE FUCK ARE YOU? Ranting!!! Talking to Mary tonight about how I hate the world ... what a stupid talk ... she says there needs to be balance between good and evil ... what a fucking joke ... no there does not. I don't like her. I don't like anyone very much. Everyone lies ... fucking lies and bullshits and plays nice or not nice or whatever ... it is all bullshit this life. This life, this planet, all bullshit.”

The symptoms eased off so slowly that I could not tell I was healing. I had one “window” of no pain and a quiet mind in my 18th month off, it lasted the entire day and I was in heaven. I did nothing that day but feel the calm and peace.

My next window appeared suddenly in my 37th month off. Then they became more frequent. I took a trip alone at that time to a tropical island for two weeks. I had zero pain and that quiet mind with normal thoughts and feelings. I swam every day in the ocean and felt the joy of being alive. Towards the end of the vacation, I had 2 1/2 drinks of alcohol and took a red-eye flight home. It seems that the alcohol put me into a setback that cost me 8 more months of terrible waves, sometimes feeling like I was back at the beginning again.

Lately I've been experiencing a lightening of symptoms again and am hopeful that by spring I'll be good enough to participate in life again. There is more healing to do psychologically and spiritually and I have a strong desire to be well in every way so will pursue whatever it takes to achieve that wellness goal. Keep the faith everyone, the hell

ends and a beautiful life full of empowerment and joy awaits. That is my belief, that we are doing this for a reason, that we are strong enough to endure and that we have stories to tell and hopefully can bring some good into this world by telling them.

## Story 26

I was prescribed Xanax at age 30 for anxiety-related issues and insomnia. At the time I was given no warning or precautions with the medicine. I took Xanax p.r.n. ("as needed") for many years and never had an issue in between doses. At age 40 I began noticing increased anxiety and panic attacks, and I would take Xanax when I was calm to prevent the onset of anxiety. I was taking Xanax before shopping, going out to dinner, before doing anything outside of the home and I never realized I had a problem. Once on vacation at age 40 I recall taking 1/2 Xanax before I took a walk on the beach. I was already calm and was about to take a relaxing stroll at night but still took the Xanax. This episode did wake me up to how dependent I was on the pill, but I still did not feel or know I had a problem. I had suffered an abusive relationship, breast cancer in early stages found at age 37 by routine mammogram, and I was a victim of hurricane Katrina in 2005. Also, around mid-40s my doctor and I diagnosed me as being pre-menopausal as the symptoms I have having all fit that diagnosis.

I continued on Xanax. I married in 2010. The marriage took a turn for the worst due to many outside issues, and I was taking Xanax much more than prescribed, and I began running out of my prescription before the refill date. I was actually sneaking into my husband's Klonopin while he was asleep to try and hold onto my Xanax or tide me over until my refill. He was prescribed this years ago for PTSD. September 2012 we separated, and I assumed I had a nervous breakdown. I could not function, and I acted like an insane person, though I did not notice this at the time. I had called and emailed almost every person I knew and aired out my personal life. I was shaking, stuttering, unable to work and drive. I got the point my oldest son told me to stay in bed. My children thought I had lost my mind as I was out of control with my anger and I was shaking, could not talk, and I could not even type and do my job. I had lost control of motor function. I remained in bed except to go to the bathroom or kitchen for a few days. My son had to drive me to refill my Xanax when the time came.

Within 30 minutes of taking 1/2 of a 2 mg Xanax I was calm, shaking and stuttering stopped, and I became fully functional as I thought I should be never aware of what really was happening.

October 2012, 3 weeks after my separation, my friend died suddenly in her home. She also had been taking Xanax along with other prescription medications. It was shocking and devastating. I began researching medications, mainly Xanax, and that is when I learned I had suffered from withdrawals for years in between doses and the end of September I had acute withdrawals. This scared the hell out of me. I had no one to talk to for advice on what to do, how to do it. I spent many hours reading forums on Xanax withdrawal, and I learned that I had reached the point where I would suffer withdrawals almost daily if I tried to cut my dose or I would suffer acute withdrawals from running out early before time for refills at the amount of Xanax I was taking. I decided to stop the pill cold turkey when this last prescription ran out. I knew it would be hard, but I had no clue how hard or how dangerous.

I stopped cold turkey the end of October 2012. I went through acute withdrawals for about 6 days with hallucinations, depersonalization, headache so severe I thought I was having a stroke, projectile vomiting, loss of all motor skills, could not look at any light, could not walk, lived in a state of being in a "vacuum" for 6 days as hearing was almost gone. I did not sleep for over 72 hours straight. Had not had fluids for 3 days and my son realized this and made me sip water as I was dehydrated, and the water tasted horrid. I remained in my room, in bed most of this.

Within 7 days most withdrawal symptoms had left, but the depersonalization and loud ringing in the ears remained and still do 4 months free of Xanax.

Within 2 weeks I was working and I was driving. I was very slow at everything due to depersonalization, but I was functioning. I am now 4 months out from this cold turkey of Xanax. I have remembered many things that have shocked me and made me ashamed. I have learned how Xanax had not helped me, but it caused me to live many years making wrong decisions and choices, though I thought I was "right" in my mind. I now know I was very wrong, and I lived for years with my life clouded by this drug that was given to help me.

From the wonderful people I have now met after stopping Xanax through social network pages and forums, I know I am one of the lucky ones as I am able to function, drive, and leave my home while others still cannot after months and years stopping a benzodiazepine. The difference in symptoms and healing in us baffles me and always will. I can only feel that God has allowed me to function being a single mother who must work to survive. I am lucky and blessed, but I live with depersonalization off and on, and I have no clue if this will ever subside.

## Story 27

I have over the years been in the position of being a caretaker many times. As a mother of two, a wife, a daughter and a friend, I have stayed by the bedside of children, partners, friends and parents. I maintained a daily presence through months of illness with my husband, helped my daughter through several surgeries. But when I struggled with the worst physical and mental pain I have ever experienced, I for the most part walked that road alone. Yeah, I have anxiety issues. I at times had some severe bouts that led me to the doctor, and resulted in a prescription for medication. I took Benzos for a month or so a couple times over the years and never had a problem, until 2008. I took a small .50 dose every night, and after a year tapered over about a month or so. It had never really eliminated the anxiety, and during that time, Cymbalta was added, although I couldn't tolerate more than a smidge of that. I never thought much about it, until 3 weeks off. I was standing at the sink, washing dishes and the most severe tsunami of anxiety I had ever experienced hit me and I had no idea what was happening. It just stayed with me. I drove to work and my leg made these weird twitching movements. I shook, I couldn't eat. Obviously, my doctor said, I needed to be back on the Klonopin. It was a couple days before Christmas, my family was arriving. And sheepishly, I went back on the benzo. I had a couple weird panic attacks, and on a late night Google search, decided that the Cymbalta was the culprit, and saw horror stories about getting off Cymbalta, so, tapered slowly off it. I had about four bad weeks of dizziness, and was shocked at how sick I felt.

A few months later, I wanted to be free of the Klonopin as well, as I was still having anxiety and panic, and feeling dizzy at times. I was taking .25 once a day. It was then I read about withdrawal. I tapered even more slowly, titrating the last bit. I felt better, but then again at 3 weeks off, was hit very hard. I lasted a couple months, and was entering my last year of college, having gone back to school when my oldest started college herself. I had so much at stake, a budding art career, a family, kids, and job. I went to the dr. to see what I should do about my troubles with anxiety from getting off, which were now coupled with a good deal of depression, which was not something I was prone to. The dr. said I just needed to realize that I was an anxious person, and that I needed medication, and would probably need it for life, and that I must not be using the coping tools, i.e. CBT, that I was taught via therapy. I felt like this scolded child, yet was desperate to feel better, and once again went back on the benzo. Always feeling like its "me." But this time I did some serious research, I learned that I had been in tolerance, that my yo-yo on and off was called kindling, that others had experienced this. I saw my problems were mirrored in the experiences of hundreds of others. I read everything I could find, and I took the .25 a few months longer, never feeling free of anxiety, and I knew there was no choice but to either increase my dose over time, or just stay off the stuff no matter what it meant. I began another taper and titration over a spring and summer (2011). It was my third attempt, and I knew it would be my last one way or another.

I am now 18 months free, and free is now how I feel. I could list for you the hell it has been, but if you are reading this, you are probably aware of what that is like. I have

never felt so sick or so mentally anguished in my life, and never would I ever have thought a low dose a tiny pill that was not abused could have done such a thing. There were days I thought I would not make it through, but the reality is: I went to grad school, changed jobs, exhibited art, gave my first artist talks, traveled to artist residencies, taught for the first time, all while enduring the worst nightmare of my life. I say this not to show what a superhero I am...oh no, far from it. I stumbled; I swayed like a drunken sailor, nauseous and dizzy. Inside I was freaked out and "sobby". But I had been through the other two attempts, and at that point just felt like I had nothing to lose. I was going to be freaked out no matter what I did, and probably was "not going to make it", so I might as well just push myself.

And here I am. Pretty much healed. I doubted this would ever happen. I did not believe I would make it. But along about a year off, things started to improve. Little by little, so slowly I didn't think they were really getting better. But it has. I wake up without that crushing dread, I no longer shake internally, and I can walk a bit steadier. It is amazing. Writing this is hard, it has been a journey that I walked alone, trying so hard to appear normal to family and coworkers, nobody really suspected. My husband tried to be supportive, but had his doubts that it was all withdrawal. Well, I know now. And I have made it to the other side. I am exhausted but still here.

## Story 28

WOW...

I don't even know where to start! My God ..I have been holding off on this 1!!!

For all of you who know me and have guided me thru the last 8 months of my extremely Lonely experience thru Benzo W/D Have my Heart and have all my Respect!!!

Guys I can't even begin to say thank you I couldn't even put into words the In print all of you have made for me ...Guardian Angels is who you are to me I am truly Honored for you all...Thank You I mean it with all my heart Thank You! 😊

OK here we go I am a c/t of 20 mil of Valium and suffered severe shock to my CNS and my Brain had 6 er trips over the first 8 weeks of c/t I had no idea what was wrong neither did the Dr's.Other then it was me doing this to myself! So not true.. I knew it was this med and I knew that I was going to be forced to fight for my Life with 0 help...

Long story short I am a 38 yr old woman had 4 children ,4 yr old daughter who passed from brain cancer,3 separations from husband of 17 yrs, Car accident, 14 procedures way to many Narcotics had Sciatic nerve damage ,2 kidney surgery's 50 kidney stones and Then came Benzo withdrawal Oh boy ..I was done this was truly going to break me and bring me to my knees on so many occasions during this w/d ..But I didn't care I had no option in my opinion It was Fight,or Die Fighting that's it .So that's what I did and it payed off huge..I was bedridden come month 3 to month 6 and didn't see a light coming my way so scary but I had excepted what I had done in the fact of my c/t and it made it easier to accept for me!

Come month 7 window that never truly shut what a miracle I sware I was feeling like me again and that "Ground Hogs Day" was gone !!That's when I found BB and I knew 1 thing we heal from this most extreme experience and need to let every1 know

Hang in there this does end!! It so bothered me and made me so upset to think any1 else was going thru this ,So I dedicated my Heart and yes my Soul to all of BB the best I could to bring Comfort and Peace and just me ya know as a friend to let you know ..As bad as your feeling and as scary as this is You are not Alone ..And you will get thru this I so Promise you! I remember at month 5 I was bad really bad I prayed to God and I said if you need me here ..Then ok...But pls don't let me fall..I knew then I had to learn some stuff and this was going to be the challenge amongst challenges But I am so Grateful I never Fell! So I am so thankful I went thru this because I have gained the most amazing friendships in all of you..

Well now I'm at month 15 on Sunday and I have a few mild sxs ,Muscles twitch little discomfort,small lump in my throat and spasms from time to time ..Whoo hoo that's so cool .I cant believe it.If your not aware of my story and all my sxs there on my blog page 6 i believe..Just know this...YOU are going to heal and you are going to be you again and even when your body and mind are at there worst and you cant see Straight ..Look Up! And look for that Hand to lift you thru this time !! Hang in there every1 and I can say

with Conviction This Ends...

So much Love to all of you and I could never ever have gotten thru the last 8 months  
without all of you ...

xoxoxoxox~

## Story 29

I was put on 0.5 mgs of Klonopin in October 2010. By December, I was a total mess and I couldn't figure out why but I knew the Klonopin felt like it wasn't working as well as it had in the beginning. I tried to contact my Psychiatrist but he had decided to take a 3-month leave from work. I went to a walk-in clinic and they increased my dose to 1mg but only gave me a 2-week supply. After those 2 weeks I started to feel sick again so I went to a different walk-in clinic where they increased my dose to 1.5mgs. I began taking more some days and less other days. Some days I would take up to 4 mgs. My pills ran out and my Psychiatrist wasn't back yet and walk-in clinics would not give me anymore so I went to the emergency room where they gave me refills for my prescription. I started taking 1.5 mgs every night.

My husband started to really notice a change in me and began doing research into the drug. After we realized that I was sick because I was in tolerance, we decided it was time to start coming off of it. I cut down to 1mg and ended up in the emergency room basically every second or third day because I was having really bad anxiety and wanted to kill myself. I couldn't function whatsoever. I begged for help and begged to be hospitalized, I begged to go to rehab, and no one listened. I soon came to the conclusion that there was no one out there to help me with coming off of it so my husband became my doctor. At first, he sucked at trying to be a doctor.

I cut my dose again about a month later, down to 0.5 mgs. That's when things got really bad. I soon found myself in a custody battle for my youngest son and moved 3 hours away from my husband to fight to get my son back. I took my daughter with me and left my husband and 2 step sons behind. I spent 5 months away from them but got so sick that I could not fight for my son. I dropped from 130-140 pounds to 106 pounds. My hair started to thin and fall out. I got disgusting sores on my skin. I was stuck in a severe anxiety/panic attack. I spent most of that 5 months in bed and my daughter was basically left to take care of her little brother. I started getting really bad intrusive thoughts of harming others. When I looked in the mirror I didn't see myself. I also developed agoraphobia. I couldn't feel my face for almost a year. I had brain zaps and twitching.

I picked up and moved back to my husband and other kids and left my son behind. Oh, I forgot to mention, during that 5 months I jumped down to 0.25 mgs of Klonopin and was put on 75 mgs of Seroquel as they said it would help with withdrawals. It made things worse and I once again was back at the emergency room a couple times a week. I stayed on 0.25 mgs for several months.

When I moved back in with my husband he became the father, mother, cook, maid...everything. I was incapable. We then decided to do a liquid taper to get off the last 0.25 mgs. We did the calculations wrong and I ended up coming off that last 0.25 mgs in 40 days. It went much better than the other cuts I had made and during my liquid taper, things were not that good but not that bad, however I did experience some really horrible twitches. I thought I had developed Tourette's syndrome or MS. I wished I had

done the liquid taper from the start. One month after coming off Klonopin, I tapered off the 75 mgs of Seroquel. Coming off the Seroquel was a piece of cake compared to the Klonopin.

I am 5 months off of Klonopin and the only symptom I have left is the intrusive thoughts. For example, I can't drive on the highway as I'm scared I will purposely drive into another vehicle. I haven't been alone with my kids since November as I have been scared to going crazy and hurting them. I have thoughts of punching random people in the face. The other day I spent a whole day with my stepson...HUGE accomplishment! I have a bit of anxiety but nothing too bad. My marriage has suffered lots because of this but we are working on getting things back to normal. My husband is glad to have his wife back. My kids are glad to have their mother back. I am glad to have me back. This experience has been by far the worst thing I have experienced in my whole life and, trust me, I've experienced a lot.

I may have left a few things out as some things are kind of a blur but if I remember anything else, I will add it on. A year ago, I had NO hope whatsoever. I thought I was going to die before I got better. But here I am, finally starting to live again. So this goes for all of you. There IS hope. You WILL get better. It may take a while, don't rush. When you're having a rough day, just tell yourself that you are going to feel like crap because it means your brain and body are healing. Try and see your symptoms as a GOOD sign, rather than a bad one. You will not die from this, although some days it's going to feel like it. If I got through this, you guys can too.

## Story 30

Exactly about one year ago I was at work and feeling busy as usual. I remember feeling a bit awkward but many things were happening in my life that I was tired of dealing with, especially my marriage of twenty-some years that had gone no place. New things were happening to me though that were exciting, like being accepted to Michigan's OT Program. So you could say I was dealing with a difficult situation but exciting new changes as well.

Two weeks after receiving my acceptance letter to WMU's OT program, I was at work feeling a sense of awkwardness and extreme dry mouth. I took a walk and rushed home to meet my kids. It was a Friday. I remember clearly that we were going bowling after street ministry. My mouth kept getting drier for some reason. I grabbed a drink at bowling and as my friends came up to me they asked if something was wrong. I went outside because I felt nauseous and a bit sweaty. I was rushed to ER thinking I was having a stroke or heart attack. The doctor ordered labs and that was it. It was 11:00 at night and I remember thinking "I'm dying something's wrong". So, the ER doctor asked if I wanted a sleeping pill. I said "sure". I saw the tiny pill and said, "Oh this shouldn't hurt". I left feeling sleepy and filled the script for the lowest dose of Ativan. "Take one to two a day for panic attacks".

I woke up the next morning feeling better (I thought) and went to the restroom and then downstairs for my morning cup of coffee. As soon as I took my first sip of coffee I began to shake internally and I felt brain vibrations running down to my spine. I've never ever had panic or anxiety so I attributed it to that. I ran upstairs and took another Ativan pill and, sure enough, it relaxed me. The next two days I was fine so did not take the Ativan. Then at work I began to feel intense muscle spasms and throat spasms, so I took it again. So then I'm taking one here or there and by two weeks, I'm needing two at a time. By the third week I'm in total psychosis. I was sweating, shaking, nauseous and spasming everywhere (I mean everywhere, IN places uncalled for).

A year ago I walked into "Hobby Lobby" for Easter decor with my daughters. I hit the first isle and began to cry uncontrollably. I was in the thick of DP (depersonalization) and did not realize it. I just stood there and cried, petrified of who or what I was. A sense of doom loomed over me. Where was the mom that would run into a store w her family and talk nonstop and laugh nonstop and enjoy shopping w the girls? I FEARED the WORST, that it was the end for me! The movie "A Beautiful Mind" kept playing in my head. I begged my daughters to go...to rush me out! We were all scared. I'll never forget the look in their eyes, it haunts me to this day.

This exact time a year ago I walked into "Hobby Lobby" with my girls. Today I walked most isles with them AND without them. My mind is at 90 percent. My physical symptoms are at 65 percent and up to 75 percent on a good day. I smiled and even laughed with them today. No, it's not exactly the old me back, but she is re-emerging from the depths of Hell. My swallowing and head sensations are worse for me but everything else is making a turn around so I must believe that this too shall be healed

one day. I went to five stores today looking for Easter décor and that's a long way from not even one store.

My duration of Benzo use was only 3.5 weeks but the torture was just as intense as someone who was on it for years. I never took street drugs and rarely drank. I did take diabetic meds before Benzos but never experienced any sensitivities to it.

Gone is the lady that was trembling out of control, crying in anguish, fearful of everything, inside her bedroom like a frozen mouse! I waited a whole year to tell my full story as in the beginning I had no idea of what anxiety, panic or Benzos were. I thought to myself, if I can truly see a difference in a year then it's a story worth being told to encourage the "Newbies" that are in the same state I was in a year ago.

## Story 31

At age 30 I was prescribed Temazepam for insomnia. At age 50 I was prescribed 0.25 mg Xanax for (minor) job stress. In 2003 my mother was brutally beaten in a home invasion. She died after a hellish five weeks in ICU at Stanford. Three subsequent murder trials and a divorce found me on a much higher dose of Xanax and several antidepressants. Xanax was the only thing that could stop the crying.

A few years later my GP, a truly wonderful and compassionate man, said Xanax wasn't his favorite drug and suggested I switch to something else. I told him it was working great (I thought it was) and he didn't push it. We were both somewhat at fault at this point. I stopped taking Temazepam without tapering. At 2 mg a day, I could hardly stay awake at the end of each day as it was. Xanax probably covered any withdrawal.

I taught kindergarten successfully during these years and retired in 2000. With no job stress and my grief manageable, I couldn't figure out why I still needed to take Xanax...I knew I needed the relief it gave me but I had NO idea it was due to physical dependence. I started 'testing', playing around with the Xanax to see if it was actually the cause of the problems or if I was just a hopeless emotional wreck that had to take meds to stay calm. Then I "googled" benzodiazepines. OMG.

I started tapering in August 2011 on my own. My cuts were here and there because I didn't know how to properly taper. I realized I had to hold during stressful times like holidays. By Feb 2012 I was down to 0.25mg with relative ease compared to what was coming next. A marriage/drug counselor friend told me to jump. So I did. Three days later I was in full blown withdrawal and felt I had to either reinstate (every fiber of my being resisted taking any more Xanax ever) or die from withdrawal...I KNEW I was in big trouble. I reinstated to 0.25mg and felt immediate relief from the worst of the symptoms.

I found "BenzoBuddies" at that time and learned SO much. Finished my taper April 8th, 2012 and began immediately to improve. The perpetual headache went away the first day off. The rest were slower to go. The cog fog and memory issues took a while to improve. I also had insomnia, light and sound sensitivity and a host of other minor complaints like burning skin, tremor, dislike for showering, changing clothes, seeing people, fear of driving and stores...But they're gone now.

A year later I am doing well. I am increasingly active, I can think and remember, I want to go places, do things and be with other people. Life is good and getting better all the time.

I've been asked why I've recovered so quickly. I think a huge part is that I didn't have to work, didn't have to take care of children. I only took care of myself (I could barely do that). I was able to keep stress down and let healing happen. I have really put myself first in this.

\*\* Every single symptom (except insomnia and general agitation) was brought on when I went too fast. GO SLOW...if you're not already suffering, DON'T BRING IT ON by rushing your taper. You are not going to kick the benzo's butt, it will kick yours if you rush your taper!

## Story 32

I started taking anti-depressants about 15 years ago for mild anxiety. I saw my doctor and he gave me a prescription after about 15 minutes without any exam. He said I had a guess what? Chemical imbalance. For the next 15 years I switched a few times and increased the doses so in the end I was on 50mg of Paroxetine CR daily. Through the years I had always had a feeling that something just wasn't right with me, I was drinking way too much sometimes and I felt like I just didn't think right, like a normal person.

After 8 years dry, I started drinking again following my divorce. I slowly drank more and more and continued to take my 50mgs of Paxil every day. I didn't realize it but I was slowly taking away my conscience. I also didn't realize it until recently but the Paxil was actually giving me the overwhelming urge to drink. It screws up your blood sugar which creates a craving for sweets. Alcohol is derived from sugar, so it satisfies this need in your body. But what happens is afterward your blood sugar crashes again which starts a cycle of craving. As a result of the Paxil and alcohol I was lying to everyone including myself about my drinking but it didn't seem wrong to me. Anti depressants and the like are very powerful drugs that not only affect us physically but they do horrendous things to our brains and our personalities. I found myself praying frequently and asking God to help me. I knew I was drinking too much but I also felt something else was drastically wrong but I couldn't put my finger on it.

God answered my prayer and I guess I wasn't prepared for what it meant. He sent an angel into my life who when she learned about these drugs urged me to get off of them. We came up with a reduction strategy not wanting to go through the possible severe discontinuation syndrome, which is a nice name for a visit to hell in withdrawal. I started cutting my dose and feeling some minor discomfort every so often but nothing unmanageable. It wasn't until about 8 months into it that I got hit by a freight train of withdrawal. It turns out that these drugs are stored in our body's tissue and our blood levels drop much slower than expected from reducing the dosage. So when my body caught up my nightmare started.

I know this is a benzo site, but I also know that many are in the same situation as I was so I want to talk about antidepressants as well because that is what led me into getting trapped by benzos. They sent me to hell on earth where I met benzodiazepines.

So at 8 months I was thrust into full blown A/D (antidepressant) withdrawal what seemed like overnight. I was extremely anxious, disconnected, confused and scared. Looking back I don't know how I got through each day. Well actually it was my angel who was there for me every second that is the reason I made it through this whole ordeal. She talked to me all day long and spent untold hours doing exhaustive research to try to help me in every way possible. Through nutrition, essential oils, anxiety management techniques and on and on.

My anxiety and DP/DR got worse every day and after about a month of trying certain supplements and hoping for relief, I decided I couldn't take it anymore so I went to see

my primary care doctor. He was all too willing to prescribe me something to help me with the anxiety. Xanax, .25mg, 3 times a day as needed. I was instantly addicted and very soon right into tolerance so I visited the doctor a few more times. The end result was ending up on 3mg of Ativan a day. It wasn't long until that wasn't enough to put a dent in my anxiety and other symptoms so I started adding more pills on the worst days. I also drank periodically to try to get any kind of relief. It got so bad that one day I actually ended up taking 8mg of Ativan along with drinking a lot of beer and wine. I don't know how I lived through that day but my angel was there to watch over me and make sure nothing happened to me. I thank God for her every day. It takes a special kind of person to be a care taker for someone in a/d and benzo withdrawal. And she never left my side for the 2 years it took me to start the reduction of the a/d to this day as I sit here and prepare to share my story.

The benzos were making me crazier and crazier the higher I went. I can't really provide too much detail for this time in my life because I was in a benzo induced haze and I don't remember too much. I know I did some really stupid things and couldn't take care of myself. I was starting to get really paranoid and agoraphobic. I would stay alone in my apartment in the dark, afraid to go anywhere. I was still drinking from time to time and I was also having a lot of physical symptoms too. I was dizzy a lot and my vision was out of focus. I felt like I was a small version of myself and that I was inside my own head looking out through my eyes like windows. I was feeling like I didn't belong in this world and was feeling like what I was going through was surely going to result in my life being over soon.

It got so bad and I got so scared I did the worst thing I could have done. I went to the hospital. I knew I needed to get off the benzos and I figured they could help me, WRONG!! I spent about a week in the first mental hospital while they took me off the remaining Paxil and put me on Cymbalta at the same time they were weaning me off of 3mgs of Ativan over the course of a week. By this time I was crazy, I was crying all the time and just thinking that my life was over. I got out of the hospital and immediately starting abusing the benzos again in a futile attempt to calm myself down. I was on an adrenaline rollercoaster along with all my other symptoms.

After a week I realized what I was doing and went back to the hospital. A different one this time and they tried to wean me off 4mg in 4 days.....4, 3, 2, 1 and done. I ended up getting out of the hospital before being completely off but I was an absolute basket case.

Going to the hospital once was a mistake. Going back was catastrophic. I am very lucky that I wasn't diagnosed with bipolar or something else. The hospital was determined to get me to talk so they could diagnose me and prescribe more meds. Every time I had to see the doctor in the hospital they would try to lead me into saying something that would confirm with them that I was mentally ill. I AM NOT mentally ill, there is actually no such thing as mentally ill. The whole of psychiatry is based on lies. These drugs do things to your brain to make you act abnormally. Take away the drugs and take care of yourself and your mental state will heal along with your body.

My angel stepped in and helped me reestablish so that I could wean slowly. Right out of the hospital I had to go stay with my angel. I was psychotic and I hadn't slept for 2 weeks. I was stupid enough to try Ambien so that I could sleep. I took 9, 25mg pills over the next three days and didn't sleep at all. Imagine taking 225mg of a sleeping pill and not being able to sleep!! There must be something seriously wrong with that, it just shows you that once these drugs screw up your brain chemistry there is only one way to heal and that is by weaning off, going through withdrawal and trying to use anything natural to help strengthen your body.

At this point I was in the deepest part of my withdrawal. I was reduced to the mental and emotional capacity of a child. I was helpless to take care of myself and I was a physical and mental basket case. I was shaking from head to toe constantly. I was pacing around, smoking cigarettes and I was in a state of absolute continual panic. The benzos had taken away my ability to feel any happiness or normality. All I could feel was overwhelming fear and sadness. I cried continually over everything. I felt like my life was over, I could not ever have imagined feeling so bad. I know why they call benzo withdrawal hell. It put me in a state of torment, which I would have as a constant companion for the next year. My fear of everything was so intense I believe my brain shut down to some degree to protect itself but even that did not relieve the fear and sadness. I could stand the slightest noise or any kind of activity. I could watch TV or listen to music. I could barely put 2 words together. I know most of this because my angel filled me in. I don't really remember much at all from this time period. I was on watch 24 hours a day to make sure I didn't have a seizure or just plain go berserk. At one point I scratched my face until it was bleeding and I don't know why. These drugs hijack your brain and body and they don't let go.

I have experience drug and alcohol dependency and withdrawal and they were like a walk in the park compared to what I was to experience with both a/d's and benzos. With benzos being by far the worst experience I have ever had. I also had a constant fear that I was going to die. I was certain that I had some horrible illness. I was constantly thinking I was going to have a heart attack or find out I had some incurable disease. I was actually so filled with panic I was afraid to go to sleep. I could picture dying in my mind and it seemed so real to me at the time. I was like feeling death over and over. I could picture life going on after I was dead, the thought were torturous.

So in this state we reestablished me on 3mg's of Ativan a day. We started weaning a ¼ of a pill every 7-10 days. This was a pretty fast weaning schedule and I would definitely recommend to anyone going much slower, but we were determined to get me off of benzos as quickly as we could safely. And after have been forced to go cold turkey twice by the hospitals, I don't know that it would have made a difference to me to go any slower. I was so screwed up and the damage had already been done.

It took about 4 months to wean off the benzos and I had been thinking that I would not feel as bad as when I started withdrawal but I was wrong. About a week or so after taking my last dose I starting feeling so much worse. I didn't think it was possible but it

was. My body had finally gotten rid of the drug and all hell was breaking loose. I would spend the next month in the dark locked in my apartment. I would just lay there for days, only getting up to go to the bathroom. I had my shades drawn and I was wrapped in a blanket on my couch. Like a child the blanket gave me some tiny feeling of security. Every noise I heard made me jump and I would be paranoid that someone was going to come and take me away. Every time I heard an ambulance go by I was certain they were coming for me.

My angel took care of me every second. Feeding me and watching out for me, comforting my fear and gently reassuring me every day that I was not going to be like this forever, this was withdrawal and it would end. Despite her encouragement I could not comprehend the concept. I was obsessed with my symptoms and I was absolutely certain that this was the real me. A paranoid basket case. I did not see how it could be possible to ever return to feeling like a human being again while feeling the way I felt. I felt really alone because I was so disconnected from myself, my emotions and the rest of the world. I cried every day for months and I don't mean a few tears. I was sobbing uncontrollably at the slightest provocation. I tried to distract myself with TV, but I found that the slightest emotion shown would send me into a panic or I would breakdown into the deepest despair I have ever felt. At one point I found that I could watch an animated movie and I watched it over and over again. I don't exaggerate when I say that I watched it 1000 times.

During this time my angel was doing exhaustive research trying to find anything that might help me in the slightest way. Supplements, healing foods, essential oils and on and on. I didn't realize it at the time but the foods and the oils saved me from a much worse experience and they were helping repair the damage that I did to my mind and body.

I know it was extremely difficult for her because I was very uncooperative and I wasn't doing what she told me to do with any consistency. When I finally starting following her instruction at the end I realized that I should have been listening since the beginning. Nutrition and natural remedies are the key to any real health.

For the next 7 months I barely existed. I was going to work and then going home and then laying in the dark in a state of constant terror. I had a number of physical symptoms but the mental symptoms were the most unbearable. I said every day that I wished I could trade the mental for the physical. I realize I was actually fortunate after hearing of the physical suffering that so many were enduring. My mental state was totally obsessive and focused on my own suffering so I was unable to experience the empathy that I now have for others. My physical symptoms included blurred vision, dizziness, various pains, heart palpitations, night sweats and I had a rash on my face for the entire duration of withdrawal. I still have it but it is fading now.

During withdrawal I saw a doctor on numerous occasions trying to explain my withdrawal and the symptoms I was having and the doctors all said they would like me to see a psychiatrist. Basically dismissing what I was telling them. Unwilling or unable to

accept the idea that the drugs they prescribe were tearing me apart. They would talk to me with that all knowing condescending tone offering their forced compassion all the while insisting that it couldn't be withdrawal and implying that I had a mental disorder. One doctor told me to consider increasing the Paxil. I can't believe the willing ignorance of the medical profession in the face of such overwhelming evidence of this epidemic.

I saw a psychiatrist as infrequently as possible. It was a necessity to avoid having to cold turkey off the last of 20mg's of paroxetine. I would muster all my inner strength to tell them I was doing fine, knowing full well telling them about the withdrawal would result in a life changing diagnosis.

It was until last December I was giving the name of a doctor that was practicing functional medicine. A combination of treatment by short term medicine along with long term nutritional approach to health and well being. I am so thankful because it turned out to be the turning point for me. I started out being given tests for vitamin levels and food allergies along with a complete blood panel. At first I was put on a few supplements. They didn't have any impact and I felt worse every day. Hopelessness was growing and I was constantly wondering how much longer I could keep going. I ended making another appointment with this doctor in a desperate attempt to find the slightest bit of relief. After talking to the doctor she said she would be willing to prescribe a small dose of Abilify to see if they could provide enough relief to enable me to function. What we didn't know at the time was there was a neurologist in California that was having success treating patients with minute amounts of these types of drugs for short periods of time and seeing results.

I took the Abilify for 2 weeks and over the course of that time I was becoming more and more aggressive each day. It continued until I got so paranoid and aggressive that I turned on the one person who had devoted herself to caring for me and never leaving my side. I was delusional and this new drug had made me think that she was trying to control me and keep me captive in my apartment. The place that I had confined myself for the last 2 years. I have to take every opportunity I have to express my sorrow for having treated her so badly, because she saved my life and I will never forget what she has done for me. Even though my actions were induced by psychotropic drugs hijacking my thinking I still have no solace in that having turned on her like a rabid dog. That is what these drugs do to people it is disgusting.

Because I felt so bad it finally made me see through the psychotic fog and I decided to stop taking the medicine. After 3 days to my absolute surprise I noticed that I actually felt a little better and over the course of the next few days I felt better and better. I actually experienced happiness which was an emotion I forgot how it felt to have.

Since then I have continued to feel better and better with the passing time. I changed my diet and stuck to doing what my angel was telling me to do and as a result I am no longer in withdrawal and I am getting ready to start weaning the last of the paroxetine, extremely slowly!!

We believe that the small dose of anti psychotic drug stimulated the receptors which had basically been shut down from the a/d's and benzos. As a result I have lost all of my mental symptoms and I only have minimal physical symptoms. My CNS is still very sensitive and I am only sleeping 3-4 hours a night but I am eager to face each day with happiness and an undying gratitude for my life and my angel.

I believe that I was divinely guided through every step of this journey and I can see now the reason for everything that happened. I thank God each day and look forward to the future hoping that I can pay forward the gifts I received.

### Story 33

Well, I'm sitting here in the big, plush easy chair in the family room listening to the Moody Blues – “Your Wildest Dreams.” I haven't heard it for years but just happened to google Moody Blues and this is the first song that came up. I can barely think of a more appropriate song for this moment. Three years ago, possibly to this very minute, I was ending a three-week stay at a psych hospital in Harrisburg, PA. I spent three weeks there under suicide watch. I survived quite a bit during my stay at the hospital - a “taper” off 4 mg clonazepam; a failed “trial” of a tricyclic anti-depressant as well as a trial of Wellbutrin – both of which only served to intensify my misery. About halfway through my stay at the hospital, it was decided that I should undergo ECT in hopes of eradicating the black depression. So, for that time I was switched from clonazepam to Ativan because Ativan has a much shorter half-life. The reason for that was simply that ECT does not work with benzos in the brain. I had four ECT treatments given every other day. On the “in between” days I was put on what they called a “mini-withdrawal”- no benzos at all until after the next ECT treatment. Of all the cruelty at that place, that was the worst. I was in constant acute w/d for a week and a half. I was forced to go to in-house AA meetings and also, not just attend other therapy sessions, but also take part in them. An indescribably horrendous experience.

On that Friday evening, about one hour after my last ECT treatment, my wife rescued me from that place and I stumbled outside, down some steps, over a sidewalk, and across the parking lot. It had just begun to snow. I looked back at my footprints in the snow and wondered how I made those tracks. I felt like I wasn't even there – like I was nowhere –like I didn't even exist. Surreal, surreal, surreal. The dp/dr was unimaginable. I hoped and literally prayed that I would die before getting to the car...but I didn't.

So, as I sit here now in my right mind, comfortable, at peace, and connected to reality, I am living beyond my wildest dreams. I thought this was an impossibility three years ago – even 15 month ago. Nothing is impossible (one of the dozens of lessons I have learned from this journey).

My complete story is very long and circuitous. I won't bore anyone with all the details because it would literally result in a book. The condensed, “abstract” version is: I spent 40 years drinking alcoholically. At about the 28th year of drinking, I was getting panic attacks (from the booze and some life situations). I went to the doctor. He gave me Xanax (which worked well for maybe 2 weeks). He also gave me Paxil which threw me into a tailspin of panic attacks and suicidal depression. It took a year and a half (and dozens of psych drug trials) for me to emerge from that 3-day Paxil experience. The only thing that helped me emerge was the increased alcohol intake. Of course, I was switched to clonazepam over that time, and I took it every day while I also drank. I stayed on the clonazepam for a total of 13 years. I was told I would need it forever...and I believed it.

In my 40th year of alcoholism, I finally quit drinking for good. After two weeks, I fell into unbelievable anxiety, panic attacks and depression. I didn't realize for several more

months that I would never be well again until I ditched the clonazepam – all of it. I was in severe tolerance w/d. After one to two months of tapering, I was completely off the benzo. Let the success story begin.

I am currently a few days shy of 30 months off clonazepam. Over the last year or so, I have thought about writing a success story. My biggest difficulty with that has been the question – “What does success mean – a least to me?” In the past couple days, I have answered that question. The answer for me simply is the answer to another easier question - “Am I at least as well as I was before this whole mess started – before I got off the clonazepam or maybe even before I started taking the clonazepam nearly 16 years ago?” The answer to both parts of the question: Yes, I am much, much better. In fact, I am better than I have ever been in my entire life. I am not exaggerating at all. From that perspective, I could have written this at about 22 months off. That is when I knew beyond a doubt that I was better than I had ever been in my life.

I am calmer than I have ever been in my life. No booze or benzos required. They were only escalating my anxiety and depression. My sense of humor is huge and I am able to laugh as I never did before. I am wiser than I have ever been. I can see deep meaning in so many aspects of life that I never even thought about before. My mental cognition, ability, and energy are off the charts now. Physically, I no longertake Nexium or any PPI for acid reflux. I took PPIs for 15 years starting way back when I was originally prescribed benzos (1997). Also, at about 18 months off, all my allergies disappeared. I had been severely allergic to most nuts and fruits for a couple decades. Now I eat absolutely everything (except Brussels sprouts and tripe – only because I can’t stand them). Pollen allergies left at the same time. I don’t know if it’s from getting off the benzos, but I’ll take it.

I do have a few minor lingering s/x. My sleep could be better, but then I drank for decades. It can take years for alcoholics to regain good sleep. Tinnitus is still hanging around (very common). And of course there is almost always the perpetual song running through my head – especially in the morning. But I am able to at least “change the record” simply by suggestion. My mind still is very active, but I am easily able to direct the mental energy into “good places.”

If I had to put a percentage on my healing, it would easily exceed 100%. I am better mentally and spiritually than I have ever been – even long before benzos. Physically, my only real problem is some arthritis which has nothing to do with benzos.

I remember when I got out of the psych hospital I was in severe acute w/d and had nearly one hundred separate s/x. There was only a handful that I didn’t experience. They are virtually all gone with the exception of a few minor ones which are only nuisances at worst.

I always liked looking at the healing time line of different individuals to measure my own healing against.

Here is mine.

Month 1: Very similar to the weeks of tapering. Lots of anxiety, depression, dp/dr, insomnia, and restlessness. At the end of month 1, the bottom dropped out and s/x increased in intensity by at least a factor of 10, but they were not as acute as those experienced in the psych hospital and immediately after discharge from the hospital nor were there as many different ones.

Months 2 through 6: Little or no improvement noticed really. The greatest hallmark was the extreme terror that would appear from nowhere at times. Morning terrors every morning and extreme fear to get out of bed and face the day. Extremely sensitive to cold, noises, movement, and any other sensory input.

Month 7: First noticeable improvement when I was able to go outside and do some yard work even though I shook uncontrollably and was very fearful. Dp/dr was still nearly unbearable – extreme dizziness.

Month 10: Recall the first morning I had an actual desire to do some exercise – 10 or so minutes on the elliptical. Gradually improved in duration from there as well as adding weight bearing exercises. Otherwise, s/x remained pretty constant.

Months 11 to 13: Very little change in s/x.

Months 14 and 15: At end of month 14, I had an “awakening” one morning (September 28, 2011) that I was well enough to possibly write something on FB for the first time in two years. I wrote a couple sentences about being on a journey and finally beginning to return. It was the first “social” improvement since the whole thing started and was the first noticeable lifting of two years of depression. Morning dreads disappeared.

Month 16: At my grandson’s birthday party, I was confident and unafraid to drink the first cup of coffee I had had in over two years. This was about one month after my entry on FB (October 30, 2011 – snowstorm here in Central PA). This was the very day I KNEW that I was going to get well. The depression of over two years was nearly completely gone.

Months 17 to 22: Continued improvement in nearly all s/x. Most noticeable was vastly improving cognition. Mental tasks were becoming MUCH easier and creating no anxiety or panic. Very calm.

In month 22, my confidence was finally at a level which allowed me to take on a job requiring a high level of mental cognition and emotional calmness.

Months 23 to present (month 30): While the mental s/x of anxiety and depression had already vanished, other lingering s/x have improved or disappeared – usually without me noticing. Heart palps are gone. Inner vibrations gone. The only burning sensations

now are sometimes when I wake from a nap. Dp/dr is very mild now. I had that one long before w/d began back in my drinking days.

As I close, I honestly believe that my story is one of the more extreme ones – with the decades of alcoholism, 13 years of clonazepam use, and three weeks of torture in a psych hospital. This is a doable journey by anyone really. There is nothing special about me. It just takes time. You have to hold on, and when you think you can't hold on any longer, you have to hold on.

You may not “feel” hope through much of the journey, but you have hope. It is right there in the deep recesses of your very being. It is inside every one of us and constantly whispers to us. Don't let the shouting of your ailing brain convince you that it's not there. It is there. It is speaking...constantly speaking truth and saying to hold on one more minute, one more hour, one more day...until you are one more healed man or woman. ..who then becomes a voice of hope for someone else to hear over the noise of their ailing brain.

Hold on. Just hold on. And you will heal. It's a promise.

## Story 34

When I pictured writing my success story, I thought I would just wake up one day, feel great, and write the post. It was a lot more gradual than that. Waaay too gradual for the most part. But, this past summer I went to the theater often, flew to Disney for a few days, drove to the ocean for the rest of the week, flew home, had company over two or three times a week, resumed the job of grocery shopping that I had passed on to my son, and cleaned my house from attic to basement, with the help of my cleaning lady. I am more or less living a normal life. THAT'S the definition of success. My story is a long one and I have decided to break it up into categories so people can skim through what interests them. I know I spent a lot of time reading Success Stories and made a vow that I would write one too, even if I wasn't a daily part of BB anymore. So, here goes.

### WHY I WAS ON BENZOS

To make a very long story short, I was diagnosed with Interstitial Cystitis, was IMO improperly medicated, and fell down the rabbit hole. With each medication there were side effects, and then more medications were added to address those. The more medicated I was, the more fatigued I was and more helpless I felt. I had never been clinically depressed or had an anxiety disorder until I was medicated. I am embarrassed to say I was on Klonopin for about 10 years before I saw the light. I only took it at night and I thought I developed a fatigue disorder. UGH.

### WHY I WENT OFF OF BENZOS

About seven years ago, I went to see a Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner because I felt anxious and a little depressed. After some time, she said I don't understand why you are on all these meds when you have no history of psych issues. I think I was on Effexor, Topamax, Adderall, Armour Thyroid, and Klonopin at this point. I went off of all of them except Klonopin and was just starting to taper off of that when I herniated my neck badly. The Dr. actually upped my klonopin (from about .5 to 2 mg) because I wasn't sleeping at all. At this time I was still fairly naive about benzos. I had neck surgery eventually and then hurt my back badly. I had two major back surgeries and was put on an opiate (OPANA) and was still on a benzo. This is where things fell apart. I was in constant tolerance withdrawal. I was so tired I could not function. I did not sleep well. My pain Dr. said that it was a very dangerous combination and I needed to get off of the klonopin. For the next two years I tapered off of the benzo and the pain meds at different times and different rates but it was all HELLISH. There is a synergistic effect that occurs with a benzo and an opiate which makes each stronger so when I was tapering off a benzo, I also experienced opiate w/d. I got stuck at .375 mg of klonopin, switched over to about 7 Valium, and tapered off of that at a rate of about 1 mg a week. I was then left with the opiate taper, which was also hellish. I ended up going to a recovery center this last January and did a medically supervised detox.

### SYMPTOMS

These are the symptoms I experienced during my taper: metallic taste, headache, head pressure, electrical pulses in the face, eyes hurt, sinus' hurt, sensitive to light and sound, ear aches like the start of an infection, teeth hurt, jaw hurts, sore throat, swollen glands, shoulder pain, back ache, chest was tight, stomach felt swollen, stomach ache, THIRSTY, GI symptoms, all over body aches and pain, off-balance, dizziness, cold sores, extreme temperature switch from very cold to very hot, flashbacks of painful memories, couldn't sleep, unmotivated, lethargic, overfocused, anxious and depressed. TIRED!! I was incredibly fearful, which ultimately led me to have a lot of difficulty with this forum. I was scared out of my brains that someone would end their life. I was also very scared of being a featured person on a person's blog who mocks this process. THAT is a HUGE change as I now see how silly that blog is now. But, I could not see it then.

If I didn't know it was benzo/opiate withdrawal, I would have thought it was entirely possible that I was dying. I have had a lot of medical issues in my life, am considered strong and brave by those who know me, and that taper kicked my a\$\$.

## **TAPERING**

There is so much talk on here about taper rate. In an ideal world where I had minimal symptoms I would have done a liquid titration off the benzo. Apart from the fact that I didn't even know that was an option until too far out, I was also on a heavy duty opiate which complicated things. I wish I would not have switched over to Valium and I would have done a liquid taper off the last bit of Klonopin, and I would have divided my dose into 2 a day. As I was symptomatic throughout I just wanted to get off the meds as quickly as possible. It pains me to see people micro-taper off a few mg of Valium WHEN THEY ARE SYMPTOMATIC. IMO, if you have a lot of symptoms, move quickly so you can get into the healing phase. I swear I did not see the fatigue lift, until I was completely off of the benzos.

As far as the opiate taper, I became more and more sick as I went on. I finally found a facility that would do a medical detox (clear across the country from me) that would NOT use suboxone. I had trouble trusting the process because they use a lot of meds but by week's end, I was off most meds. I stayed on clonidine for a few weeks after and then stopped that. I also took Melatonin for a few months and then stopped that as well.

## **WHAT HELPED**

This forum helped to validate my symptoms. I know that my symptoms were worse than a lot of people but I was also on an opiate too, so there was a great escalation of symptoms. I had tons of symptoms long before I ever heard of this forum and then to see other people experiencing them as well was comforting. With that said, I did not spend time googling every symptom -- I chalked them all up to benzo withdrawal and moved on. I had Dr.'s who supported me, especially a NP who was supportive throughout. I read a lot of online blogs about things other than benzos. Decorating blogs, parenting blogs, recipe blogs. Anything that could distract me. I actually started

my own blog, written under a nom de plume where I talked about health and motherhood. I watched tons of TV. I watched entire seasons of HIMYM, Sex in the City, The Office, Friends, Mad Men, and more. When I could go for a walk, I did.

Dietary changes made a big improvement in my symptoms. When I stopped caffeine during my taper, I felt better. I also avoided neurotoxins in foods and also felt better. I eat a very clean diet these days, proteins, lots of vegetables and some fruit. When I eat poorly, my symptoms can really flare up.

## **WHAT DIDN'T HELP**

Honestly, getting involved in BB drama did not help and I realized quickly I needed to keep a pretty low profile. Watching the news was terrifying to me so I avoided it.

## **LIFE TODAY**

I now know why people do not come back and write success stories. All of the craziness of this seems like it happened to another person. I DO remember every bit of it. It seemed never ending. It was the most HELLISH, challenging, experience and I recognize that but in a very detached way. I just don't FEEL it anymore. Talking about benzos bores me, which I think is a very healthy sign. I had a lot of family issues throughout my taper with a young adult daughter who is an alcohol and drug abuser, and THAT just about knocked the life out of me. Within two months of my final opiate dose, I hired an interventionist and off she went to treatment where she remains five months later. My home is peaceful and quiet and my other children are in college and doing very well.

My life is far from perfect, but I started out on this road many, many years ago with a bladder disease and was way over-medicated and lost my voice and my self. I finished this journey with the same bladder disease but I am on but one medication: ELMIRON, which is a very benign drug. I am still regaining strength in my back and my body is getting stronger through exercise and diet. For good or bad, I am back to my own self. I have seasons tickets to the ballet, and to a few other theater companies as well. I see friends and family throughout the week. I am looking for a part-time nanny position so I can have some extra fun money and to also fill up a little of the quiet space in my life since my children are away more often. Two years ago I could barely function. Today, I take a shower like it is no big deal and that was one of my hardest activities for more days than I care to admit.

I think of all of you often and pray for your success. So many of you helped me on this journey at different times so THANK YOU, all of you! You are a courageous bunch and I have learned a lot from you. This forum is a valuable resource for many and I applaud the efforts of all who run it.

A few weeks ago, I went to pick up my son at his college which is about a 2.5 hour drive away. I had car trouble and broke down in a very small town on Labor Day weekend,

where most everything was closed. To make a long story short, what would normally be a five hour round trip took about nine hours with lots of things that went wrong along the way. It didn't faze me in the least. I was pleasant and problem solved and eventually we all got where we needed to go. After surviving the hell that was a benzo/opiate taper, I welcome normal life problems. I shrug my shoulders, count my blessings, and carry on.

I wish you all a return to the ebbs and flow of a normal life. Honestly, if I can recover, anyone can.

LOVE, 😊💖

PS OMG, I did it!

## Story 35

Hey Everyone.

Just wanted to give an update. In short, I was a real mess. I did not have any relief for the first 18 months, the fog was so bad I could not work and my thought life so whacked that I could simply not function in the world. I missed almost 3 years of work all tolled. I avoided alcohol but drank coffee and ate sugar at times. It was impossible to overcome simple cravings as my ruined brain made it that much more difficult to control impulses

I was angry, very angry. I was homicidal and suicidal all day long. I used a 12 step program to calm me down and stay on track. I recommend them. I was glad I was not prone to aggression and I managed to channel the anger into some productive areas. I decompensated into brutal and bone crushing depressions a number of times and was able to come out of them. If you want to know how I just used music and dance therapy to make myself better. I would just put on upbeat, positive music on you tube and literally dance myself out of depression.

I was at 65% after 36 months. It was very hard but I went back to work and somehow managed to fool everyone that I was a normal person when I was not. I had many Sx and found it a challenge to cope every second of the day. My sleep was poor and I could not nap at all.

I just stuck with it and with a number of strong SX at 48 months I believed I was permanently damaged and pretty much gave up hope.

Then by month 55 the fog finally cleared and I was able to think normally again. The depression is gone completely and sleep was also normalizing.

It is now 63 months since I took those damn pills. I have a long hx of alcohol misuse which is why it took so long for me to get better. I also was sick on the pills and kept taking them as my doc did not figure out that the pills were making me ill. I was lucky to meet an MD who specializes in addiction and he got me off the pills and into recovery.

I am presently at 90%. I abstain from all drugs and alcohol. My sleep is great and I can nap as well. I have a little tinnitus still and a tiny bit of a spacey feeling in my brain. Not quite perfect but I am fully functional. I can tell you now that I am confident that within another year or less I will be 100%.

If you are feeling afraid and hopeless, I understand.

Stay away from caffeine in all forms and all amounts and avoid booze too. I never bothered with supplements of any kind as I refused to risk any more damage. If there was a magic pill none of us would be here. Self care and time are the miracle workers for this plague.

I am changed, I take nothing for granted. I look at trees and birds and feel the wind on

my face and appreciate every meal I have and the simple blessings of family and friends and I have been curb stomped into humility but that it what it took for me to open my eyes to the miracle that surround me all day long.

Your symptoms will go away. Bare down and just breathe.

### **Story 36 (deleted)**

### **Story 37**

Five months ago I swallowed my last Benzo. It's hard to believe that it's already been five months but I know that a lot of healing has occurred. In the past two weeks I haven't experienced the morning blahs and in the past 5 days my cog fog seems to be lifting. The world now looks bigger and brighter to me. The best part about recovery has been that my sleep has been restored. I am now sleeping 7 1/2 to 8 hours a night without being dependent upon any sleep aids, and I have never felt so rested. I have tons of positive energy.

I continue to work out for 2 hours per day 7 days a week (my body craves exercise) and I eat a lot of brain food. I'm currently taking Omega 3 fish oil and Vitamin D daily. I want everyone to know that it really does get better!!

## Story 38

♥♥Dear buddies...I was a bit afraid to write this as I still have some residual benzo fear left regarding being totally healed. I think we all face this, the fear of being thrown back into the suffering as we have so many times before. We do face some PTS issues. Having now approached my two years off I was pretty sure that I was never going to heal. Never expected to write a success story. I am not going to go through these two years of sxs or suffering, we all know them all too well. Just know that I faced Many sxs that you have or have read about here on BB. Hell. The only thing I will say is that I was only on the benzos for 5 months. And was totally unprepared for my tolerance issues and the length of time it was taking me to heal. Completely Unable to accept my situation. Frightened and thought I was either going crazy or going to die.

The one thing I do want to share with you is that I was given a DNA Genotype Blood panel early on by a nurse practitioner ( my doctor couldn't be bothered with me at this point and sent me to a psychiatrist who just put me on more drugs). This test was such a revelation to me in that I was 67 years old and never knew I had a dysfunctional liver. Out of 9 enzymes that are supposed to metabolize drugs, 9 of mine do not function properly. I now know that there are many drugs that don't metabolize in my liver and that I should never take...including Advil and other over the counter drugs. Even some herbs and supplements. And I am sure my original problems were caused by a dentist prescribing Advil, 800 mg twice a day for jaw pain. I was depressed and had bad insomnia. This started the spiral of more drugs being prescribed to me. I now tell everyone that they should have this test and should have their children take this test for all their future health care. The facts are that over half of the people given this test show malfunctioning liver metabolism and I sincerely believe that many here on BB and worldwide suffer this problem. And as the FDA approves ever more powerful and dangerous drugs for human consumption, this problem is only going to get worse.

I am so much better and my message to you is that this suffering does end. You will heal. But the only true healer is TIME. Nothing else worked for me, not supplements or more drugs. Or therapy. I cried every hour of every day for many months. I spent months in bed, months on the couch and then more time in a lounge chair. Lost 45 pounds. I couldn't read, listen to music, go out the door.

But thank God I found BB and Baylissa's Bloom in Wellness page. And had so many here help me ...PJ was so great and supportive as well as VCharis's Courage Cafe here on BB. I have found wonderful relationships here from total strangers who reached out to help me over the Internet. I shall always be grateful to one and all and consider them truly my friends when my so called friends fell away as time went on. God bless you all.😊♥♥♥♥

You will get your life and health back. Believe it. I do have a few lingering issues but I am sure these will fade. My age has been an issue I think. I can only advise you to try to be as positive and as accepting as you can. Distract. Read only success stories and

positive things. Understand as much as you can of what your body is having to accomplish to heal you. Know that it is a slow process and you might take 3 steps back for every step forward but you are healing, every day in every way. And when you are healed take steps to stay that way. Take part in the handling of your health care, choose your doctor wisely, eat more healthy organic foods. I know you will be a stronger and better and more compassionate person because you have conquered your fears and overcome your suffering. Laugh a lot, love even more. ♥☐ And lastly, give back. Reach out to help others who are suffering through this hell of withdrawal. Only we who have gone through this can understand the pain and confusion and heartache that we all must go through as we heal.

I am not saying that you will no longer face challenges or that stress will not be in your life again, only that you will be able to handle it because you handled this hell of withdrawal and you are off the drugs. You should be proud of yourself as you go forward into life.

Blessings to all. You can't change yesterday, you can't worry about tomorrow. Live each day thankfully. Relax into the uncertainty of the time it will take you to heal. Just know and believe that will...that you ARE...healing.♥♥

## Story 39

Lately I have spent weeks not even once thinking of benzo withdrawal or its affects it had on me. That is why I know that it is time for me write my success story. I actually sometimes forget how difficult the benzo w/d was yet I spent 14 months from September 19,2013 to December 2014 wondering second by second, day by day, month by month if I would ever regain my mind, enthusiasm for life, clearness, sharpness and go-getter attitude. Yes, it does all come back! I promise you! Benzo Buddy studies show that full healing within this community will occur by month 14 on average BUT you may feel better much sooner -- hence it is sometimes earlier for many. If you are reading this you are probably wondering "What have I gotten myself into? Will I ever be me again? Is all this benzos or is it that I am damaged goods? Maybe I need benzos to feel better? What if reinstating does not work? Are these waves really benzos or am I just not well?" Are you asking these questions? THE ANSWER WITH 100% CERTAINTY -- Yes it is all benzos!!!!

For the first 14 months post jump I thought I would never be "me" again. I write this success story not at an opportune time either. I write this at a time when there has been an extraordinary turmoil in my personal life -- but I am benzo free and basically "wave free" but not stimulus free. You see, I am going through a tough civil litigation that is quite draining and very dark and negative. But the good news is that I am handling it well -- like anyone "normal" would given the circumstances. A little or alot of stress no longer makes me go into a anxious/depressive wave. Now, before you think that I am anti meds -- I am not! Some people need meds. I am just anti benzos! But if you were an anxious or depressed person before benzos then you must use CBT, exercise, Hypnosis, yoga, emotional tapping etc to get yourself naturally to a good place again. At the same time benzos w/d will make you feel that you will never overcome and you will never be "you" again. That is a benzo lie! If I can do it you can too!

I have fun again; I dream again; I make plans again. Imaging making plans again without waves making you cancel them. I can look forward to the day rather than wondering how I will get through it. I no longer spend my days "googling symptoms". Ahhhh, but you may be the anxious type - the doubting Thomas? You may be someone that says "Yeah but not me -- I am really messed up." Yeah, sure, you are so special that you defy the odds of healing? So as the doubter you may say, "Yeah but what about all the people that are healed? Why are they not around? Do people really heal?" Yes, they do heal and believe! And when you are healed the last place you want to be around after you heal is Benzo buddies. I hope that does not sound ungrateful! I probably owe my life to this site. I am back on this forum today and am writing this little story because people need to know that healing will come -- whether you believe it or not. For me, when I was "almost healed" I just wanted to be away from benzo buddies because I felt so fragile still. So I started to spend more and more time away. It was hard because all my Buddies were so kind and dear to me -- they are now on the 12-18 month thread. I will not mention them all for fear that I may miss one. I truly love them

When you start feeling the healing process take hold in earnest, and you will know when

it happens, you will start to realize that there is a whole new life out there and you will start to go for it! I will write more in the future about life after benzo w/d but I promise you that you will heal no matter what you may think. For anxious people it will be hard to accept - but your body will heal you whether you know it or not -- i.e. time is in control NOT you. Your job is to stay away from the drug and time will heal you. I call what I went through a "Benzo reactivation syndrome" not "benzo withdrawal". Your brain is trying to start the Gaba system up again. It has been artificially seduced by a nasty drug. It needs to reactivate and work again. Please hang in there and stay with this wonderful community until you no longer need it. I say that without guilt. Then come back after your success and shine a light for those behind you. That is what I am doing.

Things that helped?

Praying

Benzo buddies

Stay away from protracted sites ( they will just confuse you)

Not everyone has the same issues

Keeping active

Distracting with anything possible ( a most)

Hypnosis -- particularly Rapid Resolution Therapy.

Daily Exercise

Emotional Healing ( tapping)

Meditation

Drugs used to alleviate

Low dose of Gabapentin ( For me very helpful) 200mg a day. ( No longer)

What you are going through feels like pure hell. I will not sugar coat it -- it does feel that way and it may be just that for a time. I can tell you that when you get through it one day you will wake up and not even think about benzo withdrawal. That is when you know you are way on your way to total healing. I have an opinion of how long it takes to fully heal. Studies on this very site show 14 months for the average. Before you freak - understand that there is a time that you just feel like your symptoms are tolerable and then things get better and better. I think the brain continues to repair itself for about 2 years post jump. That does not mean you will be in misery for 2 years -- not at all! You may start feeling better anywhere from 4 to 14 months ( I know big spectrum but healing is individual). Then you just get better and better until one day you feel fully healed. For me I am 90% there -- but I am cool with that because 90% feels awesome on the way to 100%! As I write this "success story" I am thinking, " Wow, I can now remember how bad it was". I almost have forgotten as it feels like an event in my distant past. I know that you may not feel like total healing will happen to you but you too will have this healing. That I am 100% CERTAIN! One day it will be a distant memory for you. You doubt it? Just remember my words. It will be a distant memory. May God bless you all and happy and quick healing!

## Story 40

So it's been 3 years since my last dose, and while I still have some symptoms: tinnitus, heart palps, oversensitivity to light and sound, and more....I feel like I'm finally starting to feel things lift a bit.

I'm starting to get a clearer sense of who I am and where I used to be. When I was deep in the middle of the benzo beast the most troubling thing was that I lost my sense of true self...I had no identity, it was like my soul was gone.

Now I am starting to feel that life energy come back into balance and my biochemical structures are starting to realign themselves with my center, and sense of reality.

I can't believe how much I was disconnected from everything before. I always had this sense that nothing fit together, that everything was out of place and disjointed from one another. I would always find my mind focusing on the strangest things, very bizarre thoughts and disturbing imagery and the over identification with these thoughts is what drove me insane.

That's the worst part about benzo withdrawal, is the lack of sense of self and the feeling as if you are an imposter in your own skin, and actor in a movie that you didn't create and have no business being in. I guess after awhile I just kind of got used to feeling that black cloud hanging around, and although I have tried to remain as positive as possible I find myself falling deep into negativity now and again.

But a lot of positive things have come out of this experience, and overall I'm glad that I was able to get through it. For one, I spent the entire duration of my withdrawal (the past 3 years) learning about internet marketing, eCommerce, and SEO and I was able to focus in on that craft and start my own company from scratch.

I went from working as a bus boy at a diner making 2.00 an hour to making over 100k online last year, all from the self taught knowlege that I have learned during benzo withdrawal. The key is that I was able to use my time wisely. I knew that I had to distract myself from what was happening inside of my mind, so I found online marketing and watched every single YouTube video I could find. I read every article that I could comprehend with my benzo infested brain and stored up a massive internal library of knowledge on all subjects related to making money online, specifically with eCommerce and SEO.

Now three years later here I sit, the owner of a very profitable web site that will do over 6 figures this year, and most likely over 7 figures in 2016. Hint: it's in the marijuana niche.

I'm not trying to brag...okay well maybe a little 😊 but the main thing that you should take away from my post is that I was able to flip benzo withdrawal on it's head and steal something from it. I didn't let it defeat me.

During benzo withdrawal you have an ever increasing tendency to feel like a victim, and if you're not careful you can end up playing into being that victim even more when you start identifying with those ideas, and then it becomes a part of who you are.

**DON'T EVER IDENTIFY WITH BEING A VICTIM!**

Take this situation and use it to your advantage any way you can. Use the time wisely to learn new things so that once you are fully recovered you will have a brand new life waiting for you.

This is a transitional phase in life, one that you should be happy to go through.

One, dare I say, that you are indeed LUCKY to go through!

Not everyone gets to experience such a personal metamorphosis such as this, so you should be GRATEFUL that you are going through this unique experience that will eventually make you a stronger and more caring person.

A person who sees life for the fragile and beautiful thing that it really is.

A person who really UNDERSTANDS what it means to be a human, alive on this planet.

A person who APPRECIATES life and every living thing in it.

A person of CHARACTER.

Yes.

Benzo withdrawal builds character, but only if you rise above it without letting it snatch your pride, your dignity.

**DON'T LET BENZO WITHDRAWAL SNATCH YOUR SOUL!**

Protect it. Nourish it. and you will Flourish gracefully into a new reality where you will become a brand new individual capable of achieving anything that they wish.

**BELIEVE IT.** Because it's true.

I'm living proof that benzo withdrawal can be beaten.

It's only chemicals, and you can inject your own chemicals into the mix by creating new neurological signals through positive neuro linguistic programming and listening to positive, motivating messages.

This is KEY!

Benzo Withdrawal is time for self discovery. Don't miss this amazing opportunity to discover how powerful you really are. How much you can really take. How much you can mentally and physically endure.

You must endure the pain. You must master your pain, be more powerful than your pain. Feel the pain and know that one day it will be gone and success will take its place. Pain is simply the other side of pleasure. Through advanced mental alchemical processes and extreme self discipline you can transmute pain into pleasure just as I have done.

Embrace the pain. Overcome this challenge and transform yourself into a brand new individual capable of so much more.

Think of it this way:

"Only a soldier can endure this particular brand of pain. If you survive this, you are built for war....and nothing can stop you."

Benzo withdrawal survivors are born again, rigidly defined individuals of a different type of character that is invincible and indestructable.

No other set of life circumstances could have lead you down this path to produce the person that you are now in the process of becoming. A 100% fully unique person with a novel and intellectual outlook on reality that nobody else will ever be able to fully duplicate. You are in the process of being forged into something unimaginable that you cannot currently comprehend. Something that you will one day evolve into and then, only then will you finally understand.

Don't force it, don't rush it. Don't miss this opportunity to pay the price, to make the sacrifice and become what you truly are.

You are shedding the false skin of who you once were to become a new being risen from the ashes, reborn as a Phoenix bathed in self actualizing intellectualism and spirituality.

So now...it's your turn to take the test. your turn to face the crucible.

who will you now become?

## Story 41

My stomach felt like it was being squeezed in a vice. I went on the internet to diagnose what was wrong with me. "I have either pancreatic cancer or stomach cancer," I thought to myself, as my anxiety began to build, and build to a level that was very disturbing. "You dummy, you know better than to look up diseases on the internet," I yelled at myself.

Being a typical guy, not wanting to go to a Doctor, I lived with the stomach pain, and my not sleeping for six days, until I eventually realized that I would not get better without some medical intervention.

The next morning I went to the Doctor, and was diagnosed with H. pylori, and given a prescription for the triple cocktail of drugs that would eliminate the bacteria that had invaded my stomach lining.

"Doctor I have had insomnia for a couple of years, and because of the painful stomach, I have not slept in six days. Can you give me a prescription for a sleep medication," I asked her, as she was about to exit the examining room. She gave me a prescription for Ativan, and Ambien, and told me to 'take as needed.'

That night before going to bed I took a 1 mg Ativan pill. WOW! Before I knew what hit me, it was morning. I had not slept like that since I couldn't remember when. "That Ativan is some good stuff," I exclaimed to myself.

During the next two years, I continued to take the Ativan, and the Ambien, intermittently, having no clue that I was having, what I refer to now, as mini-withdrawals. There were many days when I just did not feel good, and had lots of weird things going on with my body.

Every time I went to see the Doctor, prior to going cold-turkey, all my test results came back negative. She, unfortunately, did not make a connection between the benzos that I was given to treat insomnia, and all the weird things that were happening to me. I never made the connection either. My only prior experience I with drugs was when I had taken Vicoden a few times for a pinched nerve in my back.

One morning I had just gotten out of bed, and I began to shake violently, my body felt like it was encased in ice. I went to the E. R., where I was told that I had a U TI, and was given a prescription for Levaquin.

After reading about the terrible side-effects associated with Levaquin, I contacted the E. R., and told them I would not take it. "I would give it to my grandmother, it is a safe drug," came a reassuring voice over the phone. Realizing that I would not bend, I was given a prescription for Keflex.

I took the Keflex for two days, when the E.R. called and said the culture they had done

was negative. I did not have an infection.

About a week later, after just having gone to bed, a wave of heat enveloped me from head to toe, my skin was flushed, and red like a lobster. This caused a mild panic in me, and lasted about an hour. The next morning I went to see the Doctor for the umpteenth time.

I explained to her about the previous nights disturbing episode. "You just had too many covers on," she said to me. "That is why you were feeling so hot." Sensing that I was getting irritated with her, she suggested that I should take Zoloft to ease my anxiety.

I went home with a prescription for Zoloft, and a refill for the Ativan, and the Ambien. I was so mad over the ignorance of the Doctor that I shredded the prescriptions, and thus, began my cold-turkey.

That night the heat-wave thing hit again. I spent the night in the recliner, wide awake, my mind racing faster than an Indy 500 car. So it was for the next thirty nights. No sleep, and a racing mind, my body going from hot to cold, to cold, and hot.

Eventually, I was cognizant enough to research benzo withdrawals on the Internet. While scrolling down a page, the word BenzoBuddies, 'grabbed a hold of me', and on that cold December night, with my ever faithful dog lying at my feet, and a blanket wrapped around me to chase away the cold chills, I was led on a tour of the BenzoBuddies forums, where I quickly realized that, I indeed, was experiencing Benzodiazepine withdrawals.

No words can express the relief and sheer joy I felt in knowing , I was not alone in my quest in searching for answers that would validate the reasons for all the weirdness my body was dealing with. I did write my Doctor a letter, explaining what I was going through. She apologized to me, I accepted that apology, and moved on, never seeing her again.

I had around thirty different symptoms, everything from electrical shocks, to burning mouth, to twitching eyelids, to insanely burning, and itching skin. I won't elaborate on the numerous other symptoms, since all of you now have, or have had them at one time.

After a year of dealing with all this crap, I began to wonder if I would ever fully heal. But, after fifteen long months, I have completely healed, and am happier, and more content than I have ever been before.

All you wonderful, kind, and decent folks, will all completely heal one day, and like I now do, you will enjoy life with a new found appreciation for all the mysterious, and wondrous things life has to offer.

Your sunrise will be so much brighter, the sunset so much more spectacular, the sound

of a laughing little child, so much sweeter. The little things that used to upset you won't anymore.

I have read hundreds of old postings from the past three and four years, and have often wondered what has become of the kind, understanding people who cried together, laughed together, and shared their deepest thoughts together. To read the back and forth banter between one member and another, is fascinating and inspiring. I have to marvel at the fact, that complete strangers, in the blink of an eye, became kindred spirits. What a befitting testimony to our capacity as humans, to love and appreciate one another.

We can become so enamored with certain members that when they leave, we are left with an emptiness and sadness that cannot be easily explained.

While reading those postings from many years ago, I felt like I was treading on sacred territory, and could almost 'feel' the presence of the authors, who wrote all those heartfelt words to each other.

It was at that moment when I realized that they had all healed, and were back to living their varied lives again in the way that life was meant to be lived. All of you will be doing the same one day, because this nightmare does end, and you will be happy, and productive again.

It would be awfully hard, maybe even impossible, to find a kinder, or nicer group of people than you do at BenzoBuddies, where People REALLY do want to help one another in the most thoughtful, and caring way, with a sincerity, and decency that is so very real.

When someone cries out for help. There is no hesitation in wanting to help that person. People respond with heartfelt emotions, and a genuine concern for an individual they have never met, and often become close friends with that person. Friends unlike no one else in their lives, because they understand how that person is suffering day in, and day out, in a way that no one else can ever understand.

I want to leave you with one of my favorite quotes by Ashley Smith:

"Life is full of beauty. Notice it. Notice the bumble bee, the small child, and the smiling faces. Smell the rain, and feel the wind. Live your life to the fullest potential, and fight for your dreams."

## Story 42

I am a 64 year old professional. I consider myself educated and intelligent. If someone would have tried to tell me the hell I would go through because of a “prescription” medication I would have thought they were nuts. Wrong! My, was this experience a real eye opener.

If you are reading this, you are probably going through withdrawal or you have a friend or family member going through withdrawal. There are many documented stories of success and recovery . It is imperative that you become as educated as possible or your experience could bring great fear and confusion to you or your friend.

My story began in 1995 when I was put on benzos for sudden onset of tinnitus. I remained on this horrid drug for 16 years. At the peak of my addiction I was prescribed up to 6 mg of Klonopin per day.

By 2006, I was experiencing symptoms of tolerance withdrawal. I had no idea what was happening to me. I continued on until the summer of 2010 when things really began to deteriorate. My tinnitus became very loud and I was experiencing numerous symptoms that caused me to return to Urgent Care many times. I was put on antibiotics that didn’t work and other drugs to no avail.

At this time, I began to search the internet for answers and found the Ashton Manual. This explained a lot about my problems. But what was I to do? I took a copy to my Primary Care Physician and he read the manual. In January 2011, we sat down together and devised a withdrawal schedule. He transitioned me to Valium. My suffering intensified and no matter what schedule or dose I tried, things progressively got worse. By April 2011, I was so sick and suffering that I began to have constant suicidal ideation.

On April 22, 2011 my daughter and her husband, both are Registered Nurses, intervened with my doctor and got me admitted to Lovelace Rehab Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I was there 7 days. During that time, I was taken off benzos cold turkey and sent home.

This was the beginning of my real suffering and very long journey to recovery. I started reading every success story I could find and discovered that I was experiencing nearly every documented symptom. The main symptoms were: massive constant tinnitus, distorted hearing and vision, crawling skin, tightness in my head, neck and jaw, I could feel my brain quivering in my skull, I felt like I was walking sideways, total insomnia, extreme anxiety, abdominal pain, lesions on my arms, weakness and the feeling of total fear of everything and despair, I felt like I was going insane and losing my mind.

My symptoms and suffering worsened over the next 7 months without any breaks. It wasn’t until the 11th month that I experienced my first real windows. These weren’t windows of feeling normal, but windows of feeling less suffering. By the 13th month

many symptoms had subsided and the remaining tinnitus would increase and decrease as the windows would appear and disappear. I am now in my 14th month and I feel confident that healing is well underway and that I will feel totally normal at some point in the future. I am able to function normally and carry on the activities of daily living. Because of the extremely long time I have endured the suffering, I have experienced some depression and anxiety; therefore, I have started taking Remeron and Propranolol.

I wonder how many innocent individuals have begun to experience tolerance withdrawals and because of ignorance on the part of the medical practitioner they have been wrongly diagnosed with “mental” problems and put on higher doses of benzos and additional mind altering drugs? How sad!

How did I make it through such a long period of time with so much suffering? Two things, first, I dedicated myself totally to God and put myself in his hands. Second, I had a support system which included my mother and two daughters. I can look back now and see that the power of God had to have played a major role because I had no strength in myself. Even my wife couldn't be a real support because she saw me everyday and could not understand what was happening to me. She thought I had lost my mind.

I would call my mother or daughters daily and ask them to pray for my strength. Some days this would be upwards of 15 times per day. I would take warm showers at least 8-10 times per day just to try to find some relief.

My daughter, who is the Nurse, began to read the same articles that I was reading and became a real encouragement to me during the times that I would doubt that I would ever be normal again. I ended up several times in the ER, when I was so sick, only to hear the doctor tell me that there was nothing he could do, except prescribe benzos to help me through.

I picked out numerous success stories and highlighted the parts that really encouraged me and then I read them a number of times during the day. One that really helped me was written by a woman named Alison Kellaghar. Alison went through the same horrid ordeal and then wrote her Masters Thesis on this subject. I read her thesis every day and memorized the sections that would give me comfort. You too can read it by going to [www.bcnc.org.uk/allison.html](http://www.bcnc.org.uk/allison.html).

I found it vital to keep a daily log of my symptoms. This greatly helped me when I began to have my windows. All that I read was right regarding the waves that would come. I could have a window of relief but when the wave returned, I couldn't remember if I had a window of relief or if I just imagined it. The log gave me great encouragement that I had experienced relief and that healing was continuing.

I now desire to be an encouragement to others that are going through this same nightmare. Friend, I want you to know that no matter how deep your struggle, there will be relief and healing at some point in the future.

May you find strength in my God and Savior Jesus Christ to help you through your journey. He is there. All you have to do is ask Him.

16th month update:

I am now going into my 16th month of recovery and as best as I can tell all my symptoms have gone except for a very faint tinnitus that comes and goes. Since it was the absolute worst symptom, it makes sense that it would be the last to disappear. This last remaining noise is nothing like it was in 1995 when I was first put on benzos and not even what it was like several months ago. The pitch has changed to a sound, that when it is present, it is faint and is not even annoying like it used to be. I can just feel in my brain that it is healing as the sound fades every day a little bit more. Let me send a strong word of encouragement to those of you who read my story every day. Let it be an encouragement for you to know that you will heal and return to normal. I am convinced that if I can heal after all the suffering I have endured from so many, many years of this horrid drug, then you will be healed if given the right amount of time. Just hang in there and be strong and look to God for strength and in due time you will see your sadness turn to joy as your symptoms begin to fade and drop out of your life one at a time. May my God and Savior Jesus Christ give you strength to endure.

### Story 43

I have read so many success stories where the person says, I still have a few symptoms but am basically doing fine now. So I wanted to write mine. I have no symptoms at all. I am 100% back to normal, maybe better.

Through all of it I was hoping for some kind of insight into the meaning of life. I thought of ending my suffering so many times but refused to give up because my adult kids still needed someone, even if it was only to talk on the phone once a month. I think I have, however, found greater happiness than before. I appreciate small things like the taste of food, rain, cooking, giving my very old dog a massage. He can't walk anymore but he can stand so I carry him into the backyard, wait for him to go, then carry him back inside. I would have considered euthanasia before, but I have a new appreciation for life now and he still wags his tail and enjoys French fries so I want him to have as much time as possible.

My speed of thought has increased tenfold in the last two months. My memories are now back and don't come fluttering out of nowhere like a deck of cards thrown in the wind. My word recall is just as fast, maybe faster, than it was before. I'm no longer sad, or worried, or think about all that's wrong in the world. I started Klonopin about 10 years ago at .5mg per night for restless legs syndrome.

Gradually I worked my way up to between 3 and 5mg per day. I started having bladder pain and urination problems and asked all the doctors if the Klonopin could be the cause. They all said no and gave me bladder pain drugs and Flomax and said all men my age develop those problems (I was 50). Nothing helped and it continued to get worse. I read everything I could and decided it was a side effect of the drug. I didn't believe I had overactive bladder and benign prostate metaplasia simultaneously. My options were surgery or quitting the drug so I quit. I tapered for about three months and lost patience, then quit altogether 22 months ago.

Basically everything got worse and worse for about the first three months then leveled off at six months and I didn't really start making progress until about a year to 18 months. I can't remember all the symptoms but a few include: Feeling like a time traveler, feeling like I was outside the flow of humanity, obsessive thoughts, constant suicidal ideation, I didn't sleep at all or in 20 minute periods for about six months. I am not religious in any way, nor do I believe in spirits, or anything remotely supernatural, yet I often felt pursued by a machine-like intelligence that enjoyed making me suffer. I felt like the world had turned evil, most people were bad, I often felt like I was tethered to a string, floating in space high above my body.

I had partial seizures where I would suddenly lose consciousness, then wake up a few minutes later and not know who I was, or if five minutes or a thousand years had passed. I felt like I had to urinate 24 hours a day and had severe pain. I would go the bathroom every ten minutes but it always felt like I had to go. Sometimes I did, sometimes I didn't but it always hurt. I had spontaneous bleeding through the skin on

my shoulders and chest. I guess that's where the term sweating blood comes from. I had the typical stuff too: incredible stomach distention, constant itching, my face would bleed when I shaved, my scalp itched, severe joint and back pain, blinding headaches, pins and needles in every part of my body. I often felt like my face was going to explode. My eyes watered constantly and stung and itched. My sinuses would swell and I couldn't breathe through my nose. I had constant heart palpitations and my blood pressure would go to 240/160. I couldn't watch movies – everything looked like a really bad high school play. I rarely read books, although I previously read up to four or five books a week. I hated music. I would have watery diarrhea followed by what looked like aquarium gravel. My teeth hurt so much and so often they felt like they were all loose. It was hard to eat because of the pain.

I had crying spells that would last ten hours. I envied other people who weren't going through what I was. I had always tried to be a good person and I wondered why I was being tortured so horribly. My emotions would cycle from profound sadness to anger to extreme anxiety to hopelessness to complete out-of-body experiences that felt like I was spread across the Universe like the surface of a soap bubble. I felt like I was living in an old black and white Twilight zone in a ghost town where tumbleweeds rolled across the dusty streets and you could hear the creaking of the barroom doors swinging in the wind.

I would suddenly get searing pain like a sword had been stuck through my back, or a thumbtack driven into my knee. Those are all gone.

I couldn't read the credit card swipe machines and had trouble filling my car with gas.

My memories were often so unreal I wondered if they really happened at all. Even around 18 months I was convinced I had permanent brain damage and would never be the same.

I could list another hundred symptoms but you all know them. My point is that it has all gone. I feel smarter, happier, and wiser than I have in ten years. I have no anxiety at all. I laugh to myself at silly things, I love people more than ever, I feel connected to every living thing. I think I have actually achieved the wisdom I searched for all my life.

The last symptoms to go were extreme exhaustion and apathy. My depression lifted at around 18 to 20 months but I didn't care anymore about anything and all I wanted to do was sleep. I still had pretty bizarre nightmares right up to about a month ago but those are now gone too.

My interest in work has returned. My sense of humor and wit has returned. My bladder works perfectly. No headaches, my teeth don't hurt, my skin doesn't itch; even my shoulder, knee and back no longer bother me at all. I feel competent once again. I can see better. I can multitask. I can make instant decisions. Even the texture of my hair and skin has changed dramatically.

I was taking seven different pills a day for blood pressure and now I'm down to one. My blood pressure is normal. I had gained 50 pounds and I've lost 30 of them in the last two

months. My stomach no longer looks like I swallowed a basketball and I no longer have nausea or the spins.

I can drink coffee again. I have an occasional glass of wine and I can eat anything without being worried it's going to result in an anxiety attack or crying spell. Right up to two months ago I would wake up and wonder if I could make it through another day. Now I wake up happy and eager to get to my list of things to do. Concentrate on the symptoms that are better or you no longer have. Don't think about what is still wrong. Compare yourself with six months ago and you can see the difference. If you concentrate on the symptoms you still have it doesn't feel like you're making progress. Between 18 and 20 months I was on autopilot. I just kept going, feeling like it would never completely go away and I would never be the same again. I had come to terms with that, and then a month later realized that I was beginning to want to do things again. I noticed my speed of thought was increasing weekly and my cognitive precision was back. My memories are now back in order and I am able to recall them in vivid detail, but now they have time tags on them and no longer just pop up randomly.

Physically and mentally I feel as good or better than I have in ten years. I have recovered completely and have no lingering effects. My success story has no qualifiers. It has been 22 months and I'm like new.

For some reason, 12 to 18 months was the most difficult. I think it's because you're so exhausted and feeling hopeless. After 18 months it begins to get better but you feel like you'll never be the way you were before, that there will always be some lingering symptoms. For me it began to really accelerate at around 20 months. I could tell I was beginning to get better but I had given up on being the person I once was. I have been waiting to write this until I was positive I was completely healed. I am.

Thank you everyone for all your help and support during the last two years. It made all the difference to know I wasn't alone. Neither are you. You will get better. I promise.

## Story 44

I have not come to this forum on a regular basis. Due to the many opinions of taper methods I stayed away. At first I sifted through the many opinions. I did join Jana's group in July/Aug 2013 to start micro tapering. But I rather like the term "Daily Tapering".

The taper was the right choice for me. I left the group midway and just took care of myself for the rest of the taper which was considerably many months. I found certain things not true on my own and other things very helpful.

I started tapering the last day in July 2013 by December 2013 I was noticing lots of improvements however I did go through two frozen shoulders, one at a time and that was painful.

I had all the symptoms most people list so I am not going to list every single symptom.

If I can look back most my psychological symptoms faded away in December 2013. I now consider that a phase one. Phase two was the pain phase, nerve pain, arm pain muscle pain and all that started to fade by October 2014 in fact I had hardly any symptoms so end of phase two and onto phase three which was the healing phase. I lost all my symptoms except for fatigue and started to improve dramatically after October 2014. I was tapering but the only thing that reminded me was taking the actual doses and being fatigued, other than that I felt pretty normal, I still had dry hair and skin though.

My taper took 15 months for .50mg Klonopin.

Did I heal before my last drop of a dose because of the taper?

Or was it because of the time it took?

Would I have healed in the total time of 15 months if I tapered faster? I will never know.

Am I totally healed now? I would say yes to all the withdrawal symptoms however I feel that I am returning slowly to homeostasis.

I am happy that I did it this way because I wanted the safest taper possible I could find and even though this was incredibly slow it delivered what I wanted. I was tapering and able to regain a lot of my life and function while tapering. If I had to go back and do it over again I would do exactly how I did it.

I was on Klonopin for over 20 years and in my opinion this was the best plan for my situation.

The first time I tapered I tapered 5 percent every two weeks and I got down to .25mg a

day. I held for eight months due to my best friend passing away. Then one morning about 3:00am I woke up in a bolt of blind terror. I had no idea I was in acute tolerance withdrawal. After about a week of that I went to the ER, I had no idea it was the klonopin because I was still taking .25mg a day.

The ER Doctor gave me .50mg of Klonopin and when I got relief of my symptoms I realized that what I experienced was klonopin withdrawal. The ER Doctor did not tell me I was in withdrawal all he said was to throw out the rest of my klonopin and he wrote a prescription for seven days of Xanax. I tore up that prescription and called my prescribing doctor who then told me it was break through anxiety and just upped my klonopin to .50mgs 3 x a day. I knew it was withdrawal and I only took .50mg twice a day for two days when it hit me that this will just happen again in the future. I went back to .50mg a day and started to look for taper types and learned about daily tapering. I took my .50mg dose and put it in whole milk and divided it up to take three times a day, I did this for a month because that helped me to be stable.

I started out tapering at .0005mg a day August 2013 then doubled that to .001mg in November 2013 and decided to stay there for as long as I could.

I did not have to slow down towards the end, in fact towards the end I felt really normal. All I had towards the end was fatigue.

I keep seeing posts of people saying that slow tapers have to face acute after their tapers and this did not happen to me at all! So it is not true everyone faces acute even if they do a very slow taper. How slow do you think tapering slow is?

This taper might not be for everyone but it was the best one for me. I don't have fear of acute anymore, I have freedom from withdrawal and doctors. All my phobias disappeared. even my phobias I had before withdrawal and before I ever took a benzo.

My hair is starting to thicken and the dry part is softening up some.

My shoulders are still sore from the frozen shoulders episodes, I hope with exercise my muscle will return. I have already been exercising while tapering and have upped my exercise now and I am building up my muscle mass. Exercise energizes me now, instead of wearing me out. My skin is making me happy now, no more dry skin (I was so sick of the dry skin) .

I do not have any withdrawal anxiety whatsoever.

I do not have any depression whatsoever.

I sleep like a rock now and wake up feeling good and do not have that tired and wired feeling.

I have had coffee and sometimes I feel jittery and sometimes I feel fine, so I don't know what that means.

I will not drink now, maybe will try in a year.

I never doubted that the taper would not work, but it took such a hell of a long time that I felt it would never end. But it does end and we do heal, maybe not when we wish but it does and when it does it is wonderful and worth it.

I do think it took me such a long time and that was a bummer, however I was able to function like anyone else and that was the plan, I had no idea it would take 15 months. But in my mind I had to pick from fast and non functional or slow taper and fully functional.

## Story 45

Where to start? I knew I wanted to come back here and be a support to people going through the same thing I went through last year, so here I am. Clonazepam and Remeron (and Ativan and Paxil) FREE since Sept 2012. It's been 6 months since I took my last dose of the liquid titration, and I pray I never forget to look back on that time and remember the HUGE thing I overcame and made it through. It changed me forever.

I suffered severe panic attacks and phobias since I was a young kid. Mom also had anxiety disorder. Here I was in my 20s and living on social security disability. So much of my life was spent indoors, isolated and suffering. How much of life I missed!

I was always one to seek natural and alternative therapies. Some helped, most didn't. It was on a particular "Hell night" that I ended up in the ER and a doctor prescribed me Ativan. Finally, relief! I slept like a baby. I remember after they filled my vein with the medicine, I started to hallucinate some interesting images of silhouetted people and auras...then my blood pressure monitor alarm started beeping--which I remember in my blissed out state---because my blood pressure had dropped dangerously low due to the Ativan. The nurses checked me; flipped me to my side, and the alarm went off.

They sent me home with the Ativan, failing to stress the side effects or that I should NOT take it every day. I started taking it every time I had an attack. Finally, I realized my increased symptoms were due to withdrawal symptoms. I'd been taking it everyday, my body rapidly craving more.

I had another Hell night, went to my doctor's, this time I requested a prescription for Clonazepam, after I read that it would be easier to get off of than the Ativan. So I switched to Clonazepam, and it was a good switch. My symptoms eased up a bit.

And so it went for 3 years or so. I actually kicked the Clonazepam at one point, by pill cutting, but then got back on it again. This time I would take it even for a migraine headache! Little did I know...

I suffered chronic nausea for 3 years while I was on Clonazepam. I thought I had either a Systemic Candida infection, parasites, or an H.pylori infection--or all of the above. And I had each of them at one time or another. The H.pylori was the worst. With treatment through natural supplements I healed from the h.pylori and the nausea subsided, finally.

But for a long time I continued to suffer with what I believed was hypoglycemia: the need to eat every 2 hours or less, feelings of extreme weakness, mental disorientation, motion sensitivity, breathlessness, nausea, sensitivity to heat, tingling hands, verbal and cognitive disorientation, and of course...severe panic attacks, phobias, and suicidal ideation. The need to eat ruled my life. I had to take food with me everywhere--even into the bathroom when I showered, and would wake up in the middle of the night to eat, at least once a night, but up to three times a night. This went on for a few years.

Finally, it occurred to me, through talking to a friend, that maybe the Clonazepam I had continued to take might be causing some of these symptoms.

My illness increasingly affected my marriage, and in June of 2012, my husband moved out, leaving me to face my fears and illness and withdrawals without him. Devastated from the loss of my husband, I became even sicker. I could barely function. I developed morning sickness. Thankfully, my mother lives across the street, and she became my main support.

It was truly Hell. A spiritual battle. My faith in Christ and sudden, desperate devotion to Him and to prayer saved me. I spent almost every moment in unceasing prayer. It was a profound time for me, that in some ways, I actually miss. I became closer to my God than ever before, and without that, I wouldn't have made it. I clung to prayer, and the Psalms, specifically, like a security blanket.

Insomnia hit with full force. The Psalms got me through. I suffered in the night, the worst. It seems to me, that the night is just the time for spiritual warfare! And I went through it, but thankfully, I had a small group of friends who constantly kept me in prayer and who I could text any time of the day or night.

I began my titration in July of 2013 using coconut milk. The schedule I made for myself empowered me. It gave me focus, a mission. I looked to the day on the calendar that I had written "I'm Free!" I decided to take 3 months or so to go off" approx 100 days, at a 1% taper each day. I've always been an impatient person, but a friend of mine told me to take it slow, and I learned that that was best in this case! She had taken 6 months to go off--I was trying to do it in half the time. Everyone is different.

I suffered a lot, but I mentally prepared myself for "battle" everyday--mostly through prayer and acceptance. I remember as the days got closer to Freedom, the liquid in my jar seemed to disappear. I kept thinking, how could there be this many more days left? It was such a small amount of liquid. This is why I ended up taking a little less than 100 days, but it worked for me.

As I got closer to the last dose, I would tell my friends and family, "Two days left!" Or "It's my last night tonight!" And I had my sister and mom come stay the night with me for two days of my last dose. I thank God for them, because that last night was truly hard. I had been taking Remeron for a short time, and mostly as needed, and I took it on those final days to help with sleep and nausea.

Then, after I kicked the Clonazepam...it was still not over. I had to kick the Remeron. That was another mountain to climb, and again, I needed the help of my mother and stepdad, but I made it. (I was on Remeron for less than 30 days, and hadn't even taken it everyday, so I just tapered down with pill cutting over a few days.)

It's been 6 months, and I am gradually getting stronger. What symptoms I still have may be due to damage caused by the drugs---they may have affected my thyroid and

adrenals, which I am working to heal now, through chiropractic and supplements. But, my sleep has improved. I can fall asleep naturally; it's staying asleep I still struggle with. I am still waking once a night to eat, but that's much better than 2 or 3 times. Also, I don't have trouble falling back asleep. The anxiety has gone way down. Sometimes I go a long time without any anxiety. I overcame my phobias because I had to face them head-on and all by myself! I have also been seeing a lot of improvement through EMDR therapy.

Today I feel like a new person or like the person I always was, but now she can breathe and live! I look healthier and I have a lot of hope for continued improvement and healing. The suffering is hard, and when you think you can't do it anymore...you CAN. You absolutely CAN. And it will pass. It will always pass. Sleep will come. Rest will come. Peace will come. Eventually you'll look back and realize that 3 months (or however long you choose to take to go off the benzo) wasn't as long as it once seemed. It's just time and it always passes. THANK GOD.

Peace of Christ be with you. Please message me anytime. I want to be of help.

## Story 46

I feel like I am doing a farewell tour - I am so emotional about all of this and all of you. My heart feels like it's going to burst. I guess I should just start with I am on the other side now. I have made it and I am grateful!! It has been a three year journey the last two of those completely free of any kind of drug prescribed or otherwise and I am healed. I want to list the things that I dealt with during my healing so that others will know that it all goes away! Things that scare the s@#\* out of you for months on end just end up stopping one day - not all at once but little by little until you have yourself back whole again, stronger in mind, spirit and body. I can honestly say I believe I can face anything that life chooses to throw at me now. I am not afraid anymore!

The entire body pain is gone, no more excruciating tail bone pain or back pain. My clothes don't hurt me anymore. I can sleep again, I can lay down at night and fall asleep. No night sweats, no adrenaline surges, no panic wakings. The hives are gone. No more rashes, no more peeling skin or lips. My tongue is no longer white, my mouth is no longer constantly dry. I can bathe without it hurting and it feels so good. I am able to go to shopping malls, movie theaters, zoos and amusement parks without any issues. My diet is back to what it was before this, my weight has stabilized at 105 lbs. which what my body likes to be at. I can listen to music again. I have season tickets to our cities Broadway shows and we haven't missed one! I laugh all the time - I only cry when my thoughts go to my mom and dad and their passing. It doesn't consume me. I feel joy daily. I feel anger occasionally. My ear ringing is seldom and just a whisper when it comes. My thoughts are fluid. I am reading books again - so many books. I missed out on two years worth of reading. I am learning new ways of dealing with stress - yoga, deep breathing and talk therapy. I have forgiven the people that left me and am going forward in new relationships too. The headaches and neck pain are gone no more restless leg or muscle spasms.

I don't smell like a wet dog anymore - at least I don't think I do 😊 I haven't been to any type of Dr. since we made our move north and I have no intention of seeing any. I can tolerate scented products but find I do better without them in my world. I have gone as chemical free in my home as I am able. My diet is clean except for baked goods. I have added pastries back into my diet almost daily because I love them and so far so good. My creative juices are flowing again. I have done interior design work on three homes with great satisfaction and monetary success.

This past year after my 12 month turn has basically created a new better version of who I was before all of this. I have learned so much about my inner strength which up until this had never really been tested. I want everyone who is suffering right now - in the midst of the unrelenting pain and suffering associated with w/d to know that with time it all goes away. The CNS takes so long to heal and yet it does heal. Please don't give up, don't reinstate - I did and it only set me back. Days crawl by and the pain is consuming but it will end.

The community here is amazing. i was blessed to be part of it and I will always hold the love that I was shown here in my heart. You all have helped me become a more compassionate person. It is 25 months off and I am completely healed. You are all in my thoughts!

## Story 47

Well, here I am at exactly two years off, writing my Success Story. I truly never thought this day would come.

I'm not sure where to start exactly, but two years ago I hopped off the very last remnants of the z-drug I had been placed on in the aftermath of my late husband's suicide. He died at the end of November 2008 and I simply stopped sleeping. I was in and out of hospital in the months that followed as I fell into a dark and debilitating depression, fueled by the lack of sleep. Straight away, after his death, the doctors put me on zopiclone (a benzo-like z-drug) and as the months went on, they simply upped the dose in response to my staggering, intractable insomnia. I went from 7.5 mg at night to 15 mg and sometimes even more. I had three hospitalizations during that time, the last one in April of the following year where I resorted to 6 sessions of inpatient, unilateral ECT to get me sleeping again. This was such a dark period in my life, I can hardly think about the details. Looking back, I definitely had PTSD and was suffering an intense, complicated grief reaction.

I do not blame the doctors that put me on this medication and failed to inform me of the risks of long-term use. In another life, with a different family of origin perhaps, I would have been held close and lovingly supported through my grief, without the intervention of psychiatrists or the need for hospitalization. This was my first major loss in my life. I had no roadmap. No idea of how to auger my way out of the very deep hole I found myself in. I do not blame either the doctors or myself though. They came from a place of good intentions. Although wary of benzodiazepines and largely medication avoidant all my life, I simply didn't do the necessary due diligence. I truly think that part of me just wanted to take the pills and sleep to avoid the intense suffering I was experiencing at the time. I take full responsibility for my actions.

It wasn't until my then boyfriend (now husband!) had emergency open heart surgery and a quadruple bypass in 2012, that the "penny dropped" and I made the connection between the intense physical symptoms and mysterious illness I was experiencing and the zopiclone. My boyfriend was also put on zopiclone in the hospital. When he came home, after a few months, he went to our new GP and asked to increase his dose as he was experiencing what I now know to be tolerance. Our GP said "Well, actually, now is when we start to take you off these drugs." He went on to talk about his difficulty in managing patients that he inherited who had been put on this medication, who had gradually steadily increased their doses over time. I went home that day shocked by what I had heard and immediately started to research this drug. I found BenzoBuddies and, well the rest is history as they say.

I've posted a few updates over the past months, chronicalling my very slow recovery. Suffice it to say, from months 2 to 16, I became increasingly unwell and very, very debilitated. I came off on May 23, 2013 seemingly without issue but that did not last. For most of these past two years, I was far too ill to even post. I had mostly physical symptoms: intense benzo flu (nausea/jet lag/hangover/flu-like), tinnitus, large

areas of burning skin, right side muscle pain and weakness, muscle spasms, internal electric buzzing sensations. I've come to realize that the z-drugs are particularly nasty in this regard. Having figured out why I was so ill in tolerance and inter-dose withdrawal while I was on the medication and having done a long (10 month) taper, I was relieved to know the cause but singularly unprepared for the hellish withdrawal that I experienced once off the drugs entirely.

Something happened about 16 months out after I went for a 6-week course of auricular acupuncture, 4 times a week. My benzo flu dropped away and life began to be somewhat tolerable. At month 19, my cognitive powers returned. Suddenly, I could converse again. Write again. Read again. It was as if the cognitive fog lifted and my brain was restored. I was slammed by another wave at 18 months out, characterized by intense physical pain in my neck and shoulders. This went on until I went back for full-body acupuncture in month 21. Acupuncture at this stage ushered in a new level of healing. I went on to have my first ever windows - two consecutive afternoons - at the end of month 22. By month 23, I was having mutli-day, full day windows. Just this past week, I was able to work out at the gym on the treadmill for the first time in 3 years, without pain or severe exercise intolerance. Truly a miracle.

I am well on the way to getting my life back. A life worth living. A rich and full life without pain or suffering. I remarried, on a wind-swept beach on Vancouver Island, a year ago in April. I was so ill at the time, I staggered from my bed to the beach and then back to the couch. Looking at those pictures, I see someone who looks like death warmed over but who was determined that benzo/z-drug withdrawal would not win.

Loss. Dependence. Accidental Addiction. Defining moments in my life but they **did not** and **will not** define me. I have a lot of living yet to do. At 55, I'm planning what I will look like in the next half of my life. I have so much to give, and so much yet to learn. I am profoundly grateful for all the help I have received on these boards and for other's success stories. Stories I clung to in my darkest hours.

Today, I'm starting a blog for the first time. I hope you drop by to say hello and find encouragement as I go forward on this journey to complete healing.

As I am very fond of saying (this is a remnant of the riding instructor in me!) - "the only way forward, is forward".

Sending hope, love and healing your way buddies. If I can heal, anyone can!



Mmmmmm

## Story 48

Hello To All :

This has been a messed up wonked out ride. I have many thoughts on the hideous nature of benzos, antidepressants and all pharmaceutical drugs....but I don't think I need to elaborate too much. I am pretty sure you all know how bad it is.

I quit cold turkey from several prescribed drugs that I used very short term and apparently that was not wise! I suffered a very long time. This past December 2014, I considered myself healed from the violent attack on my brain from big pharma. Total HELL ...that sloooowly and then finally went away.

I had started reading success stories here on benzobuddies from the moment I registered. I never imagined I would be sharing my own, but here I am, writing this post! I want all of you to know that If I Made it Through ~~~~ So can you! Please just take it day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute and hang on to whatever helps you. This forum was a place for me to at least know that I was not suffering alone. It provided the knowledge that I felt I needed to understand what was happening.

I am better now and back to my definition of a "normal" existence. I enjoy the days again and can feel pleasure again.

Take Care and Keep on Keepin on!!! Thanks to all who answered my questions and listened to my please!!! Love to those of you waiting!

## Story 49

Hi everyone,

I don't post here often as I have been benzo-free for 8.5 years. Lately, I've been talking with a few people who are approximately 12-13 months off the poison. They all question their own recovery, as I did, too. Putting in a full year and not being recovered is depressing. I was there. I know the fear. I worried that I would be in that boat forever and left behind. I read all the old timers stories on Benzo Liberty and Benzo Friends sites. I was not on this group at all until years after I healed when I was requested to help a person with burning vagina....one of my 24/7/365 symptoms since swallowing the first Ativan. I read the stories about how the old timers recovered and I so longingly wanted to be in their boat, but the symptoms were still so horrible at one year off that I was convinced I would be sick and tormented forever.

How could I suffer any longer? Time moves like a snail in withdrawal.

I was 100% wrong, obviously. My breakthrough was just around the corner. I was stunned that symptom after symptom started dropping off after 16 to 18 months. It didn't happen overnight. But, it did happen. And, your recovery will happen, too. The depression, anxiety, fear, pain, insomnia, nausea, etc...all stops and the body normalizes. Peace returns. No more feeling like a prisoner of war in your own flesh. Just peace and relief from the torture you endured for so long.

Just thought I'd remind you all that your miracle is coming. If I can recover, anyone can. and, WILL!

Hugs and healing,

## Story 50

I have healed.

I started to write a success story about two months ago (at 2 months off), but was so afraid that I would have another wave and have to retract the success. That didn't happen. I am fine. It is time to write this story of hope for others.

I started tolerance withdrawal in February 2011 and I was off the drugs on June 22, 2012. It is now November, 2012 and it is done. It was a long haul. I didn't believe it would ever go away. It was so hard doing the taper, even though I knew that cold turkey would be worse, because when I started out, I was cut by about ½ my dosage all at once by my doctor and it was horrible. It is so hard to know that there is no way out except tapering. However, having said that, once I had a plan, I could stick to it and that helped. Eventually it ended. In the last month of June, I had a bad month, getting only 3 hours sleep each night. I jumped sooner than I had originally planned, by about 2 months, because I just didn't think I would stabilize at all. It was a good thing to do; stopping the drug when I did as I did stabilize very quickly after it was out of my system.

Withdrawal was awful. I had the whole range of symptoms, went to the doctor a few times for dizziness, thyroid and blood pressure problems. Over that year and a half, I got so many of the symptoms; you can read back on some of my posts to see. I only mention this because every time I read a success story, I wondered, "Did that person really have the problems that I do and no longer has them?" I expect now, that he or she did have them and healed, the way I have.

The good news; it has all gone away. All of it except a couple of things. I will mention these just so I am totally honest. I have tinnitus still, but only when I am really tired, maybe only a couple of hours every few days. It is gone most of the time. I do have minimal insomnia. The insomnia does not come with anxiety – so I can be up at night for a couple of hours and it really doesn't bother me. When I think back about how groggy I was every morning when I was on benzos, this is much better. I sleep less but it is a wonderful, restful sleep and it is all the sleep I need. My memory is better. My mood is happier. I am focused on each day as I am living it.

Benzo withdrawal is about coming off a drug. It is not about an ill brain. It is so hard to believe that when you have the problems and all the symptoms, but it is really true. The symptoms really go away. I can't say that enough for you who will read this. It all goes away. It is a drug that changes the brain in horrible ways, but with time and care, the effects go away and the brain heals. I wish hope and healthy healing for all of you.

## Story 51

I am out. I have been waiting so long to say that. I am 14 months out and been waiting awhile to write this to be sure. But I feel great and have for awhile. The torment and misery that I was in seems so distant but also fresh like looking at a scar. I have to write this just for closure and be done with it.

So 14 months ago I was ignorant and went out after 3 months use of xanax for panic and anxiety attacks. All hell broke loose and the downward spiral began. I was in torment for a good 6 or 7 months. I remember the unreal anxiety or energy in my chest as soon as I woke up every day. All I could do was lay on the couch and wait for the evening because that was my peace when I would go to sleep. I was fortunate to be able to do that. The unbearable energy or chemical anxiety felt like a nuclear reactor ready to explode in my chest. My vision was so bad for along time. It was blurry, gray and grainy most of the time. I lost at my worst point 20 lbs. I had every sx's that everyojne talks about. There were so many that I forgett about some until I read someones post and remember it. Each hour seemed like forever and time moved so slow. I can remember being at 2 months and thinking how can I make it to 4 months or 6 months. But I did. Now time flies by. This poison will bring you to your knees and to lows you never thought you would go through. I can remember wishing time away so I could get better. I got there but it wasnt easy and was the battle of my life. I am 45 now and it is the worst thing I have ever been through. I was shot when I was younger and thought that was bad. If I had my choice between being shot again or going through w/d I would tell you to pull the trigger twice!

Advice: Try and listen to the ones that have been through it. There are days you will listen and agree with us and say I can do this. But there are days when you will doubt this is w/d and has to be a disease or something else. It will wear you down. But you will make it. You have to be strong willed. Try and connect with someone. I listened to many others. The advice they gave was crucial to me knowing what was going on.

Ok around the 7 or 8 month mark I decided to go on an AD becuase I had panic and anxiety attacks( which I had prior to xanax) and I needed to be able to work and provide for my family. I am on a baby dose and it helped me. I know some of you were critical back then of me taking it and I am not saying it helps with wd. Some of you will say I am not healed if I am on an AD. To be honest I could give a shit less. I feel good and did what I had to do. I stayed away from alcohol until 1 year. I am able to drink a beer or two and I am fine. I am not drinking to get drunk, or to escape, I just like beer. I have no desire to drink more than 1 or two. So dont get all bent out of shape because I have a drink. If you chose not to that is great. To each his own.

I wish you all the best and hope your torment ends soon. I am getting on with my life. Thank you again for all who helped and know that you will get better. I am here for anyone who needs me. Benzos I beat you, kiss my ass!!!!!!!!!!!!

## Story 52

I wrote a success story a while back, when I was 10 months out. From that time and now at 13th months out there were a few setbacks (3 minor setbacks) where I noticed that I was pretty revved up. All because of being under a lot of stress. There is nothing anyone can do about having stress. That's a fact of life. I feel so much better. Still stuck with two sx's, but they are so minor that it's not too big of a deal.

There's a very smart friend of mine, who operates a small company for benzo withdrawal sufferers in Arizona, that I met online looking for help, when I was in acute withdrawal, and in very terrible shape. He said, "It's better saying that you're better, instead of healed, because healing for us takes a lot longer, and even after we get better we still are recovering." That's so true. Never thought of it that way, but it makes perfect sense, because I've met so many people in support groups and on Benzo Buddies who said that they healed, but still get withdrawal symptoms once in a blue moon. I also do. Plus if you say you're healed, some sx's could come back later on, and you will be very disappointed. Sometimes the sx's come back when under too much stress or even if we push ourselves too much. What my friend does is counsel people, give lectures, put people on healthy supplements and much more.

It's a working progress, but you will all get better. It takes time and believe me, you will know when you feel better, because that whole extremely intense feeling of fear that overwhelms you and all those other really bad sx's will vanish. You'll be able to do things that you couldn't do while in withdrawal. It will even feel better than your windows did.

Don't give up, because you never know how good things will be for you around the corner. I've talked to people who were on benzos longer than me and said they healed pretty fast, like my friend Mark, who healed or got better I should say at only 3 months out. He was on Xanax for a year. Known him for many years and never knew he was on a benzo before.

It goes to show that we really can't trust anyone, if we can't trust the people that are supposed to take care of our health, and make sure we are fine. Many doctors are corrupt and they indeed get kickbacks from the pharmaceutical companies. It's very sad! I really believe that the guy that made the first benzo, which was Valium, knew that it would have a bad affect and what a genius he was, an evil one, but still a genius. To create a medication that someone would have the worst time getting off of. He came up with a medication that most people couldn't stay off that long, because they wouldn't be able to stand the withdrawal, and most people would have to get back on Valium. Why would he do that? So they will keep buying prescriptions. The more prescriptions people fill the richer Big Pharma gets!

### Story 53

March 27th 2011 I took my last crumb of Lorazepam. I'm happy about the anniversary but at the same time it's not like a declaration of sobriety or anything. That just happens to be the last time I took the Lorazepam followed by many months of feeling mentally ill. I wish I had heard about titration or understood how to do it at the time but by the time I had learned about it I had already stopped taking the Benzo and I didn't see any point in going back to taking it just to taper off using titration. I don't know if I was right or wrong to do that but I just decided to stay away from the Benzo all together. Maybe that would have made things easier for me. I'm quite sure that I tapered down too quickly but I was trying to figure this all out on my own.

It was truly the worst thing I ever went through in my life. The psychological trauma was really overwhelming and it took every bit of my strength to keep from loosing my mind. It was a very slow and gradual process but eventually I got back to normal. I regret taking the medication everyday but that's how my family doctor prescribed it and I didn't know any better. Doctors were of NO help in getting me off of it. They all wanted to prescribe anti depressants to cope with my symptoms and withdrawal. Mainly Lexapro. I just wanted to get back to normal and not take any medication. The only medicine I take now is a cholesterol med. Nothing else. I'll admit that I am a nervous and anxious person and always have been but I can cope with it and get by with out a medication. So, I'm certainly not Mr. Perfect but I'm glad I don't take Lorazepam anymore. In hind sight I think it affected me in a negative way. I feel like I was released from the chains that kept me down.

It took a lot of work to get off of the benzo but I'm glad I did. The human brain and body are very adaptable. I just takes time.

## Story 54

Hello! I hope this finds you receiving relief! I am starting to write this success story at the end of my 5th month, so that should give you an idea of how the improvements are, even if I don't post for several months...the 5th month was good enough for me to feel I could start this!

I loved reading success stories and wished there were more of them!

In the early summer of 2013 I found myself having "funny" feelings of lightheadedness while at work. I even told a co-worker on several occasions that I was feeling this way and didn't understand what was happening to me.

By August I had taken a leave of absence and was told I needed my gallbladder removed. On September 9th I had my gallbladder surgery and within a week my back had gone out severely, with a bulging disc pushing on the sciatic nerve. On October 1st I had back surgery. Prior to the surgery I was told I needed to stop all medications I was currently on and that I could resume them after surgery. I thought that if I was going off of them I would just not continue them after the surgery was over. This is where all hell broke loose! After my FMLA leave I quit my job, I didn't know what was wrong with me!

I never abused any drugs including the benzos, and only occasionally drank a glass of wine or had a margarita. I had many of the typical symptoms and started looking on the Internet. This is when I found out that there was a problem! I had been on 4 mg of Lorazepam and immediately cut to 2 mg. I contacted my doctor's office and was told by his nurse that my doctor did not support me getting off this medication and that I should just stay on it. I was told that he said I could have a heart attack, seizures, or die. I instantly said to myself, "Oh, hell no, I will not be controlled by a drug!" I knew right then that I would quit.

In November I began my taper directly off the Lorazepam and finished on February 12th, 2014.

The symptoms I had (no specific order):

ANXIETY/PANIC/INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS (this was the worst and lasted longest)

Suicidal thoughts

Insomnia

Restlessness (Horrible in acute phase, had to keep moving, moving, moving)

Pain in left shoulder and forearm

Lightheadedness

Cold most of the time

Morning "ick" from cortisol, with internal chest/left arm vibrations

Gastrointestinal issues

Heat palpitations

Tinnitus (this is why I was prescribed Benzos to begin with)

Muscle aches  
UTI within a month of quitting  
Floaters in eyes  
Shaking/Tremors in muscles  
Breathing – can't take in a deep enough breath  
Prickly feeling on calves  
Dysphoria – emotional disconnect  
Memory issues  
Trouble swallowing  
Heightened sense of smell  
Sensitivity to light

Here is how the healing went for me:

Taper: SO bad! Little to no sleep! All of the symptoms were very bad!

Month 1: SO bad! Little to no sleep! All symptoms were bad!

Month 2: A nice window opened for about 2 weeks, so I thought I was healed! Drank about a ¼ glass of wine only to be thrown back into hell! Rest of the month was bad! Sleep returned to normal! Symptoms were bad, maybe a tad better!

Month 3: Mostly waves with some windows coming and going. The bad was still bad, but better than earlier. Windows were short. Good sleep!

Month 4: Some waves with some windows. Again, the bad was bad, but still less intensity than previously. Windows got a little longer! Good sleep! Anxiety bad in the waves, had to breath deep.

Month 5: Beginning of the month was in and out of waves and windows. Bad was still bad, but even better than the previous bad episodes. The windows were better than previous windows. From July 16th to the 29th I was in a good window the entire time and felt "normal"! The 30th went back into a wave, and it felt really, really, bad, trouble taking a deep breath, anxiety. After that just felt "so,so". A couple of weeks of insomnia early in the month, then sleep returned to normal. The morning "ick" feeling and the lightheadedness went away the end of the month!!

Month 6: I felt excellent the beginning of this month! Went for an allergy shot and had a reaction, was given 40 mg of Prednisone...two days later went into a wave that lasted about a week...don't take Prednisone! At six and a half months I had been feeling good and decided it was time to go back to work. Applied for a full-job and got it a week later! Still having emotional disconnect, left shoulder issues, and some anxiety/fear, but I feel I can control it to a certain extent, where it used to control me. Still some sleep issues, but this is intermittent.

Month 7 thru 11: Just continued with waves and windows...windows got longer. Month 9

brought the WORST wave ever, just horrid and lasted about a month! The depression was terrible, and I had never suffered from depression in my life up until this point! That has been the last wave I had up to this point and I feel SO wonderful! My sleep has improved greatly! Month 11 was almost wave free!

Month 12: No waves! So happy!

I still get on this site daily, as there is one person that I have messaged with since very early on. They are a couple of months behind me and I can hear healing happening through our messages! I will continue to give back and I can't wait to hear about the healing!

I drank coffee throughout the entire process and I did not stick to any specific diet. I took melatonin early on, which seemed to help, then quit early in the 4th month. Once the insomnia came back I tried the melatonin but it did not work this time. When sleep was really bad I tried diphenhydramine, with a little success. I took an antihistamine when the anxiety was very severe and it eased it. Other than that I tried not to take anything and just let the healing process happen.

Prayer helped me immensely! I talked to God constantly! I understand not all people choose to turn to God, that's ok! You find what works for you and run with it!! You are an awesome person and you deserve to, and will, be healed!

Do not compare your situation to others! You don't know what they did or did not do or for how long! We are all so different! Don't read stories about the people who take longer to heal and believe that will be you. It may take you longer than some or less time than some, but I believe keeping a positive attitude will aid in your success!

You will heal! Do not keep telling yourself this is your new "normal" and that this is how you are going to be forever when you are still healing! It's just not true, you WILL heal, it just takes time!

This site is awesome! You are awesome! You will heal!

## Story 55

It took 22 months of trekking in slow motion through fire to reach this point. I am now generally healed, and it is time to post my success story.

I was first on Xanax (alprazolam) then Klonopin (Revotril/clonazepam) for a total of 5 years (1.5mg/day), and quit after a quick dry-cut taper. I was already in tolerance withdrawal when I jumped off, suffering from about 15 symptoms at once. I had NEVER, EVER been so ill in my life. Yet I could not figure out what was wrong, nor did any of the doctors I consulted. It was only when I researched my symptoms on the internet 2 months later that I found out about Benzos, and made the connection!

I suspect that a single dose of Avelox, a fluoroquinilone antibiotic, which I had taken a year earlier, triggered the decline. My tolerance withdrawal symptoms included horrendous jaw pain, bizarre internal vibrations, severe headaches, terrible fatigue, poor memory, aggressive behavior, vertigo, heavy limbs, muscle pain, weight loss, excessive mucus in throat, gastrointestinal problems, irregular heartbeat, skin rash, depression, anxiety, DP/DR, and insomnia. These were not run-of-the-mill aches, but rather severe heavy-duty afflictions.

Things would get much worse before getting better. Soon after becoming Benzo-free, the gates of hell opened on me. My symptoms quickly morphed into huge buzzing waves of painful paraesthesia, i.e. severe nerve burning, numbness and stinging. This was accompanied by unbelievable chronic fatigue, cognition fog that rendered me "stupid", and arthritis-like aches which I had never experienced before. Pain became so intense during my first year off, it nearly destroyed my will to live. I had to stop my work and life for many dark months, and stayed at home curled in bed or on a sofa.

Improvement seemed imperceptible, slow, frustrating. One day was equal to a hundred days. I followed posts on BB obsessively, and read everything and anything related to Benzos. I went through more medical tests to rule out other causes. I drank a lot of fresh juices, and found that sunbathing reduced nerve pain. I could neither exercise, nor tolerate therapeutic massages or acupuncture. Vitamins and most supplements were out. So was alcohol.

Month 11 was the turning point. Symptoms started to permanently wane, and the journey became more tolerable. I experienced waves of nerve burning and fatigue in months 13 and 17, but they passed. I am now 22 months off, and over 95% healed. In the end, I did nothing, I just waited things out. What healed me was TIME. It was as simple as that.

I am appalled at the irresponsibility of the drug companies, and the lack of initiative at the FDA and other regulating bodies. Benzo withdrawal is not an imaginary condition: it is a serious medical syndrome, caused by widely-prescribed medications. I believe that the petition filed with the FDA in 2010 regarding putting limits on Benzo prescription should be adopted without further delay. Concomitant prescribing of fluoroquinolone

antibiotics should also be forbidden. It is utterly unacceptable that thousands of patients will continue to go through withdrawal suffering, because of legally-sanctioned prescription malpractice.

Like most of you here, I had little help from doctors. I relied mainly on BB for support. I honestly do not think that I could have regained my health and sanity without this site, and the grace of God. The buddies I encountered on this long journey were true angels flying by my side. The quality of advice one gets here is truly A-one. I can't thank him and the moderators enough!

I hope my story gives strength to those of you who are still struggling. My advice is to be patient, get informed, seek support, quit alcohol, quit supplements, accept that this is a slow and arduous process... then forge onward. Some of you will take a few months to heal, others a few years. But please know that Benzo withdrawal is not a life sentence.

So long!

## Story 56

My benzo story started with a panic attack, I was a very active person with a busy social life who loved socialising, i had stopped drinking but it never stopped me having fun. Then out of the blue these panics started i thought i was about to die . I went to my GP and was given 60 diazepam 2mg pills she said take one twice a day That was 26 years ago and the same doctor had also seen my battle with booze.

I had no idea they were addictive. We didn't have a computer at that time, we just trusted our GPs. Anyhow i started taking the diazepam I took one pill a day to start with. Got on with life panic attacks stopped I was taking a 2mg pill per day. Over the years I did have bouts of depression and other complaints. Things I couldn't quite put my finger on I know now it was the diazepam

About 7 years ago the panic attacks started again but far worse than before, awful anxiety, I could not function, the GP increased my dose and it went up and up till it got to 20 mgs I started getting very depressed, crying all day, the GP added a/ds to the mix I was a complete mess and I lost the will to live. 😞 I became housebound I could not wash myself or dress myself. I was so sick my husband had to take care of me. I was scared of the phone i used to get electric shocks when the phone rang or the doorbell and I could not open my front door.(agoraphobia) I was in fear of everything, i had muscle pains and severe stomach problems, along with every symptom in the book some were extremely scary.I had tests done, endoscopies xrays, bloods all came back negative.

On my next visit to see the doctor I asked her if the medication could be the problem My GP laughed, kept telling me it was all in my head, I was too weak to argue. What was worse for me was when my family and friends told me to pull myself together, that's when I convinced myself it was in my head. I dragged myself onto the computer one day and did a search on diazepam(Valium). How I managed it I do not know I was so ill, and wanted to die. I learned that Valium belonged to a group called benzodiazepines, i eventually came across a forum called Benzoisland and could not believe how my story was common knowledge. People like me with the same complaints, it was so sad but at the same time it was also a huge RELIEF to me to learn I wasn't going mad, it wasn't all in my head. They told me on the forum it gets better. I didn't believe them but I did what they suggested me to do.

I did my taper there before it closed I did 10% cuts until I got to 6Mg's I then did 5% cuts, it was hard cutting the pills, I ended up with powder most of the time. Anyhow I managed it it was hell, but oh so worth it. and here I am 20 mths free 99% healed. I noticed huge improvements after the first year (we are all different) I have seen some recover sooner and some later but what is for certain WE ALL DO RECOVER. I NEVER thought I would make it, we all make it in the end its just time. My only regret is that i didn't get off the benzos sooner, i have lost 5 years of my life. I am trying to make up for it know, i am out most of the time. I was also pretty cheap for a while but today it is costing my poor dear loyal husband 😊😁🙌

I joined Trap after BI closed, that got me through this last 6 months. I made some amazing friendships and got to know some of the bravest people I have ever met. Now I have been welcomed at Benzobuddies. And meeting more brave people

Thank you all you amazing mods, admins, volunteers and technicians for giving us these life saving forums.

Love

## Story 57

In my life I experienced anxiety, the normal type that comes with life these days due to the stresses of our lifestyles. I dealt with my parent's death, job issues, family dynamics and other disruptions that in our society we find necessary to deal with. I never felt the need to treat myself with any kind of medication for the anxiety; I was able to work through it knowing that it would pass as the situations resolved. Fast forward to my experience with benzos and the worst anxiety and panic that I could imagine. That is the reason for the title of my Success Story. When I was having terrible panic and anxiety and needed to drive somewhere I always drove in the right lane so I could bail out if necessary. And there were times it was necessary, many times.

Now I'm driving in the left lane again. You will too!!!

I have actually been through withdrawal twice. I was initially put on Ativan for a supposed middle ear issue by an ENT who spent less than 10 minutes with me and gave me a prescription for Ativan and said the condition would clear up. After a 2nd opinion from an ENT I was scheduled for a comprehensive vestibular test for which I could not be taking medications like Ativan. My doctor assured me that because of my low dose that I could discontinue the Ativan with just possibly some flu like symptoms. I stopped taking Ativan and descending into a hell like I have never thought possible. I was shaking, my head hurt so bad I cried, I had awful stomach problems, and I was so dizzy that I could not walk without holding on to the walls. I had DP and DR, the world I knew looked so foreign and strange. The worst was the panic attacks. I would try to go to the store with my husband and once inside the store I would have to turn around and have him help me out. I ended up staying home and in bed and crying, crying.

My GP wanted to run tests so I went in and almost fainted after the blood tests. My doctor said he really didn't know what was wrong with me. When I asked if it could have anything to do with the Ativan he said no, since I had been off for 2 weeks and it was completely out of my system. My husband had to take me out of the office in a wheelchair because I could not walk. I had an MRI of my brain and it was normal and the blood work showed I was very healthy.

I had no idea I was in withdrawal, I didn't know what a benzo was, sure I had heard of valium but I didn't know that Ativan was in the same family. Should I have known, possibly, but more importantly I should have been informed by my care givers.

This was my first withdrawal. My doctor recommended antidepressants for my "anxiety" and I resisted for a couple of months. After much soul searching I decided to try one because of my intense desire to get well. I tried a few with my GP and they all made me ill with serious effects. At this point I decided to seek out an "expert" to help me with my "anxiety" problem. This was my first experience with a psychiatrist. He immediately put me on clonazepam. I felt better at the start and subsequently I was put on many different medications. I began to be afraid to try any more because of the intense side effects and also because I decided to start to read up about these meds and many of

them were used “off label” for anxiety. Bells started going off in my head and I began reading more and more. I did ask the doctor about the safety of taking clonazepam long term. He assured me that I would not encounter any problems because I didn’t have an addictive personality. At this point I [...] didn’t know about the recommendations for short time use of benzos.

I quickly reached tolerance and was ill for a long time. I asked my psychiatrist about my symptoms and he said it sounded like withdrawal and advised an increase in dose, I refused. He also suggested I get some medical tests because he couldn’t see a psychological reason for the anxiety and therefore he surmised it must be biological. I underwent many medical tests, some of them fairly invasive. At the time I was also being treated for nerve damage and disc degeneration in my cervical spine. I had many steroid injections not knowing about their cross tolerance to benzos. Many of the procedures I had were done with conscious sedation (valium). I also had fusion surgery at C 5-7. I really wish someone would have said something to me, between all the doctors I saw, I wish one had spoken up. After I completed my crossover to valium I had shoulder surgery for a torn bicep tendon and tears in my rotator cuff. The anesthesiologist was very frank with me about long term benzo use. Why didn’t I hear that years before? I was tapering at that point and dedicated to ending my benzo use. I wish there were more doctors like this person who wasn’t afraid to speak up to a relative stranger, someone she just met to perform the anesthetic for the surgery.

I did finally find a doctor that agreed that the medication was making me ill. I took the Ashton Manual and him and I planned the crossover to valium. He also discontinued all the additional medications that the naturopath started me on, primarily hormones and thyroid medication. Upon completion of my taper my hormones and thyroid levels returned to normal.

My taper was rough; I only had the Ashton Manual as my guide at this point. I was able to work through the taper and made it to the end. Surprisingly I felt really good for the first 2 weeks off and then I got hit. I had a myriad of symptoms and so much pain both nerve and muscle. I had just about every scary symptom there was and had all the fears that accompany withdrawal.

I found Benzo Buddies and just read posts for quite a while. Needing more help and support I decided to join. This is where I received more information about withdrawal and met people who knew what I was going through. I was certain I would be one of those that healed in the 6 month range. After all, I was on the tennis court 2 weeks after gall bladder surgery. Not so. I became discouraged many times.

Distraction helped me so much, movies, books, puzzles. I was also getting more and more interested in the science behind withdrawal and the mechanisms that are affected by benzo use. I did a lot of reading and came to the conclusion that my body would heal on its own, in its own time.

My bedroom was my oasis the summer of 2011 and BB was my lifeline. I read books on forgiveness to forgive myself for allowing these medications to enter my body. I have

yet to forgive the doctors and my new doctor said I have no need to do that, it was not my fault. I took baby steps, driving, shopping any activity. By the end of the summer I was riding my bicycle. I encountered many waves, usually after a lovely window.

As time progressed I became more and more functional. I have continued to work except for some time off during the summer of 2011. I saw my 1 year anniversary come and go with many improvements. I traveled some even while having symptoms. I probably could have written my success story a few months ago but I have been really busy with life. Plus, there is always that little voice that says “what if you are not totally healed”. Get out of my way withdrawal fears!

I am so extremely thankful for the support of all my buddies here; you are near and dear to my heart – all of you. I know without a doubt that this process would have been so much more taxing without you.

I know how hard this is, I know that it is tiring but the end result is so worth it. We are meant as humans to feel things, not have feelings suppressed by a medication. We are meant to cry when we are sad and laugh when we are happy. I missed these things. They are all back, please know they will be back for you too. I will happily share the left lane with all of you brave, strong and caring people.

## Story 58

Wow! I can't believe I'm writing this! I remember coming here when I started my taper, reading the success stories and crying uncontrollably. I was so envious of these people and I was convinced that I would never be normal again. I would never be able to post a success story. I could not have been more wrong!

I started off on this site as nomore75, but lost my information and decided to just create a new account. If you go back and see my original posts, you will see how much I suffered. Nothing could have prepared me for this experience! Even with my education and intelligence, I was clueless as to what long term benzo use and withdrawal would entail. Not many people get it. People still don't believe me when I try to tell them what I went through. How could they? Unless you have experienced this, you can't even fathom!

So these are some of the things I went through. The last year on Klonopin, I was a complete mess! I had terrible agoraphobia, major panic attacks, constant dizzy spells, heavy DP/DR, migraines, and depression. I had no idea what was going on! I was constantly at the ER, convinced that I was dying. I payed numerous visits to my doctor. Not one doctor suggested that it could be my meds making me sick! Not one!!! I was told to up my dose because my anxiety was out of control. I was so lost. I needed to find out what was wrong with me. I was always a very strong, independent and outgoing woman so there had to be something going on. I went online and researched anxiety and panic. My research eventually led me to this site. I was so relieved to find people going through the same thing and the reason why. It was the Klonopin! As relieved as I was, I was also terrified! After reading many posts on here, I decided to start tapering. I wanted off so bad! I wanted my life back! I did this without my doctor.

What a nightmare I went through tapering! I made big cuts and quick. There was no way I was going to drag this out. My worst symptom was dizziness/vertigo. It was awful and so debilitating! I was sure I would be dizzy forever. The extreme fear was next in line. I was terrified all the time for not particular reason. I would feel it in the pit of my stomach and it would consume me. I can't put into words how scared I was. The morning was the absolute worst time! I couldn't think about my past and couldn't think about the future. It was too overwhelming! I would watch people living their lives, working, laughing, socializing and I was so envious and jealous at the same time. While they went on with their lives, I was struggling to get through an hour. It's unbelievable the thoughts you have when in withdrawal. I will tell you now, if you feel like that, it's just the benzos lying to you. You will not feel like that forever. I had deep, dark depression too. I would cry for days. I have never felt depression like that before. I wanted to die so many times. I should also mention that I'm a single mom. I have 2 boys and I raised them on my own through this. I couldn't work, couldn't attend school meetings, no sports, couldn't drive, couldn't go out. This whole process was a terrible mind\$&@\*! The DR/DR was unbelievable! Aside from the mental stuff, I had nausea, headaches, muscles aches, blurred vision, tinnitus, awful akathisia, jaw pain, gut pain, insomnia, inner vibrations, etc.... I had pretty much every symptom all the time!

When I jumped in May, I figured it couldn't get any worse. Ha!! Acute withdrawal was pretty intense. I was spinning out of control. Anxiety and panic were brutal! For 6 weeks, all of my symptoms were exaggerated. I did not leave the house.

After 6 weeks, I started to feel better. The anxiety lifted and I began leaving the house. I started going into stores, attending appointments and driving short distances. I still had many symptoms and my thinking was still flawed, but I felt better. I was more awake. The fog was lifting. All of a sudden, colors seemed more vibrant, the sky was beautiful, the trees were amazing. It was like I was waking up from a long sleep. Soon, feelings started coming back. I felt love again. I felt joy and excitement. I started to laugh and have fun with my kids. I was able to watch tv again and listen to music. My life was coming back. Slowly, my symptoms started disappearing. I had huge windows and nasty waves. The waves were so discouraging, but I kept fighting. My longest lasting symptoms were dizziness, blurred vision, insomnia, and akethesia.

Now, at almost 7 months off, I have no symptoms. I am free!! I work full time and I am very busy. I am a hockey mom, a soccer mom and a basketball mom again. I can do anything now! I have no anxiety, no depression. I am happy and grateful for everything. This experience has made me a better person. I am not afraid of anything anymore. I love life. I can handle stress. I sleep like a baby. I am connected to people again.

For those of you in the thick of this, fight and know that one day it will feel like a bad dream; a distant memory. Remember that your thinking is flawed right now, so don't believe the lies your mind is creating. You will come out the other side stronger, happier and grateful for being alive. As difficult as it is, believe that. You will do all the things you love again. You will feel again and you will love life again. I promise! I suffered greatly and I am great now.

Stay strong and keep putting one foot in front of the other.

## Story 59

I have been a very irregular member of this lifesaving site. Every time I logged on and read our very very painful stories I was thrown into such anxiety and despair..... You know the story. I took my last benzo 18 months ago today and though I'm still not 100 percent ALL of the time, I'm no longer that quivering mass of terrified jello that thought she was having a nervous breakdown and not a cure in sight!! GONE!!! I actually feel HAPPY!!! I'm SO HAPPY!!!! And, no matter what happens in the future I know that NOTHING could be as horrible as what I've gone thru. I'm not even afraid of getting the most life threatening, miserably painful, protracted and lingering illness known to personhood. (Well, perhaps a bit of an overstatement..) But, I have PERSERVERED. I did it. I sucked it up and waited and waited and waited and waited and expected nothing of my self other than to continue to let time have it's way with me. Not that I had a choice in the matter....

AND, YOU PEOPLE OUT THERE CAN DO IT TOO!! It's one frigging foot in front of another. That's the only secret. Distract yourself if you can. I've listened endlessly to podcasts, audio books, self help people (Eckhart Tolle is great, Jon Kabat-Zinn and Jack Kornfield both have wonderful cds on Mindfulness Meditation), walked, practiced yoga and other endorphin producing exercise. Many of you can't do the exercise part, but try if you are able. I actually felt better for a few hours afterwards.

Whining also helped, tho I only whined constantly to my husband and children and best friends. I found that trying to explain to people what I was going thru (tho I actually tried to tell as may people as I could) was not the best way to endear myself to folks and didn't quite work since I was such a blithering idiot. I continue to try, however, as the world needs to know.

Don't allow yourself to get horribly disappointed when that wonderful window of 3 days vanishes for 2 weeks. (As if..) That will happen. Frequently. Don't assume anyone else's experience will be your own. You can hope for a three or six month recovery but please don't expect that it will happen. You SO want to escape those horrible body sensations. Horrible, horrible, horrible. AAAAAAAAAAAAAACK!!!! I felt as if I could probably relate to what tortured prisoners must feel, never knowing if they would die or live or when or if the terror would ever ever end. I once saw the most hideous Inquisition instruments of torture. MAYBE that would be worse.

But, believe me, I'll not whine about much ever again. I've learned a big lesson and I'm happy about that. A number of lessons actually. One is, don't f\*#@ with your brain if you're not suffering from mental illness. And, under no circumstances, even if you're tempted beyond distraction and desperation, go back to those magic little pills. You've made it soooooo far. You'll just be prolonging the agony. We're here for you and there are so many people here who are willing and even happy to listen to you and help you and send you love and encouragement. One day you'll be better. Sooner or later, you'll be better, too. And, we'll be here to hear that you're happy and we'll be so happy for you. It's gonna happen, for sure.

## Story 60

It is three years today that I realized it was the Ativan that was slowly destroying my life and that I needed to get off it. That was the day I stopped my occasional use of the prescribed drug. And the hell really began. I was very fortunate to find Benzo Buddies shortly after, which saved me. I will be forever grateful to Colin and his team of compassionate volunteers for this site. I am also grateful to all the Buddies who have traveled this journey with me. Each of you will forever hold a place in my heart.

I rarely come on this site anymore. It used to be my lifeline in the seconds, minutes, hours and days that I suffered through not knowing what was going on with me and then finding someone or lots of someones here experiencing the same symptoms.

My worst symptom was dizziness – from head spinning to the feeling of getting off an amusement ride. I continue to have a bit of this and expect it to hang around for a while longer.

My most frustrating symptom was the horrid insomnia. I became friends with lots of different types of sleep music.

My scariest symptom was the immense anxiety of being alone. Showering was terrifying. It was simply the worst feeling to be that out of control of my feelings. My weirdest symptom was the sensation that my face was misshapen. It would feel like half of my face was missing or that it morphed into some Picasso-like form. I would have to go to the mirror to assure myself that it wasn't real.

My most painful symptoms were the GI issues. Sometimes it felt as if I was going through labor the pains were so intense.

I had many other symptoms that I coped with and distracted my way through. If you're interested, please read through my blog.

I wanted to come here today to let you all know that even in the darkest of dark moments there is hope.

You will heal. It may take you months or years. I know how daunting that can seem. It is a hellish experience.

Please know that so many others have traveled this same journey and came out alright at the other end.

## Story 61

I now know how Alice must have felt when she found herself in a world where everything was upside down and backwards. I really don't know how to start this story so I guess I will begin at the beginning.

Back in 2006 I was the victim of a violent crime. My world really did turn upside down. I wanted to pretend it didn't happen and "just get over it," but it does not work like that. The FBI guys were nice but I had to tell the story over and over again and get prepped for testifying at the trial and all that stuff. I have always had anxiety but it went from being manageable to being way out of control. So after a few tries with antidepressants which just made me depressed my Doctor reluctantly put me on klonopin. His only warning was it is addictive.

Being a pretty moderate person I was not worried about that. I never abused it and I never felt "high" on it so I couldn't figure out what the big deal was. The first two years was the "honeymoon" phase for me. It worked just as it was supposed to. Called them my "happy pills" and it would have been hard to convince me they were bad or dangerous.

In 2008 I moved down south to take a promotion to a supervisory position. I figured it was time to let go of the happy pills so I did what I thought was a slow taper over about two months. My anxiety went absolutely off the charts and both I and my new Doctor figured it was still my PTSD symptoms and he reinstated me at 3 mgs a days of klonopin from the 2 mgs daily plus 30 mgs xanax a month for breakthrough panic attacks. He said the extra klonopin would prevent the attacks in the first place. Sounded good at the time but I think the extra mg of the klonocide was what really did me in or at least it speeded up the process.

What I don't understand is how progressively over the next four years I went from being outgoing and always on the move to being an agoraphobic recluse without noticing. It was just what my world had become and I was so emotionally blunted it had become my normal. Sitting here trying to type this out in a way that makes sense is impossible. Mainly because it doesn't make sense. I am sure many of you are nodding your head in agreement because you have been there. But to someone who has not experienced it, it is impossible to explain.

It was during this time that my iatrogenic addiction and my Son's opiate addiction collided like two trains on the same track. As he got worse and bolder I got worse and less resistant. When he met the girlfriend she just wiped me out financially without mercy. They would drain my checking account and I would cuss, cry, scream and beg them to stop, then I would take an extra pill and sleep for 16 hours.

During this time I was also working crazy hours, sometimes hitting all three shifts in one week. There was overtime I didn't want but I had no relief so I was stuck. I was exhausted all the time and being treated for all kinds of mystery ailments. I literally slept

for 18 hours a day on my days off. I got nothing done. My house was a wreck, my finances were totaled, I gained 50 pounds and neither I nor my Doctor even suspected the klonocid could be the root of the problem. I just assumed it was my crazy work schedule and stressful job. I know now I was in deep tolerance and the klonopin had become toxic to me.

In the fall of 2012 my Brother passed away so I went home to NJ for the funeral. When I got back I discovered that the dynamic duo had taken several hundred dollars out of my checking account and my klonopin prescription was gone. I decided since I could not keep anything locked up well enough to keep it away from them that I wanted the klonopin out of my house. And thankfully I had just given up the supervisory position to go back to doing the job I had done for 15 years and could do in my sleep. I had no idea at the beginning of this taper what a blessing that would turn out to be.

I took my last refill of 90 mgs and tapered with 50 percent cuts all the way down. It took a little over 3 months. Honestly the only thing I knew about tapering klonopin was you needed to go slow to avoid seizures. Sometime in early January I hit acute withdrawal with ALL the classic symptoms. The inner vibrations and sensory distortions are what sent me googling "klonopin taper" to see if I was tapering too fast and fixing to have a seizure. That is how I found BenzoBuddies. After reading for a couple of weeks I finally understood what I had been through and how I found myself in my current position. This knowledge was terrifying and liberating at the same time.

I went ahead and signed up and spent the next couple of months glued to my computer screen. I mainly lurked but what I read reassured me I was not crazy or gonna die any second. I, like a lot of others, searched relentlessly for the answer to when is this craziness going to end?? I even went down to the archives thinking maybe one of the old timers had found the answer. I knew I had tapered to fast by Ashton or any other standard, but I had a limited amount of meds to work with and I was so angry at the medical profession I could not stomach the idea of going to see one. So I carried on. The last month of my taper and the first two to three months off were the worse for the w/d symptoms. I still don't know how I managed to work through that. I just hid in my office and worked when I could and spent time here at BB when I couldn't. Driving back and forth was an adventure. Once I got into the city on the 6 lane highway I was a total mess. I almost wrecked because someone blew their horn as they were passing me and it felt like someone had shot me in the head.

Somewhere near that three month mark the symptoms, though still present, were not as intense. My head started to clear and with that I found myself waking up from the sedation and stupor that is benzo tolerance. I found myself starting to actually care about life again.

Healing for me has been very linear. Slow, but linear. All the symptoms slowly got lighter and lighter as time went by. I am just a week shy of the one year since benzo free mark. The last couple of months I have been mostly pretty good but stress could definitely take me back to acute for a couple of hours or days. I was thinking that I may

have to live with an inability to deal with stress forever.

Then of course, as things in my household have for the last couple of years, everything hit the fan two weeks ago. Son winds up in jail. I have a knock down drag out with the Daughter in Law in the front yard over taking my granddaughter to the emergency room. I finally won the battle with threats of calling Child Protective Services. We get home from the ER and she goes into labor 5 weeks early. Back to the Hospital for an emergency C Section cause the baby is breach. The baby is small but healthy, thankfully. I have the two year old for five days by myself and my precious angel only stops moving to sleep. (And more drama that I will spare you.)

And during this whole time no w/d symptoms! Of course I have some normal anxiety. The situation demands it. I have a lot of concerns for the future. I may have to take custody of my granddaughter at some point if her parents don't get it together. But NO popping, zinging, shaking, vibrating, teeth clenching, puking, intrusive thoughts or any of the other major players of benzo w/d. It has been two weeks now and the drama hasn't stopped, but I feel hopeful. I feel hopeful because I now feel like I am able to handle what comes. Eighteen months ago I would have hid in my dark family room with the TV clicker or just went to bed to endless, dreamless sleep. I pray that my Son and DIL will get it together and be good parents but if I have to I will be able to take care of my grandchildren.

Yes, withdrawal definitely sucked! But it was so worth it to get off that poison and be a in a position to rebuild my life. I have a ton of rebuilding to do but I have a plan. I can't thank the BenzoBuddies Team enough for keeping this place going. I don't know where I would be right now if it had not been here. And big hugs to my special buddies for keeping me sane through all of this.

I also want to thank this page for allowing me to bleed all over it. This is the first time since all this started that I have taken the time to put this experience into some kind of rational order and it has been healing. As I sit here at the edge of this rabbit hole looking down into it I still have trouble believing all this is real. For those of you still down there in the thick of it I will reassure you that healing will happen. I am not sure there is a "painless" way to get off of this crap but stick it out because the end result is worth it!

## Story 62

I thought I would come back a final time and write the complete success story. I have another one around here somewhere. I am a couple of weeks shy of being two years free from Klonopin and Valium. I took it a total of 8 years.

I'm completely healed pretty much. My stomach problems was my last problem. Those went on for about 6 months. I still get a little nervous every now and then, BUT nothing like before and during Klonopin. It's strange I don't have panic attacks anymore nor really bad anxiety. It all faded away.

My healing went something like this:

Month 1 was very bad.

Month 2 was better.

Months 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 were the worst! Sweats, chills, anxiety 24/7, couldn't sit still, got too overwhelmed, excited, vertigo, nerve pain, d/r, illusions, etc.

Months 8, 9, 10 were better. Actually month 8 was very good. 9 and 10 was off and on stomach problems.

Month 11 The d/r and d/p completely lifted, so I must have turned a corner.

Month 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 had stomach problems off and on (Felt like an octopus wrapped around my gut) Very hard to put into words.

Months 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 The stomach problems lifted gradually. They have been gone about four months now.

I never took any vitamins, never stuck to a diet. Never really exercised and still healed.

I don't even think of the w/d anymore. It's like it never happened, but I know intellectually it did.

I really don't have any advice, just do what you do to keep busy. In my case, most of the w/d was d/r. I never got tinnitus or insomnia, and really not too much panic.

The withdrawal can't kill you. If anything it will lie to you. I wouldn't pay much attention to it. I recall when I jumped... I really thought about suicide. I'm so happy I didn't go through with it. I was pretty desperate. Just know it fades. It may take some time, but it does.

I could get very mean and cold to people here at times. I was mad and wasn't myself.

I'm all together now mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually and existentially. I'm in one piece.

Everyone have a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! I now go out and shop, laugh, cry, eat whatever, listen to music, watch TV. Whatever I want. It feels good to have me back. Just hang there and you will to!

## Story 63

Its with great pleasure (that's right anhedonia) that I tell you folks that I have been benzo free for ONE YEAR. I can go anywhere I want, sleep, feel positive emotions, think.....so many things I can do again.

I feel close to writing my success story but not quite. My worse symptoms: insomnia, panic, anxiety, digestive, confusion, lots of neck/throat stuff, nerve, muscle, cog fog, dp/dr....god there is so many. And so many that are horrible, but also ones I did not ever consider 'bad' at the time are gone like ear ringing, twitching, vision, skin (mostly), hair.... I had very few problems before starting benzos. Never had a panic attack or dp/dr just a little trouble sleeping and winding down, something I always used marijuana for very successfully. I took benzos at the Dr.s request to stop cannabis. I still am not sleeping 100% all the time and I would not say im 100% mentally.

The biggest hitch there is my motivation is still not back to normal. I can get myself to do anything now but I have to override my brain saying to stop. Cog fog is 99% gone and I am a scientist that has to use my brain to earn a living. I can tire easier than before and don't always feel great but this is now 'symptoms' for me. Symptoms are not feeling perfect!

I did not post for help much even tho I leaned hard on you guys for support. Early on, coming here made me cry uncontrollably. I felt like I was peering into hell, I could hear the screams, feel the pain. But the few that I have written to have probably heard this, but for those who haven't, I believe that the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course I took has helped me tremendously. Time is the ultimate healer but I believe that practicing mindfulness meditation and yoga helped my body help its self. I am so happy with where I am at in life I would not trade what happened to me. I am excited for my future. We cant control what has happened to us but we can control how we respond to it. This event was motivation for me to improve. The calming affect was what got me started with mindfulness but the wisdom for life in this course and its practices make the relaxation part just a nice side effect now.

There is so much more in life for us, we just have to find it. Use this 'rock bottom' as motivation. Use it as a solid foundation for which you build a better you. It wont happen at once and you probably cant imagine it happening at all. That's ok, set the intention for it to happen and that is good enough. Be easy on yourself. Hang in there no matter how you feel. I was not different than you. I did not do this pretty or easy. We are putting up with some of the most horrific things a human can experience. I love each and every person on hear suffering from this. I have a connection to you that cannot be broken.

What helped me.

1. Healthy diet
2. exercise - whatever I could do
3. yoga - not glorified workouts but true yoga
4. Mindful meditation. Specifically Jon Kabat-Zinn's course Mindfulness Based Stress

Reduction as in his book 'Full Catastrophe Living'.  
5. Acupuncture

## Story 64

The day has finally come when I feel confident enough to write my success story. At the moment I will describe myself as about 90% healed. I won't lie and say things have been totally symptom free since I finished my taper 5 months ago (at the end of July 2014). My most persistent side effect, before during and after my taper, was insomnia, with the associated anxiety and depression.

Over the last 5 months I've had periods of time where my insomnia would return, but lately I'm finding mostly it's only for a night here or there. Currently I'm sleeping very well – no sleep aids, no supplements – just good old sleep. Sometimes I might get 5 hours, sometimes I get 7 hours. Sometimes I do the awake between 2am and 4am thing, or sometimes I wake around 4am and can't go back to sleep, but it's good quality sleep and I'm not relying on anything to get me to sleep. After 4 years of benzos, doxylamine and an amitriptyline AD that is a miracle.

I'm going to hold off saying that I'm 100% for at least a few more months, but I feel completely confident it will happen. By the time I get to the 12 month mark I fully expect that everything will be a distant memory. I do plan on sticking around BB for quite a while to "pay it forward". I totally understand that a lot of people just want to get on with their lives and forget about BB after they're done, but I personally think it's possible to do both – get on with your life and also hang around to help all those who are still to find us. So I will update this thread from time to time.

Some may say that I'm lucky that I only had to taper from 5mg of valium. Maybe in comparison to other people that's very true, but there was a time when I wasn't so sure if I would still be alive to see my next birthday, so bad were my suicidal thoughts. I have no idea if I would have had the courage to follow through on any of those thoughts. I suspect I would have been too much of a coward, and would have just ended up staying on valium, but I do also believe a good part of my reasons for sticking around are (a) my two beautiful cats, because I could never have left them alone and (b) my persistently optimistic nature. I just knew there had to be a solution out there somewhere.

My reason for taking benzos in the first place is very long and complicated, but I'll try to give a very brief version. I began to experience menopausal insomnia in 2010. I took temazepam for about a month while I was waiting to get an appointment to see a "supposed" bioidentical (ie compounded hormones) savvy doctor. After I started his treatment I had no problems stopping the temazepam c/t.

The dude turned out to be a complete freak, because after 2 months all my meno symptoms returned with a vengeance. He told me it wasn't his progesterone therapy treatment (which I now know is a completely incorrect menopause treatment). He literally said all my menopause problems were "psychological", or to be more precise "you are a very angry person who needs to deal with all the other issues in your life before you will solve your insomnia problem" ... Yeah well – my anger problems are being caused by you, you effing jerk...!!! So I called him a few well chosen and very

unladylike words and left without paying, and then proceeded to cry my eyes out as soon as I got into my car.

I began taking temazepam again briefly until I could get an appointment with another doctor, who prescribed conventional HRT, and again I stopped taking temazepam c/t with no problems. Everything was perfect for 9 months, until the dose of HRT I was on became too low, but instead of allowing my doctor to increase the dose (which would have been the sensible solution), I was an idiot and decided to go to a naturopath. Big mistake.

After 3 months of a very expensive and useless treatment, not only were all my meno problems worse, but I was now taking temazepam more regularly, because I had such terrible insomnia. The only major issue I have with my doctor is that, while she was writing the prescriptions, she never slapped me over the head and told me to wake up to the fact that the naturopath was only ripping me off. I began to research and learn a lot more about all the lies that have been perpetrated on women by the media about the supposed dangers of conventional HRT, and all the quack-sters that sell and prescribe dubious and expensive hormone and pseudo-science treatments, just so they can make money preying on women's fear.

I returned to taking conventional HRT, but the next 6-7 months saw me struggling to understand what was wrong with me. Every time I would start taking a new HRT things would be fine for 2 or 3 weeks, but I would then hit "a wall", as I used to describe it to my doctor. Much of that time is now a complete blur, but I now realise "the wall" was when I would start to reduce my temazepam dose and I would get hit with w/d symptoms, but I had no idea that was the problem. Somewhere during this time I must have started to suspect a benzo problem and I did a quick cross over to valium, because I had read somewhere that it was easier to taper off. There was nothing slow or methodical about my c/o, because basically I had no idea that was the way you should do it. I just did it over a period of about a week.

I was really struggling at this point, but then I found BB. For me, the way to success was a daily liquid taper. I had never heard of such a thing before I joined BB, and I doubt I would ever have thought of it on my own. I had struggled for a couple of months trying to dry cut just a tiny 0.25mg off my 5mg dose and each time I had to reinstate because the side effects of insomnia, anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts were so bad. As soon as I started hearing about this weird thing called "titration" I was intrigued, although very confused, but I began to have hope again. I felt this was going to be my only way of becoming benzo free.

Fortunately my doctor was very supportive, and kept encouraging me to take it slow. It took me 22 months, but it was well worth taking that time to taper slowly and steadily. Maybe I had to take it so slowly because I had already been on and off temazepam and my cross over to valium was too fast. Maybe I was kindling, or maybe it's because I was on valium for longer, or maybe it's just the way it had to be. I guess I'll never know.

My taper was tolerable although not completely painless. Like most people I really struggled with impatience. Even though I always tell other people to be patient, it was definitely a case of “do what I say, not what I do”, because patience has never been my strong suit. I even knew that I had an “early warning sign” of afternoon headaches that told me my taper was getting a bit out of control, but would that stop me from getting impatient? Of course not. I would purposely ignore the signs because I didn’t want to hold or slow down, and every time I would pay for it.

The road to benzo freedom can be difficult. It can also really test your patience and sometimes you might even wonder if it’s worth doing, but believe me it is. It is totally rewarding and it will be the biggest favour you will ever do for yourself. There are things about my life that I’d almost forgotten, because it’s been so long since my life has been “normal”. Maybe my life will never be exactly what it was before 2010, because I am 4 years older now, I’m menopausal, and I’m also semi-retired, and all that brings with it changes that you have to adapt to. However, my life is going to be what I decide it’s going to be because I am now in charge, and not some drug.

If there is any advice I could pass on to others just starting out, it would be to have patience. This is probably one of the hardest things you will ever do in your life and you can’t do it quickly. Your taper will take as long as it’s going to take, because you can only taper as fast as your body will allow you to. I believe that everyone has a pre-determined amount of time for healing. This may be a genetic thing or not, who knows, but I think you really only have two choices to make. You can speed through your taper just so you can say you are benzo free, but you probably won’t heal any faster, and you will probably just end up suffering during you taper and for a fairly lengthy time after you jump.

Your other choice could be to take it slow, try to keep your tapering to a level where your body isn’t being stressed too much and you might just spend most of your tapering time feeling fairly okay, and you may not have to suffer too much after you jump. Ironically, sometimes a slower taper can mean you actually reduce you dose quicker, because you’re not needing to hold as often waiting to stabilise. I know that was definitely how it worked for me. I’m sure I could have finished my taper sooner if I had been more patient.

The other piece of advice I would like to give is that you need to experiment to find the kind of taper that is right for you. The Ashton Method is a good method for those who can follow it. For those who can’t follow it, it’s not. I have great admiration for Dr Ashton. She is one of the few doctors who has actually spent any time trying to understand this crap, but her method is really just a guide. Don’t feel you have to stick to it rigidly, or stick to it at all if it’s not right for you. You do have many other options.

I’m one of the many who never had a hope of following the Ashton Method because when I was at 5mg I couldn’t even cut 0.25mg in one go without going almost insane. So I guess what I’m saying is don’t feel you have to stick to any particular taper just because someone says it’s the recognised protocol. Everyone is so different, and every

taper will be completely different too. If you feel something you're doing isn't working for you, don't be scared to change it.

Finally, this too shall pass. Sometimes in your darkest days you will feel things will never get any better, but they do. Be kind to yourself, and don't compare your taper to anyone else's, because you are unique. There will never be another you, and you deserve to be benzo free – and you will be. Time is the only true healer.

## Story 65

A few members on here have asked me to post what I went through after my cold turkey off 4 mg clonazepam of 10+ years and how I am doing now for encouragement to others.

I wish I could have started a journal of my journey but I was way too messed up for a long time. I want to warn anyone thinking about going cold turkey that it is no way shape or form is it an easy way out. There is a reason why the Ashton manual warns against taking fluoroquinolone antibiotics (Levaquin, Cipro, Avelox etc). It down regulates the gaba receptors and throws you into withdrawals. I want to add my own two cents here about these antibiotics. They can cause some serious side effects of their own whether you're on benzos or not. I had taken them in the past with no problem. Each time you take them you are playing russian roulette. I had some serious tendon ruptures and joint problems due to this class of antibiotics and went through a few surgeries. If your wondering what floxed is, it's what people call themselves when they get hit by these drugs. They even have forums. I also had many CNS problems which I contribute to benzo tolerance for close to a year. I went to many specialist trying to figure out what was going on with my body and each one was stumped. They all had my prescription history and not one made the connection. I finally shared what was going on with a retired physician who lives down the street from me. The first question after telling him my symptoms was are you on any benzo's? He had seen the symptoms before and advised me to wean myself off them. I was stupid and decided I wanted off right then and there and did my cold turkey.

The timeframe may be a bit off. Basing this off memory. I'm sure I also have missed other symptoms.

So New Years Eve 2009 was my last dose. The nightmare really began.

I was lucky if I got more than 2 or 3 hours of sleep.

I couldn't speak coherently or understand conversations.

Throat and chest felt constricted and had a hard time swallowing or getting a deep breath.

Bladder felt numb. Hard a hard time starting to urinate and once I finished I would dribble pee for an hour or two.

Tinnitus

Muscle spasms and cramps

Muscle twitching

No appetite

Blurred vision

Rapid heart beat and blood pressure would drop

Sweating non stop and smelt of ammonia.

Huge boils in left armpit

Acne

Coughing up mucus

Limbs felt heavy

February

Lived on the couch watching T.V. with heating pad.  
The only real change was bladder control returned

March

Started getting windows of relief at the beginning of the month. And thought the worse was over.

Appetite returned after losing close to 20 pounds

Slept better

Started to venture out of the house

Started having clay or white colored bowel movements

Towards the end of the month started to get a few stomach issues.

April

*\*I had bad muscle spasms in my back and couldn't stand straight up. Had a number of cortisone shots. Pretty sure this sent me back into withdrawals.\**

Started getting severe stomach pain and bloating. Kept me up at night pacing. Couldn't eat solid food. Lived on protein shakes. Pain moved to my lower left side. Doctor sent me to hospital for G.I. series to rule out appendicitis. Ruled out appendicitis but discovered mass in large intestine. They wanted to admit me and do exploratory surgery. Very apprehensive about this and they kept offering me benzos even though I told them this was what got me into this mess by doing a cold turkey. Got the heck out of there against their advice. Followed up with gastroenterologist. Put me on two different antibiotics (non fluoroquinolone) after a few more test.

By the end of the month almost all my withdrawal symptoms returned with a few new ones.

Vertigo-Either the room was spinning around me or I felt like I was falling forward even when I was laying down.

Forehead feels super tight mostly on left side. Feels as though my face is distorted.

Confusion

Gravity effect- don't know what to really call this one. Laying down I would feel like I was being sucked into the bed, sitting down felt like I was being sucked into the chair, standing up I would feel super heavy.

May

No windows

I know this isn't politically correct but was for sure I made myself retarded. Anyone who called me I would tell them I was retarded. Couldn't understand anything I watched on television.

Prayed I would die in my sleep.

I was for sure I would never ever get better and would live forever with protracted withdrawals.

I wanted to reinstate and try tapering. People on the forum in chat told me I was to far out and it was a bad idea.

June

No change except I could eat

Still was for sure I was retarded and would repeat this over and over to anyone who would listen.

Finally towards the end of the month started to get great windows.

July

I call this my night and day month. It seemed as though the past months was just a really bad nightmare. I knew the worse was over. The only symptoms that were lingering was a slight tightness in my throat and tinnitus. The gravity effect was lifting. I started back slowly doing cardio and lifting weights.

August

It just keeps getting better. Getting days where the tinnitus is gone. Throat symptoms gone. Once in awhile a slight boaty feeling.

September

The few days here and there when I do get flare ups are a cake walk for me. I have days where there is no tinnitus. I consider myself at least 90% healed. I am actually loving life again.

I had to come back and edit this. Shortly after writing this symptoms came back and lasted for a few months. Once I got close to a year off I noticed major improvements.

Sept 1 2011 made 20 months since my CT. I am completely healed except for a bit of tinnitus that has greatly improved. Some days it is totally gone. I'm sure this last symptom will eventually fade away just like the others did.

## Story 66

It has been one year since I have ingested benzos or any other prescription drugs. I consider myself completely recovered and would like to offer hope to all of you still on this journey.

My journey began approximately four years ago when I began to taper off the antidepressant that I had been on for 15 years. I no longer felt I needed it and I was not sure if it was really working any longer. With my doctor's blessing, I began a taper that only lasted one month. This was my first mistake of many that were to follow. About one month off the drug I began to experience what I now can identify as a hypomanic state--insomnia, reckless behavior and spending, excessive talking, the life of the party, and rapid mood changes, irritability and inappropriate anger. Deep depression followed rapidly and my doctor mistakenly told me that I needed to go back on the Lexapro as my body definitely needed the drug to balance out my body chemistry. He used the "diabetic needs his insulin" talk to convince me I needed the Lexapro. The Lexapro however did not work when I reinstated and I continued to get worse and worse. My mental health continued to decline and I could not sleep. This is when the doctor began to prescribe many different drugs with no washout period between drugs. I was given many different anti-depressants, sleeping meds, benzos, and antipsychotics. I would take one for awhile until it stopped working and then try another. I continued to get worse and worse mentally and physically. I spent many days and nights crying and thinking I was truly losing my mind. I wanted to die many many times. I isolated myself in my house.

My thinking became irrational and I was very paranoid. I developed akathasia, constant nausea, painful joints and muscles but the mental symptoms were the worst. Finally, my doctor said he could no longer help me and steered me towards psychiatry. Another huge mistake!!! The psychiatrist then diagnosed me as bipolar 2 at the age of 52. He then c/t me off all the current drugs I was on and added Klonopin (as needed) and antipsychotics. I continued to get worse and worse and I was now into 2 years of pure hell. I truly did not want to live anymore. I entered therapy to deal with my "bipolar" and that also was a huge waste of money as my symptoms and problems were drug induced, not related to a bad childhood. I began to doubt the expertise of my psy doctor and began searching the internet for more info. I found this website and found a whole community of people who had all my symptoms and believed they might be caused by the very drugs that were supposed to help. It was then that I decided to get off the drugs. I was a very high functioning woman who excelled at my job for 30 years prior to this mess and I desperately wanted her back. I began to believe the drugs were my problem.

I found an integrative med doctor who believed in my assessment and supported me in getting off all my drugs. I started to eliminate all the drugs one by one until I was left with only Klonopin. I then did the valium taper. Make no mistake, this has been the most difficult thing I have ever done. It was hell!!!! The entire taper was difficult and the first 10 months off all drugs were not any better. But I started to have very brief

windows about 4 months into the taper that kept me hopeful. I wanted to give up many many times but i always came to the forum for support and this is what kept me going.

My worst symptoms have been intrusive memories and thoughts, dark suicidal depression, and insomnia. The physical symptoms included muscle pains, nausea, hot and cold flashes, migraines, and brain zaps. The depression left for good at 10 months off and it virtually disappeared overnight.

What helped me recover? I have no idea if any of the things worked that I implemented but I will list what I did. i exercised throughout the taper (I ran 3 marathons), I practiced yoga and deep breathing exercises, I quit alcohol and all supplements, I tried EMDR and EFT. I forced myself to call my friends and be social even though I could not really connect with any of them. I read every self help book I could get my hands on. I did jigsaw puzzles as I could not concentrate on reading or following the plot of anything I would read. I spent days on the forum just reading and crying. I tried to keep my diet organic and healthy. I journaled my feelings daily. I practiced yoga and deep breathing. I prayed. I snuggled with my cats and cried. I truly believe that time is the greatest healer.

Fast forward to today. I awoke this morning with a deep feeling of gratitude and anticipation for the day. I went to coffee with friends, cross country skiing, tutored a student at the local school, picked up groceries at the store, and met friends for dinner. I enjoyed all the moments of the day!! My personality has returned and I am "myself" again. Last year at this time, I thought my life truly was over and I would live out my life in misery.

My message to all of you is that we all heal. Please allow your body the time it needs to repair all the damage the drugs has done to you. If at all possible, do not add other drugs or supplements to aid in your healing. At one time I felt a victim, then a survivor. Today I am thriving. You will also. I have absolutely no fear of the future anymore as I KNOW I have already been to hell and I made it to the other side.

I pray for all of us.

## Story 67

It has been a very long time since I have been to BB's. At the time I was last here I was still very very ill and even thinking that I might some day recover was only a hope that I hung onto in my faith in Jesus. I believe I am one of the unfortunate, yet fortunate who had the long protracted withdrawal. I say fortunate because now that it is over, I am a strong person, and I cherish each day. This living hell that I was in seemed at that time a place of no escape, but I held on to my hope that one day I may be well. The physical, mental, spiritual, financial devastation that clonazepam did to me is indescribable. There are several years of my life that are missing, and that may be a good thing.

I consider what I have been through as a "Dance with the devil" and horrible images that my mind produced are now easy to ward off. I held on through the storms, in my mind I would picture Jesus arm and hold on for dear life. This is not a mind trick, it is my truth that no matter whatever happens in this life, I have my Lord with me, in me, leading me down that narrow path. As I look back at what I wrote back then, and how I am now, I am amazed. And, I know that you will too! If I did it you can do it. I was as sick as they come, and everything that could go wrong did. I was so ill I even forgot how to tie my shoes. Sleep, what was that. I would lie there for hours and the dawn would come, and I had to force myself to put my feet on the floor and get up, put one foot in front of the other and face yet another day. I held on no matter what. In my minds eye, I felt and heard the hurricane force winds screaming about me, but I held on. My clarity is evident now, and my days are happy. I still sometimes have what I call "magical thinking" by that I mean that when something just seems to disappear, I think it did, but now am able to think it through. There is no such thing as things just disappearing, I must have misplaced it again. And you know what, I did.

In this short blog, I will not go into great detail as to my particular circumstances, but I think the reader knows the hell I experienced as you might have overcome the same thing or are going through it too. I must state no matter how bad it is for you, or how impossible it seems at the moment that you will never see the light of day again, YOU WILL! Persevere! Don't ever give up! NEVER! It is my hope that this post will encourage you, who are where I have been. A blessing as I have been blessed. There was a time when I thought that I had permanent brain damage and that I would never be as I was before clonazepam, but that is not the case. I was on this prescription for about 10 years, as well as many different misdiagnoses, and many psychiatric prescriptions for ailments I did not have. I can drive a car long distances again. I pay bills and I don't forget deadlines, names or important events. Things that I once did easily but had to relearn are now as easy as they ever were. I don't have the nightmares anymore, and have been able to deal with past traumas successfully. I am working again in the nursing profession and don't fear that I will cause harm to anyone. My self esteem is well. I am accountable for what I do, what I say and how I think. Mood swings are seldom, but when one tries to occur I remind myself how well I am and I have nothing to fear, it goes away. I can go out in public without thinking I might freak out, nor do I feel I might run out of the house screaming. I don't carry "just in case" pills with me anymore. My sleep is sweet, and I wake up rested, ready for another day. Life is as it was if not better. Life is still life and we all experience "glory

moments" as well as let downs, but my nerves are not raw, and I don't feel vulnerable anymore.

Serenity is a precious friend and I value it extremely. I like myself. I love myself. I love life. I love God! I am so thankful for my God, through Jesus I am healed. Yes, I am free in more ways than I can express. Free from pills, free from public opinion, free from the lies that ensnared me free from the devil itself. FREE! I once read that the bravest thing a person can do is get from one moment to the next, and that is how it went for me, one moment at a time.

Don't rush it, you didn't get this ill overnight, and it will not be overnight that you get well, but know this, you will get well. I end this with my peace to you and my Love.

## Story 68

Time to move on ... this “chapter” in my story is just about at an end ...

I chose to come off this drug ... I did ... and I will never take the drug again ... that is my promise to myself ...

Today I am pretty much “healed” ... there is a ways to go yet ... a bit of “housekeeping”, that’s all ...and I know how to survive a little more “housekeeping” ...

My mind is clear ... I am back in my life without the drug ... it is time to let the “benzo process” go ... I have “succeeded” ... time to “graduate” ...

To the folks who maintain BenzoBuddies ... thank you ...

To the Buddies who have shared their stories and encouraged me ... a thousand blessings ...

To those of you wherever you are along the timeline of your “healing journey” ... give yourself the time you need to get through this ... you deserve it ... I only have two words of encouragement ... patience and distraction ...

We are all unique ... we are all precious ...

There is joy here for me, and a sadness ... I have been “at this” for a very long time ... time to let it go ...

As they have said ...

When you are in distress ... chop wood, carry water ...

When you are healing ... chop wood, carry water ...

When you move on ... chop wood, carry water ...

Take Care ...

## Story 69

To go backwards a bit, I have a bit of an injury history. In 1988, I had back surgery to remove herniated discs at L3-4 and L4-5. 1989, I was hit from behind by a truck while on my bike; I was on a frontage road riding off the road on a mountain bike (stupid). The 60 mph or so impact of the bumper on my left leg broke it in seven places, with the tibia coming out the front in a silver dollar sized hole. And I'm sure it whiplashed the shit out of my neck, but no apparent problems at the time. In 2004, I had another herniated disc at L1-2, this one had to be emergently removed because it was compressing my spinal cord and preventing my bladder and bowels from working correctly. Scary. And left me with lots of neuropathic pain and lower back pain. Had another surgery in 2005 on L5-S1, to decompress nerves. After this, I was left with pretty much 24-7 back pain. I turned to herbs to handle this, which worked ok for awhile, but by 2008 I was having a lot of trouble sleeping due to pain. I'd tried Lunesta and Ambien, which worked somewhat, but really only for 4 hours or so. So I stupidly asked my doc for Xanax for sleep, and she gave it to me. I had expressed a strong wish to avoid narcotic pain relievers, and she thought the Xanax was a reasonable plan. OK. No warnings given, but I didn't really dig very deep in my research.

I did somewhat OK until the fall of 2011, but I started to get weird horrible fatigue, swollen hands and ankles, and an increase in neck pain. I was diagnosed by two rheumatologists with RA, and was given Methotrexate and other garbage, none of which helped, just made me sicker. And the pain kept worsening. I finally gave in in March 2012 and started Kadian, a 24 hour form of Morphine. Helped, but my bowels didn't work at all and I felt weird. Back on the herb. Made it for a few months, then back on the opiates, this time PRN Oxycodone. And still very fatigued and nauseous, and poor sleep. And horrible pain. The pain doc I was seeing let that go way too long, 6 months, before telling me I needed to be on a pain contract and start long acting opiates. So what do I do...cold turkey! A few days of hellish anxiety and sweating, then ok. But I didn't really bounce back. I could not sleep, lost weight, bp went crazy, had to stop working out. Lost a lot of muscle. Then my neck, which I knew was bad, crashed. Horrible shooting electric shocks down my arm, lost all my muscle, terrible neck pain. My left arm looked like half the size of my right. MRI showed all levels were bad, my doc at the time told me that he wouldn't know what to fuse, and put me on traction. Restarted the opiates. I was an emotional and physical mess, due to my neck, the fatigue, and the anxiety that was just starting, never had it before, this was January 2013. The final straw, I think, that kicked off full tolerance withdrawal was asking my primary care doc to double the Xanax, I wasn't sleeping. I went downhill pretty quickly. Anxiety out of control, poor sleep, and this horrible nonsensical manic jabbering and arm flapping that started in March 2013, it got worse and worse, I went to neurologist after neurologist, had MRIs, thyroid tests, heavy metal poisoning tests, Wilson disease tests, was diagnosed in the Summer 2013 as having an "atypical seizure disorder" due to the jabbering episodes and was taken off the Xanax and given 1 mg Ativan tid. Never took during the day before. And given the option of brain surgery for the "seizures". 🤔 Around this time, I saw Rheumatologist #3, who told me I did not likely have RA, but some auto immune response that defied diagnosis. I chalk those symptoms up to

benzos, although no doctor has confirmed this.

I finally figured out, around October 2013 that it was the benzos. I found a doc willing to help me taper. Dry cutting the Ativan didn't work so well, but I went really fast, like .5 a week. I found Ashton, and crossed over to Valium around Thanksgiving 2013. Continued the jabbering, cognitive fog, dp, dr, burning arms and body, all the bad shit. It was better at higher doses, got worse around 5 mg, but I kept going, not sure how at all. I can't even begin to thank everyone here at BB who helped me get through all the suicidal ideation and planning, I must have had a butcher knife to my neck or wrist 20 times, 4-5 ER visits, calls to crisis. Jesus.

Once I jumped, the hell continued, with weird but welcome windows right away, that would fade in a week or two. I was still very stressed about my neck. I lucked into a great surgeon, who told me that my reflexes were shot, and I needed 5 level fusion surgery if I wanted to recover them. Somehow made it through that. This was all complicated by attempts to deal with pain. I tried Lyrica. It helped with the neuropathy for a couple of weeks, then made the WD way worse. I cold turkeyed it three days before surgery, after an ER visit, I was as suicidal as I'd ever been. The ER doc gave me clonidine to get of the Lyrica, which slowed my BP enough to get through surgery. The anesthesia in the hospital, along with the oral steroids, the flexiril, and whatever other garbage I was given really delayed healing, I think. And so did the passionflower, chamomile, and l-theanine I tried. I started to see longer windows, despite still having horrible WD symptoms, back in November. The turning point was 32 days ago, I started Mag Citrate 200 mg, Solgar brand, four times a day. Almost no WD symptoms since. I'm not sure if I was due to get better or if the mag helped, but who cares! A tiny bit of anxiety here and there, but nothing significant.

This has been the most hellish experience I could even imagine. Day after day of just surviving, distracting, jabbering, waving my arms, walking the neighborhood like this trying to calm down, god knows what the neighbors thought. I'm amazed to be alive, I don't know how I'm here writing this today. I'm on disability for my back and neck after three months of physical therapy, I'm getting better, to the point where while I can't work, I can enjoy life again.

I can't even come close to thanking everyone here individually, so I'll just thank everyone at BB for helping to save my life. I probably won't be around much, but please feel free to PM me. As we all know, the most frustrating thing about getting off Benzos is that there is no one formula for success, it's just a matter of surviving until things get better. And thank god for Netflix and most of all, Benzobuddies!

Wishing the very best to all of you. For those not yet healed....you will!

Don't  
Ever  
Give  
Up!

## Story 70

I remember when I first found Benzobuddies sometime in early 2013, when I was really struggling. I saw the 2 month celebration forum and genuinely wondered if I'd ever make it here to post. I wanted so badly to be off and able to post in this forum. Well, I'm extremely happy to say that as of today, I'm exactly 2 months off, so here I am 😊

All things considered, I feel pretty good. I've started a company, I've met and fallen in love with someone amazing, and if I stay on this course I have confidence that I'll finally be truly happy. None of that was possible while on benzos. I wasn't myself, but I'm only saying this to give others hope. You can and will recover. Who you are and what you were meant to do will still be waiting for you while you get through this. 😊

I would like to add, though, that while it was unimaginably difficult to get through it, I am thoroughly convinced now that I can handle anything. It's left me a changed man - and I wouldn't take that back now.

I'm really grateful for the owners and moderators here for setting up a place where we can get information and help. I desperately needed it and am forever grateful. I pledge now to help anyone and everyone struggling with this horrendous addiction. I'd love to see benzos removed from the world forever, but barring that, I'll do my part to help in any way I can.

I wish all of you the best in your ongoing journey to freedom.

With love,

## Story 71

Hi everyone....

I just wanted to give an update on my recovery...

I am still doing very well....

There were so many mos. that I felt I would never heal.....I was so sick.....I had the terrible head pressure.....headaches.....breathing issues and many other s/x...

I was at the gym today ( I am now back there three to five times a week).....I truly thought for so long that my muscles would never be like they were pre benzo and or I would never be able to breath right...or think I would not have a heart attack if I moved to fast....

That is all gone.....I will say though that my muscles need a while to get back to where they were...but I now know for sure that they are okay, they just need work....

You will all get well, it will just happen.....just in your bodies own time....it is so hard to believe when you are feeling so bad....just keep believing because it will happen for all of you....

Take good care of yourselves everyone.... 🍷❤️ 🍷❤️ 🍷❤️

## Story 72

I've been trying to write this for a while. It's been just over two years since I went Benzo free. I thought I would give a little hope to those who are just starting this journey (or who are in the middle). I won't spend time describing the withdrawal - not to be repeated or understood!! I am an accidental addict who trusted my doctor and got sucked into prescription drugs through ignorance. Strange that I would get hooked to the worst drug on the planet (Clonazepam) as I have been a life long advocate for drug and alcohol free living.

I must first say that I appreciate many of the counselors on this site who helped me through a very tough time... I needed your help and council - you were there at a critical time!!! Thank you!!!

My path toward wellness had to take a more radical approach as my physical health deteriorated at the same time. I needed a complete redo and didn't know where to start. I looked healthy, but the body and mind were falling apart!

I can't say where my Benzo withdrawal stopped as I still had to address the problems that got me using them in the first place. Everything was not peaches and cream after Benzo's. I decided that I needed a radical life change. I don't recommend this to everyone, but here are the main things that helped me:

I quit my high stress \$200k job and moved in with family (wife too). After 30 years in the corporate world this was a radical change, but I am almost one year out and so happy to be out of the madness!! Started my own business - taking it slow - taking naps when I want - sitting in the sun.

I also changed my diet - no sugar - no beef - no gluten - no dairy. I was a junk food maniac and could not expect my body to heal eating bad food. Can't begin to tell you the positive changes - normalized blood pressure - normalized prostate - back pain gone - etc. My body quickly reverted to acting like a 16 year old again!! I am now a fanatical health nut driving all of my family and relatives crazy.

Other things that have helped me:

Learning to breath right. Focus on the breath!

Learning to yawn more and often. I know - sounds funny. Just telling you the stuff that works. It helps fight anxiety, which hit me like a train, which got me on the drugs in the first place.

Getting enough sleep. Strange that my sleep only got better after I quit the big corporate job.

Dark chocolate - 90% cocoa (one ounce per day). Again, sounds weird, doesn't taste

that good, but this stuff works (best price at Walmart) - I supplement with large bars of 72% sold at Trader Joes (better taste).

Overall, I decided that I would rather live in a tent than watch myself die a slow horrible death. I had to take control of my life and live at a slower pace. I was "Mr do it all" before - work all the time - work at home - manage our rental properties - etc.. Basically, I ran out of gas or I didn't have enough in the tank, which is the same thing. I was not taking good care of myself. I didn't smoke or drink and thought I could eat anything I wanted to. I was wrong. I got hit by the perfect storm of stress - over work - poor diet. The body said - "you're done - I reject you!"

I have been Benzo free for over two years, but I have been drug free since November 2011. I am not completely well yet - I need more time, but in many ways I am better than I was when I was 25!! I know I am on the right track!! I know I will live a long and happy life - free from many of the ailments that plaque people in their golden years. I now know that my health is in my control.

A lot of people ask me - "what do you eat?" Here it is:

Breakfast - Oatmeal mixed with honey - walnuts - and almond milk (a massive bowl).

Apple for lunch - snack on dark chocolate.

Dinner - fish (wild caught) with purple potatoes - raw broccoli - raw cauliflower.

Yes - the same thing almost every day - I make small variations - seasonal fruit - anything that is anti inflammatory (dark fruit - pineapple - etc).

The key is finding things that fight inflammation. I had a terrible back problem - went to the chiropractor twice a week for seven years - sat on funny pillows to keep the pressure off the lower back. I changed my diet and my back was fixed in six weeks. Seriously - SIX WEEKS!!! Gone!!! Many in my family have the same back problems - but they won't give up the sugar - so they suffer - in pain! I don't get it - why do people choose to suffer?!?!?

OK - I am about done here - for all the guys out there.....

I take only a few supplements -

Royal Maca with zinc  
Rhodiola  
Siberian Ginseng  
Ginkgo biloba

To make it simple - these make both heads work better. Take them and live again!!!

I wish you all the greatest success in your withdrawal. It will end - and the job of building a successful life will continue. I pray that you will not choose to suffer, but rather, will take control of your life. God bless you all!

## Story 73

I was contemplating whether I should write a success story, because there's always those thoughts that make me wonder if it's really over or not. But I truly feel healed. This is not just a window, because I still felt something there in windows, even though I felt ok. This is completely different. I've been feeling 100% symptom free for 13 days. I feel really good. I have no mental or physical pain at all. They're all gone.

I was a short time user and was only on 1mg of Ativan for 88 days, actually less than that even, because there were 9 days where I was off it within those 88 days. March 17, 2014 was when I got off Ativan and I only weaned off it for 1 week. A month before getting off it I was on Buspar (a non-narcotic) for 1 year and tapered it for 2 weeks. So, I'm totally medication free. There was only one psych med I took in withdrawal and it was Remeron for sleep. I only took it for around 8 days, so I don't think it had any type of affect on me once so ever. I took it when I was 3 months off the Ativan and in severe pain.

The reason I took Ativan was over me being in tolerance with the Buspar I was taking for anxiety. I was getting palpitations really bad and freaking out over it and went to a hospital. The doctor at the ER suggested I take Ativan. Against my better judgement, I decided to get on the poison without doing any research.

I drank Kefir while in w/d and went for a ton of walks in my neighborhood. I walked every 30 minutes a day and lost like 50 pounds. The supplements I took were L-theanine, L-tryptophan, Magnesium, Vitamin C, Niacin, Vitamin D and NAC. I drank a ton of water, too.

There were so many things that I did in w/d that made me think I ruined the healing process, but like I said in another thread of mine, there's no way you'll prolong healing unless you take more benzos, street drugs, or became an alcoholic. People used to tell me to distract, but it only worked later in my w/d and definitely not in the beginning or even the middle of it due to the intensity.

Do not trust others in w/d when they say not to take certain supplements or eat certain foods because it revved them up. Just because it did it to them doesn't mean it'll do the same to you. Bread, sweets and caffeine revved me up pretty bad, so I stopped for a while until around a month ago. Now I can eat the type of food I want or drink caffeine. I'm still staying away from coffee and alcohol. Never again! Plus, it's not really good for you. I drink green teas and certain kinds of herbal teas.

There will be so many people that will judge you, because they don't know about benzo withdrawal. I've blocked people on FB who I really trusted and liked, but they went behind my back calling me a tweaker (meth addict) and I'm totally drug free and never was addicted to street drugs. I tried them in my younger days, though. Many years ago. Many will lose patients with you, too. There's so many that can't believe pills from a doctor will do this to you. If people aren't there for you during your struggle, they

shouldn't expect you to be there for them during your success! That's the way I see it.

There will be people in w/d that will start trouble in those FB groups especially. I left all those benzo support groups for that reason, after being in benzo withdrawal for 6 months. There's some people in w/d who will turn their backs on you after you healed, out of pure jealousy and I understand. I also was jealous of people who healed, but never turned my backs on them. I'm too real for that!

### **All The Benzo Withdrawal symptoms That I Had**

Brain zaps, racing thoughts, hearing Voices, irritability to light, blurry vision, dehydration, bad headaches, extreme head pressure, slurred speech, extreme laziness, fatigue, rage, palpitations, intrusive thoughts, suicidal ideation, body shakes, chest pain, difficulty breathing, hair loss, tinnitus, dizziness, body sweats, obsessive thoughts, loss of appetite, extreme body pain, memory loss, hot flashes, skin crawling, extreme depression, heightened anxiety, brain fog, insomnia, derealization, allergic reactions, fear, agoraphobia, vertigo and psychosis.

3 months benzo use

## Story 74

If you see any of my previous posts, I had a horrible time coming off of Klonopin. Like everyone else, I had no idea that a small dose could wreak such havoc. It began with me taking .5 mg (I'm 5'2" and 110 lbs.) at night for 1 year to combat anxiety and insomnia due to stress. I was never told that it would be difficult to come off, although I figured taking anything for a year and then stopping would cause some discomfort, I just did not know how bad. After taking it a few times, it's true I felt serious relief at night and I was able to sleep. However, the next day I would feel like I was in a daze and I had to put serious effort in doing my daily activities. As a few months passed, I noticed that my cognitive functions were starting to deteriorate rapidly. However, my doctor assumed that it was just more anxiety and told me that if I thought the medicine was at fault that I could just take it every other day for a week and then stop. When I tried that to put it mildly, all hell broke loose. I began having very worrisome withdrawal symptoms such as:

- depersonalization
- derealization
- crying fits
- depression
- insomnia
- night sweats
- shakiness
- dizziness
- overall apathy toward life
- panic attacks
- agoraphobia

These are just to name a few. After a few too fast tapers I realized I had to do something different. So I reinstated and begin the arduous process of coming off this medicine properly. I began cutting 5% and if I felt better, after two weeks, I cut off another 5%; if I didn't feel better after 2 weeks, I waited a month. I never jumped off the medicine. When I got the lowest dose possible for me (0.17 mg - weight on the scale not the strength of the medicine) I took it every other night for two weeks. While some may think this is too slow, it all depends on your brain's chemistry, for me this is the only way this was doable. So it's important to go at your own pace.

During the new tapering process, I felt most of the symptoms described above only at a much more manageable level. There were days when I couldn't make myself get out of bed and I told myself that was OK. I would make it as enjoyable as possible. I would order my favorite food and watch a favorite show/movie to make it doable. On the days that I could do something, I tried to do any activity from when I was "normal." I walked as much as I could, I cooked, I listened to music, I watched a funny show or clip just to give myself a rest from constantly dwelling on the medicine. But then, there were the days where I just cried all day long, wondering, praying, and feeling absolutely at my wit's end truly believing that this would never end. These days would sometimes last a

week, but then I'd have a "window" where I felt like myself even for just five minutes and from what I'd read I knew the healing had begun. I do remember some of the details of how bad it got, but not most of it which is a blessing and that's something you have to look forward to. You'll remember the overall experience, but eventually it'll start to fade away 😊

I have now been off for three months. The first month was difficult, but nothing like the tapering process. I felt good and started to exercise, I began seeing a therapist which has been helping tremendously. Now slowly week after week, certain things are starting to fade away. I no longer sweat profusely (very attractive, I know 😊), I no longer have panic attacks, although I still have mild anxiety, and I no longer have that heart flutter thing I had in the beginning of the taper. I am happy, I have normal emotions, and I am working on managing my stress, the reason I first got on this medicine. I do have many friends who take Xanax or klonopin for true panic and anxiety disorders as needed (i.e. once or twice a month) and they do great on that. I think the medicine is ok for those who truly need it but certainly not on a daily basis.

In closing, here are the things that were helpful to me:

- 1- The book, At Last a Life - I read this over and over, it does a great job of explaining anxiety and all of the things associated with it
- 2- Go very slow and listen to your body
- 3- Go for walks if you can, if not, do your favorite activity to give your mind a rest
- 4- Journal about how your life will be when you come out of this
- 5- Do one small "normal" activity you used to do a day
- 6- Print out quotes or sayings from people who have gone through this and have come out of it - put them everywhere and believe them
- 7- Stretch every morning and every night
- 8- If you have any questions or any concerns, ask your buddies here at benzo buddies
- 9- Remember: People come off this medicine every day. It's not easy but compared to what you're going through now, your normal anxiety will feel much more manageable. As has everyone else, you will come out of this and you will be better for it (cliché, but true). Ah and when you do! You will appreciate your life, body, and mind so much more for what they are capable of doing for you.

Stay well, friends! 😊

## Story 75

I have hesitated so many times writing this post. Each time I thought, well, what if? What if I am just having a good day, what if tomorrow I....

But here i am, typing the words I never thought I would EVER get to say.

I am over this. Yes, me, the biggest doubter of them all. The one who reinstated after a month of agony, and was told by the dr. it couldn't possibly be. I knew then what it was, and figured I would try and delay the pain. I tried three times before I was able to ride out the withdrawal, three times before I was able to get to the other side of what I was told "was just me."

I am an anxious person. And now, post benzo, I am still an anxious person. I am not cured of my anxiety because I endured w/d. I have recovered though, from the intense physical and mental hell that, at times, I thought was going to be a part of my existence forever.

I am not going to list the ways in which I felt so miserable, I truly feel this whole symptom comparison and listing is really pointless and serves no real use, since I have seen so many ways people suffer with this. Suffice it to say- things happened that I would never have imagined, and every time they did, I knew it was withdrawal, and that no doctor or drug in the world would take the place of ...waiting.

So I waited. I went to therapy, and that helped primarily to have a place to vent, to reassure me that I was not crazy, and keep me from constantly using my spouse as a dumping ground. He eventually started to tire of the whole thing and my obsession with it. He eventually, too, said it was "me."

I only recently realized- he was wrong. It was withdrawal. I was going to feel better, it just would take time.

During this time, I don't know how, but I kept my fulltime job, changed jobs, graduated from college, applied to grad school, started that and a new job, and made art. Thank God for all that- it gave me a reason for being, and a way to get out of the head I was sure was broken. Some have said, I don't know how you did it, well...You just do. I was freaked out beyond belief many times, nauseous, dizzy, trying to make sense of things from behind this wall of fog...but I did it. I look back now and see the journal from this time last year. It was not pretty, but there were major accomplishments that had nothing to do with withdrawal.

So- for those of you just beginning your taper, or those stuck somewhere in the midst of withdrawal- I have been there. I have cried out to god for help, I have cursed him for allowing this to happen, I have denied the existence of anything beyond misery. I titrated twice, I jumped three times, I looked to this site to keep me above water.

And it did- so many of you have been there with support and help. It was the only validation I had. Thank you. Thank you all.

So- if you have the idea of giving up and reinstating, I understand. I have been there. For me it did not work. So much of this I can only now see in hindsight. Klonopin worked ok for a short while, but stopped, and it took me multiple attempts to stay off. if I did it again, I would not reinstate, it only prolonged the inevitable, and I believe, made the inevitable jump alot harder.

But even with that, it is done. I will not claim 100%. What is 100%? I will always be somewhat anxious, and will have good days and bad. but having been through this- I know whatever level of "stuff" life throws at me, I can take it.

OK. This is the post I have waited since 2009 to make.

Know that whoever you are, whatever stage of this game you are in, if I can do it, you can too.

And, most likely, you will.

Even if, like me, you doubt it could ever happen.

## Story 76

The problem in my life was not benzos. It was me.

It was how I was raised by an alcoholic. A narcissistic control freak father. A control freak husband followed. As did divorce. As did complete alienation by my adult children.

I lost my business. My home. My marriage. My sister (to cancer). My adult kids who went to their dad when my money ran out.

I ODeD on benzos and alcohol one night.

The next day or so - I awoke. And the hell to acute wd began.

Let's go back before I lost it all including my "chit".

I had GAD ALL MY LIFE - and culminated in full blown panic attacks in my late 20s. Which led to ER visits not knowing wtf was going on.

Enter polymeds.

Too late - I had to go to hospital to be safe.

One wk later or so, I was released. On ativan, then Klon, and paxil.

I was not healed. But then began the dance of recovering from the ordeal.

I eventually was put on depakote because my moods were effed up.

Switched antidepressants because they preportedly pooped out.

On off Paxil, effexor even to this day - (but now slowly tapering off that nonsense).

Back to the part of my losing everything -

I also went through perimenopause when I was going through my many losses. No money - could not find work. No insurance.

It was me, myself and what I refer to as a higher power/God/etc and me clinging to this forum and my bedsheets feeling I would surely die.

Thank you all for being here when I was in the throes of all of this. I had NO RESOURCES and absolutely NO ONE would help me.

But you all did. I jumped off the benzo train roughly 2 yrs ago when I od'd.

I eventually became homeless a short bit. Ended up living w my elderly parents while

one of my sisters with borderline personality disorder attempted to pay me off to live with an addicted ex SIL in a far away state. She still tries to influence my parents to get rid of me. But who would take care of them? In fact, my mother found sobriety at 80 something - through AA and my being here and working my own program. Does this mean she is fully recovered and life is perfect? No. Benzos were only part of the journey. Part of it was reparing myself so I could live without benzos. I was screwed up in the head and the poly pharma did not fix my story. It numbed me and I dare say I wish I had been able to find a sharp MD who did not try to convince me I needed meds all my life. I know I have issues - and weird thinking at times - but I am just human. Not perfect. So the stress of all of those notions was greatly alleviated when I realized the only person I could change was me - and that medication may only help temporarily to give me a breather from the many stressors - but the overall picture was to emotionally GROW as a person. I was emotionally stunted and needed to grow up in the ways I was unable to through the yrs. And also GROW. The most important takeaway is that you change when you are in these darkest moments - you have to WANT TO and sadly - many of us find us in shocking ACUTE stages of WD which feels like it can make or break us. But you CAN get through that. I swear you can. The first step is to take one. Crawl if you must - but dont give up.

The hard part was the acute stage - but so was figuring out where all the depression, sadness, panic, GAD and dysfunction came from.

With my mother still actively drinking and trying to kill herself with alcohol, I had to find help. I did this through Al Anon. It saved the first part of my journey to wellness. In fact, it was after several months of attending these meetings and WANTING to get help to save myself from further despair that I felt better than I had ever in life. I began to feel strong enough to taper my antidepressant effexor. So with that I have begun to do so. It aint easy but it is easier now that I have some tools.

I found further hope for myself through ACOA - very deep work we do in there. And it is hard. I am struggling with some things about myself the program is forcing me to look at rather than medicate with. Some days I want to take a benzo after alllllll the wd I went through just to make the reality go away. There was a time I swore them off. Now I see where and when they truly could have made a helpful difference but the medical community had failed me and continues to do so as I sought help w AD WD and was told my a recent MD grad as new to the family practice that there is no such thing. I would like to put her on a round of ADS and watch her say the same as she goes through WD.

You do what you have to to get to the good place in life. There is no short cut to nirvana. In fact, the only way to get through your wd is to go through it. There are ways as described on this board on how to safely do this. People here are awesome to help you feel reassured no matter how many times you have to read it.

I cannot tell you how difficult and lonely I was going through this without support. All the losses I took.

My kids still won't speak to me and they are adults now.

But at the end of the day, letting go of as many of the fears we have as best we can alleviates the panic and terror. Even in the grips of WD it can help to let go of controlling outcomes.

Yes, your brain feels like it is throwing up. Yes, your body hurts as you wonder why and how it happened. Yes, you are afraid of every damned thing second by second as you move through the wd. But you ARE moving through it even as you read these support messages. You are one second, one minute, one hour closer to recovering fully. YOU

WILL recover fully. You will. 😊❤️

Hold on with both claws if needed. Nurture yourself instead of insisting you should be recovered already. It will happen. Do the work.

The reason I say the problem was not the drug - but me - is because I lost faith in myself to get through this. I learned to trust ME instead of people who did not mean me well. To realize I can do this is I try. I found strength in being me and letting go of controlling outcomes or others. And to realize that I am my own best friend. The rest is just icing.

## Story 77

In two weeks, on July 1, 2015, I will be two years off of Klonopin. I took .5 mg of Klonopin for almost 5 years and I did a 6 month taper using water titration. I am amazed by the amount of devastation this drug, prescribed by a trusted doctor, did to my body, physically, mentally, and emotionally. BUT, the devastation is something that we heal from, and we can come out **better and stronger** than before enduring withdrawal.

This is my story.

I had an easy time with coming off the drug and I thought I was in the clear. I didn't even become a member of BB until I was off for 6 months and my symptoms started slamming me. It felt so foreign and wrong....why would I have an easy time weaning off the drug and then get hit after being OK for many weeks? Up until 6 months, I had only had a few waves that were not too intense.

My symptoms were many.

Anxiety - It was to the extreme. It felt like I was living in a panic attack, and it had a very physical nature to it. I would feel like I had an ugly energy pulsing through my body. I had a very hard time sitting still. It was always worse in the mornings, and I would actually gag when I would brush my teeth because my anxiety was so high. My breakfast, for a year, consisted of an apple and a half of a peanut butter sandwich. I could barely chock it down, and would have to eat it in TINY bites, but getting some food in my stomach would help.

Health Anxiety - This was an awful symptom. I can't even tell you how many "heart attacks" and "strokes" I suffered from! My anxiety, being very physical, must have triggered this, but I would continuously check my pulse, KNOWING that at any minute I would feel it skip, stutter, and stop. I am a healthy, 44 year old, non-smoker, who has run 4 half-marathons....but none of that mattered. My health anxiety raged on, peaking about the 18th month when I almost went to the ER. It can still raise its head at times, but it's no where near the off-the-charts level it was even 5 months ago.

Insomnia - Another one of my worst symptoms. I would fall asleep, only to be jolted awake almost every two hours from a cortisol rush. My heart would be pounding, I would have a hot flash, I would be shaking, my fear would be raging. I would often have to spring out of bed and pace around the house, trying to calm down. Many nights I would have only a few hours of broken sleep. Naps were very toxic for me, and I would wake up feeling worse after taking one.

Fear - I was SO AFRAID all the time. I have never felt fear to that extent before. I would often crawl into my youngest daughter's bed in the middle of the night and read everything I could on BB. There were nights I would spend literally hours scrolling through old posts, reading everything I could find....I would put my phone down to try and fall asleep, and I would start shaking and wouldn't be able to calm down until I

picked it up and started reading BB again. I would read Parker's post called "What is Happening in Your Brain" over and over. I had some quotes from different people on BB that I had written down on a piece of paper and I carried it with me in my purse. Often I would pull it out and quickly scan over them. Most of the quotes said that the fear I was experiencing wasn't real.

Chest Anxiety - I called this "chest anxiety", because it was this physical sensation that centered in and around my chest. It was tightness and burning. At times I felt like I had acid coursing through my veins, other times my connective tissue would be so tight. It would move around a lot, sometimes in the middle, sometimes on the side, but I could tell it was in my connective tissue. I think that my fascia was very inflamed. My core was so tight and it felt like I was holding my stomach in, and I couldn't really relax it. This symptom hasn't gone away completely, and I will feel it from time to time. It's much less intense than it used to be, however. I did have a doctor check my heart and I even wore a 24-hour halter monitor, and my heart was diagnosed as healthy.

Boatiness/Lightheadedness - I still will get some slight waves of this, but it's nothing like it used to be.

Benzo Belly - I would feel nauseous much of the time and I would often have belly pain.

Internal Vibrations - These were the weirdest things! I felt like I were shaking, like I was sitting on a vibrating chair, but I wasn't actually moving.

Skin Sensations - I would get different feelings, like random patches of cold, feeling of water running over me, tingles, ect.

Heaviness in my limbs - Especially in my arms, making it feel difficult to move them. It never actually was difficult to move, it just felt that way. Feelings of heavy, stiff hands and tight shoulders.

Head Pressure - Often at the base of my skull, or at the very top. Sometimes it would have a headache with it, but often it was just a weird pressure.

Menstrual Irregularities - My periods were very messed up, even getting them every 2 weeks for a while. My PMS was awful and my periods would always throw me into a horrible wave.

Emotional Disconnect - Another one of the worst symptoms! I was so miserable and inwardly focused on all the weirdness happening inside my body, that it was hard to pull out of myself and connect with what was going on around me. I did the best that I could, but I faked most of it. It's hard to be interested in someone's new outfit when you are 99.9% sure you are going to die in the next 5 minutes. 😊

That was in the past.

**Today I feel GOOD and NORMAL almost all the time. What a blessing and a change from the past many years! I can be worried about something without having my anxiety go crazy. I can feel nervous. I can feel sad. My periods are back to normal. I connect with people. I am no longer inwardly focused. I feel joy. I sleep contentedly. I can laugh until my sides hurt. I can have a beer, or two, with my dinner. I can eat what I want. I can travel. I feel excitement and joyful anticipation toward upcoming events. I feel peace. I can sit still. I feel love. I FEEL!!!  
It feels so good to FEEL!**

One of the things I was the most afraid of was how I would cope with life not having benzos....after all, I was prescribed them to help me with my anxiety. I was very worried that my anxiety would always be out of control and I would simply go through life more or less miserable. I have learned that my anxiety is almost non-existent now! I realized that much of my anxiety was CAUSED by benzos, and with the exception of the situational anxiety that I was put on them for, it was made worse by taking what I thought helped and was needed. I am no longer afraid of anxiety.

I think that it is so incredibly important to continue to live your life as much as you can while going through withdrawal. I believe that it is important to get out and DO, regardless of how you feel. I know how hard this is, but I think that it builds strength and it limits the destruction these pills cause. My life was often miserable during the past 2 years, but it wasn't destroyed. I somehow kept the career that I love. I am a teacher and would often be sure that I was going to collapse down dead in front of my 4th graders. Most people in my life have no idea of the internal war that I went through. I continued making memories with my family (even though many I don't remember, they do). I made the conscious decision that I wasn't going to let klonopin rob me of any more than it already has!

This has been an incredibly hard journey. I am amazed by the strength it takes to get through it....but we do. You will. It's a day by day, sometimes minute by minute process. Time is the big healer, as everyone says. It has taken me almost all of 2 years to get to the point of writing my success story, and I know that there are some little things that are still putting themselves right inside my body.

I'd like to extend a huge thank you to my friends on the 12-18 month thread! 😊 I'm not on BB as much as I used to be, but I think of you guys often. I'll see a recipe for soup and think of Nova, or hear words of encouragement and think of Coop. There are many times that Sky, FJ, Green, Drew, Jenny, Peace, and Mrs, along with others, pop into my mind. BB has been a life-saver to me these past several years. I can't imagine going through this without having the support of knowing that others are going through something similar and that people DO HEAL.

Stay the course and continue on. You WILL get through this!

## Story 78

Well, I guess this is it... these are my last words; the last time I tell my story.

4 years ago this past January 6, I took my last dose of Klonopin; a whopping .25 mgs. After 23 months on 1 K/day – sometimes taking 1.5, which was my prescription called for – I'd taken 6 weeks to taper; what my doctor considered a "slow taper". It was very rough going, to say the least! I'd "tapered off" other drugs in the past and figured that in a couple weeks I'd be back to normal, though, so I just rode it out.

Then a month to the day later I got hit with what my doctors could only describe as a stroke/seizure-LIKE episode...and I entered My Time in Hell: 2009. For the next 6 months, some days I could get out of the house. Other days I couldn't even get off the couch. Whenever I could, I forced myself to do tai chi, which I recommend you do! Morning anxiety drove me to find all the research on benzos I could find. I shared it with every media outlet and member of the medical community I could find. The only ones interested were the med community; it would have been nice to see my articles in the dozen big city newspapers and on the networks I contacted, though! Most of the docs weren't aware of bz damage or w/d and were grateful I gave them the information. Others knew the story all too well and sadly had first-hand experience with benzo addictions & recovery.

I had no support at home. Aside from my BFF on the other end of the phone, I was pretty much alone with 24 symptoms, 24 hours/day for 6 solid months. At month 7 it started lightening up a bit. My bad-to-good days ratio started to even out. By month 11 (December) I was down to 9 symptoms and took my first temp job in almost a year. I was beginning to feel human!

I also withdrew from ambien over 3 months. By the end of December 2009 I was sleeping much better without ambien; a feat in itself as I'd used sleep meds for 24 years! After my rough time with tapering slowly, I know I couldn't have endured a longer taper off K than what I did. I commend all of you for having the strength to take your w/d slow! (If you're taking other drugs while you're tapering please be aware that as benzos leave, your CNS starts reacting to the other drugs differently. This could be affecting your w/d.)

In January 2010 – my 1 year anniversary! - I was down to 6 symptoms! I even went skiing! But then I blew my ACL on my last run of the day. My surgeon understood benzo damage and gave me propofel and ether instead of the standard ativan, and I did well. He assured me that the hydrocodone & oxycontin he prescribed post-op wouldn't have negative effects but they caused a BIG setback. A dozen symptoms returned as did my insomnia.

Fast forward...By the end of 2011 I'd gotten used to sleeping 2 to 4 hours/night and feeling my brain sizzle all the time. My tinnitus just kept getting worse, and occasionally I'd let it get the better of me. But, I was back down to 6 symptoms so I was happy!

Stress gave me big waves of old symptoms, so I avoided as much stress as I could.

At my 3rd anniversary my recovery stalled. Rather than concentrate on how I wasn't healing, however, I threw myself into studying for a new career, working and working out. I felt good, all things considered. By the end of 2012 the only improvement I'd made was in my insomnia; I was now sleeping 6 hours/night – and that was fantastic!

Sadly I lost my BFF who just couldn't bear how much I'd changed. She was worn out having to constantly remind me to do things or of conversations we'd just had. Losing her broke my heart, but my docs tell me I'm doing fantastic compared to 4 years ago, and that's what I focus on.

When I explain my benzo damage to others (a BB admin head has commended me for this simple & accurate description, so you might want to try it on laypersons), I say simply, that due to the drug moderating the CNS instead of the brain's receptors doing the job, that part of the brain essentially atrophies. My receptors are taking a long time to rebuild, that's all.

I want everyone to know **I'm not “still struggling” or “still suffering”** so please don't reply with those phrases. I am not wringing my hands, wondering “when will this end? When will I be completely healed?” Because in my opinion, **thinking about this at all, after all this time, is thinking negatively.**

Don't get all p-o'd at me for feeling this way, OK? But this is what works for me: I accept that how I am today could be how I will always be. I have peace with this (most days!). Its Buddhist thought: be in the now; be mindful and accepting; find peace in adversity as much as in joy. The best thing that happened as a result of My Year in Hell is that I found a spirituality that's healthy for me. I'm much healthier in many ways and much more in control of my life than I was pre-benzo.

Now, I'm not sharing this following update to cause fear; I'm just giving my final update. For 4 years I've felt hung over and have had a blurry R eye. My tinnitus is absolutely horrible; it often makes me cry. My cognition is terrible. Stress brings about waves but they're temporary. I have PTSD. I'm sleeping well, though! My anxiety sometimes ramps up to the point when I think I should call a doc and get an Rx, but then I tell myself, “You are not taking another drug so just deal with it. You have no choice!” (This thought, combined with intensive Deep Breathing and Tai Chi, gets me “off the ledge” every time! ) For 25 years I was told only drugs could manage my “conditions”. I'm not on drugs any more and I manage just fine! If this ain't success, then I don't know what is!

The experiences I've shared with so many here have at times been both heartbreaking and encouraging. But after 4 years here, my support system and most of those I've supported have moved on.

And so must I. I'm living life to the fullest, managing my “conditions” without drugs. My

marriage miraculously survived. I accept that my life -and brain- are different than what I had 4 years ago. I'm accommodating the grief over who I used to be, whom and what I've lost and accepting who I am and what I have today.

So that's it. No more checking the calendar, taking a morning inventory of symptoms or helping others walk down this road. To do any of this is to perpetuate my PTSD. I've reached the end of the road.

This Warrior has won!

You have to trust that you, too, will someday find yourself at the end of your road. (I reckon you'll do it a lot sooner than I did!) 4 years ago I didn't think I'd even be alive today, so I know what I'm talking about. You will do it. You WILL succeed.

**Because you never know how strong you are until being strong is all you have.**

Trust me on this.

All the best to you – keep fighting the good fight!

With much love and gratitude,

## Story 79

Hi everyone; thought I'd come back and give a note of encouragement. I've been off benzos and ADs for over 7 years now, and am recovered. I was in pretty bad shape for a long time after a relatively short time on these drugs, suffered horrible mental symptoms. It seems so long ago, it's all a blur; I don't think about it much anymore.

The only time some old symptoms resurface is when I'm under a lot of stress; this may now always be the case, the new norm, but it is quite manageable. I had an anxiety problem before the drugs, so I think it's sometimes a blurry line what is pure anxiety and what is a legacy from the withdrawal syndrome.

For those of you that think you are doomed; you're not, you will get better if you persevere. My advice is to find ways to distract your mind, try and find relaxing things to do, stay away from stressful situations, and stay away from alcohol. Find coping and survival strategies that work for you, while letting time pass and letting the healing process do it's thing. Unfortunately this time can be longer than a year or two for some. It took over three years for most of my symptoms to leave for good. Take care; and hang in there.

## Story 80

At 18 months out, I'm finally loving my life again. It's more or less back to normal, with the odd wave that knocks me sideways for a day or two. I'm now extremely functional, almost always present in my body, with just the odd clumsy moment. I can be comfortable in large groups of people - probably even more so than when I was on benzos because I'm not as tired all the time. I have no more problems in my work as a journalist - can interview people, make them feel at ease, etc. - all this would have been unthinkable without the help of beta blockers right up until a couple of months ago. I made a huge 'leap' in my 18th month and am so much better. Running well, doing martial arts again, etc.

The only weird s/x I still have are occasional stumbling over words (especially when tired) and heart palpitations/anxiety on some days.

Basically I'm very happy to be alive again. I find I am now a lot kinder to myself than I was before - I indulge myself a little more and look forward to giving myself rewards for pushing through things (short holidays, a new book, etc.).

I was afraid it would take me years and years to get to know the person I was before I took my first benzo about 25 years ago. But I need not have worried. I know who and what I am, perhaps more clearly than when I was on the pills. And the best part is, I like myself.

I guess I'm a success story. 😊

Wishing the same to all of you, especially those still struggling and thinking things will never come right.

## Story 81

Dear Friends ....

I think it's time for me to write this .... and I hope, in turn, it will encourage someone out there .....

Yes, recovery happens .... and this is coming from someone who was not expected to be able to survive nerve pain without drugs!

It all started in 2007, when I had a triple cervical fusion. It was a very rough time. I was referred to a pain doctor and thus began my horrible fall into accidental addiction. I trusted him and he nearly destroyed me.

After I fired him, I began reducing each drug, in the desperate hope that I would one day feel 'normal' again.

Folks, it was a difficult journey .... but worth every step!

I started with lyrica, naively not even knowing what the word 'withdrawal' really implied. Was I in for a shock! The nausea, stomach cramps and flashes were debilitating!

Then I targeted oxycontin and hydrocodone by finding a 'suboxone' doctor. He seemed pleasant enough .... almost compassionate .... until he realised I really did mean it when I said that I was only going to use the stuff temporarily to get off opioids. I couldn't understand his frustration at first, until he blurted out one day, when my reading on the subject offended him, that he was a Rep for the company! His conflict of interest made me even more determined to succeed.

My final challenge was that 'little yellow pill', clonazepam. I had been told that it was just a muscle relaxer and that it would help my nerve pain. What a sad day it was when I realised that I would have to endure yet another painful withdrawal!

With the help of BenzoBuddies, though, I no longer felt isolated. Suddenly, I understood what was happening .... whether it was benzo flu that day or dizziness. I learnt so much from this site .... including how to titrate .... coping skills like the power of meditation .... For this, I am forever grateful.

Nine months have passed since I took my last drop .....

I continue to be med free ..... and life is so much better.

This will happen for you, too!  
Stay positive, my friends ..... and don't ever give up!

Things that helped:

family support and BB  
healthy, fresh food  
light exercise like walking  
comedies  
music  
meditation  
deep breathing  
massage  
relaxing showers  
heating pads  
positive thinking and self-talk  
happy distraction  
sheer determination  
titration  
patience  
no meds  
gratitude

## Story 82

Hello everyone.

I have not been a very active member of this community. Mostly, I've used it as a reading resource over the years - for that I am very grateful.

I have been completely free of Benzos since September of 2014. I have no side effects, no withdrawal of any kind.

At one point I was up to 1.0mg of Klonopin Daily. From beginning to end I was on Benzos for over 6 years. (This includes my 2 year slow reduction to zero)

I too was dooped by a Dr. into thinking that this medication could be taken without end, and that there was little if any fear of addiction. What resulted was an amazing turn of events where this same Dr. now sees this medication in a completely different light. He now reluctantly prescribes benzos, and will only do so for the prescribed two week maximum timeframe. Instead of becoming angry, I educated him on the dangers of Benzos and hopefully I've saved a few people some trouble.

I used a very slow reduction method that I learned on another web forum that no longer exists: BDR The site was run by a lady named Jana.

What gave me initial relief was that I was told to divide my medication into 4 doses per day. I didn't think I could do this, but amazingly I felt so much better as I had overcome what is known as "Tolerance withdrawal". (I'm sure most of you are familiar with the jargon).

The method involved the use of whole fat milk as a medium to make minute reductions with a syringe. The philosophy being that the fatty molecules in the milk assisted to completely suspend the benzo medication and thus give a medium for minute and accurate reductions.

Following a schedule and listening to my body, I made reductions, held when I needed to and eventually (after just over two years) went from 0.75mg to zero.

The process was not without hiccups, but overall was very smooth and I was able to lead a normal life - work, travel, enjoyment, family etc.

In the beginning, I tried water dilutions, shaving pills, micro scales etc - and for me - these methods all lead to failure.

The philosophy of the BDR method, while perhaps controversial due to its lengthy timeframe, just made sense to me. "Let your body heal while you are reducing". If you are having trouble with your reduction, I encourage you to research it. There are several good videos on Youtube that explain the method. Just search "Benzo Detox

How to Guide". I am not advocating this method as the only solution, I am just letting everyone know how I did it.

This is the first time I have visited a Benzo site in over a year. I am only doing so because I feel that it is important to give those who are going through this some sense of hope. I can recall myself desperately seeking, and looking for success stories in hopes that there really was truth behind people getting off these drugs. I have come to the conclusion, that perhaps there are not as many success stories out there on the forums because those of us that have succeeded are now off in the real world - living our lives, free and not spending time looking for answers.

I'm here to tell you that it is completely possible, and it does not need to be difficult. There were times I never believed I would be writing this, but here I am, I'm done and you will be too.

Cheers,

## Story 83

Hi Folks!

Probably you did not remember me, BUT i was here a few years ago. My name is Firefly and I'm from Hungary. I had a lot of issues in the past with zoloft and rivotrill (clonazepam) drugs. In 2009 i started be addicted with these drugs, but after that i decide to do a cold turkey, and i was prepared to die. I had family with 2 beauty daughter and a loving wife. I go trough everything, hallucinations, flu like symptoms, diarrhea, dizziness, derealization, depersonalization, suicide thought... 😊after a few years I can tell you that I'm survived 😊i do not know how but I done. Shit, i done! 😊)))))) Nothing helped me, only the time. Now I'm 100% clear without any kind of problems. I'm sitting on my sofa, drinking my Czech beer with a big smile. So.. what to say 😊If you want to be again yourself, you should focus on your goal and keep calm! Nothing will help you.. like vitamins or the other thing like omega B or such thing like this... ONLY TIME! 😊But the time goes by, so do not worry 😊Sorry for my English, in 2009 i did not speak any English word only Hungarian and polish 😊)))))) but now I'm working on it 😊. SO you are one the right way, just believe yourself. Take care folks! You will be okay, just focus focus focus and focus on what you want to achieve!!

## Story 84

Clearly, being on benzos has been the most challenging period of my life, including the events that led to taking Zoloft, Valium, and Ativan, the 3-4 months of being on them, and the recovery process from weaning off of them. In short, it took about 12 months to get to being 80-90% recovered. Today, I'm about 90-95% healed. So many times during the healing period, however, I did not think I would make it and recover.

During the recovery process, I lost much sleep, money, work, apparent friends, and my physical health. I lost at least 20 pounds, looking emaciated with a significant loss in muscle mass, due to what was going on my body from the deleterious affects from benzos, and also a very restricted diet.

Sometimes it was so painful that I would wake up in the middle of the night with an excruciating burning skin sensation. I was in pure hell. Two trips to the ER room and a slew of doctor visits was extremely challenging for me. In May 2013, I contracted the shingles, which put me into a tailspin. Before, I had rarely gone to the doctor and enjoyed good health.

During the recovery process, I probably experienced every symptom that has ever been related to benzos. It was a place of immense suffering for at least 9 months. One of the hardest parts to deal with was being unable to be my active self, and to do what I was so used to doing. The benzo flu and other symptoms were challenging to deal with on a daily basis.

**You can and will make it**, in spite of what your mind tells you. Just tell it, "Thank you for telling me that, but I need a break from you right now. I am going to make it and be just fine."

**My prayers for complete healing and recovery are for all of you. May you be blessed with vibrant health, peace, and joy in your life.**

Please note that I am not on Benzobuddies much anymore, as I am focused on working again, writing my second book, conducting speaking engagements, and other projects.

**I appreciate all of you, and the support that you have provided me. Thank you much...and many blessings to you.** I will occasionally check responses to this posting.

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**Things that helped me in my recovery process, as well as other helpful lessons I learned along the way:**

1. Wean and taper very slowly from the medications.

I did not, because I did not know better, and the psychiatrist wanted me to stay on Zoloft and benzos for at least 6-12 months. Of COURSE he did, and similarly, the pharmaceutical companies want it, too. That's where they make their money. In my opinion, this part of the healthcare system has become very much broken, and creating much devastation for many people. Hopefully, many will wake up and help create the changes that are needed.

I think a relatively good protocol for tapering is the Ashton Manual, which I discovered after the 3-4 week period weaning from Zoloft and benzos...one right after the other. The discovery of the Ashton Manual, however, was too late. The rapid taper threw me into hell, and I will never know for certain if tapering more slowly would have shortened the recovery process. However, my instincts tell me that it would have tapered more slowly, the level and longevity of symptoms would probably have been reduced during my recovery. I would have gladly taken a baby hell over a major hell.

## 2. Develop a good support network.

Tell your supportive friends, family, and caregivers exactly what you are experiencing, and exactly what you need from them. If you need a back rub, tell them. If you need someone to cook for you or take you somewhere, ask for the help. Get into the habit of feeling ok with asking for what you need.

Ignore if naysayers tell you..."oh, you don't have those symptoms. They are in your head. You really need to get up and move more...then you'll feel better." All of those people wanting to give you advice probably have not experienced benzo withdrawal before, and they simply don't know what you are experiencing. As much as they were trying to be helpful in giving me this kind of advice, it often was not. Additionally, many of them were simply control freaks. See this for what it is...and do what you need to do for your health and benefit. Take the time you need to heal properly.

A close friend who had also gone through much of the same things with medication came over to my home for several months and helped me on most days, keeping me company. For at least 3-4 months, I was too weak on most days to even cook for myself, and I had little will to do so. I also had so much suicide ideation, a result of benzos. And those feelings compounded themselves because my physical body was also feeling terrible, contributing to a very dismal, dark, despondent, and hopeless place. Without him, I am not sure what I would have done.

Surround yourself with positive people and a positive environment. This is critical to your recovery. This became an opportunity for me to get rid of certain people in my life, and definitely spend considerable time cultivating positive relationships.

One of the most helpful and healing things that I discovered was EFT tapping (Emotional Freedom Technique). I had sessions with a highly skilled EFT practitioner 1-2x per week for at least 8 months...and it really helped the physical and emotional symptoms, as well as cultivating true spiritual growth. This practitioner became a key

part of my support network, and was very helpful for my recovery on all levels.

After studying many healing and therapeutic modalities for over 25 years, I have found that EFT is clearly a process that facilitates healing on many levels, including the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual bodies. It has helped me so much, that I have trained to become a practitioner and help others with their healing journeys.

### 3. Take the time to heal.

This may sound rather simplistic, but a large part of your thoughts will be about wanting to speed things up. Coming to a place of accepting EXACTLY where you are is important in the recovery process. Even though I wanted healing NOW, a bigger part of myself was telling me something: "Take the time to heal." And so I took this on as my #1 priority, leaving everything else secondary.

It was necessary to repeatedly tell myself that this was paramount, in spite of what it cost financially. I had to continually deal with and ignore the fears of running out of money, and not being able to work. Going to doctors, nutrition specialists, yoga classes, and other things cost money. But my health on multiple levels had now become my priority. Money may come and go, but I had to tell myself over and over that I could and will always make more. I had to become a well-oiled machine again, functioning at its prime. A broken vacuum cleaner will not do a good job cleaning the floor.

### 4. Rest and sleep as much as possible.

As hard as it was, I stuck with a very strict sleep regimen each night. I took a bath at 10:30 pm every day, with lavender (helps sleep) and Epsom salts (helps muscle aches and promotes relaxation). I blacked out the drapery as much as possible to create dark and quiet bedroom as much as possible, and read positive and spiritual material just before turning out the lights. Filling my mind with positive material before bed was very important.

I had never really had insomnia before on my life, but now, it was different. The lack of sleep was pure torture, and after about 3-4 months, I slowly started to get more. At first, on some nights, I would get none. The resulting delirium and lack of sleep worsened other symptoms, so sleep became an even greater priority for me. For at least 8-9 months, napping during the day was impossible, because my body was too revved up. Magnesium helped that, I believe.

### 5. Feed your mind.

Train your mind with positive self-talk. With all of the negative and dire circumstances that you are dealing with, it is vital to train yourself to ignore the negative self-talk, replacing it with positive self-talk. "Every day, in every way, I'm getting better and better" is more beneficial than, "THIS SUCKS." Yes, it does suck, but focusing on the

pain 24/7 is not as helpful as focusing on what is working well, and the progress you are making.

Attempting to stop the negative thoughts is futile and unhelpful. They are part of you, and they also serve an important purpose. They are coming from somewhere, and those parts of you that are generating those thoughts are wanting to help and protect aspects of you. However, those thoughts may not be that helpful for you at this time.

Distraction is so important to this recovery process. When you aren't feeling good in your body, and not feeling the best emotionally as a result of that, find positive things that are distracting. The benzos typically alter brain and body chemistry that brings about positive emotions, so you may feel down a lot. Distraction with things that help you feel better is key: Funny shows, comedy, pleasant radio, etc.

For nearly a year, I could not go to the movie theatre, which was a favorite of mine, because I had become claustrophobic, and the noise was too much for me to handle. It was nearly 10 months before I was able to handle going to see pleasant movies. Also, any type of violence perpetuated and expanded the dismal feelings and thoughts of "Oh my god, the end of the earth is coming."

#### 6. Feed your body with the best nutrition possible.

I noticed that little things would rev up my system, including spices, such as pepper. Therefore, I had to restrict my diet to a very bland and super-healthy diet with organic chicken, fish, and many vegetables. For a number of months, most carbs revved up my body, causing even more severe body aches and pains on a daily basis. Sugar was out of the question. Food containing even a small amount of sugar would worsen the symptoms.

This past November, I went to a naturopath in the suburbs of Chicago, after patiently waiting 5 months to see her due to her full schedule. I think in the long run, her recommendations for me probably created a major turn-around and will serve me well for the rest of my life.

In addition to suggesting that I become gluten-free, dairy-free, and eliminating red meat from my diet, this brilliant and experienced naturopath recommended that I make and drink a green smoothie each day. Immediately after starting the green smoothie and making the potassium broth, moving to a plant-based raw food diet, I begin to feel much better. I began to experience much fewer body aches and pains, and to a significantly less degree. Also, I saw hairs that were gray begin to come out dark again, and the sagging, wrinkling skin also started to tighten up and become smooth again.

One of the things that the naturopath shared with me is that my body was not absorbing nutrients...for various reasons. One of the reasons is that I was not chewing my food enough, so the nutrients were still contained in the cells. Thorough mastication crushes the food cells, moving the nutrients out of the cellular membranes and into a more

absorbable state. Additionally, proper chewing allows for the digestive enzyme amylase from the saliva to thoroughly mix with food, allowing for better digestion and absorption.

Now, I chew each bite approximately 40 times before swallowing...a really good practice. I also focus on my eating more, enjoying the process of eating, rather than just grabbing food and stuffing my face. Living in a rush culture and with a habit of eating too fast, this took some patience to practice and develop a better habit.

Purchase and eat organic as much as possible. Nearly all groceries I purchase are organic now. Eat as much whole food as possible, and eliminate processed foods wherever you can. Generally speaking, processed foods are simply not good for you.

I also crushed a garlic clove nearly daily, allowing the garlic to mix with the air for a few minutes, which is something the naturopath shared with me. This was very helpful in helping to cure sinus infections, which I noticed a huge increase in problems during benzo recovery. After following the garlic regimen, and especially after starting the daily green smoothies and other nutritional practices discussed above, I noticed the stuffiness in the sinuses disappeared. Instead, my sinuses started to run instead, probably due to the elimination of toxins.

#### 7. Take supplements as you discover how they help you.

This may take some trial and error, as well as advice and guidance from your healthcare providers. Each day, I take a multi-vitamin, vitamin C (3,000 mg a day), zinc (35 mg), and vitamin D (2,000 IU). I also take HCl to assist with digestion, especially after eating a protein, per the recommendation of the naturopathic physician.

Be careful of what is in your supplements. I started noticing that after I switched to a different brand of a multi-vitamin, some of my symptoms increased, such as body aches, pain, burning skin, agitation/nervousness, and so forth. Intuitively, I checked the vitamin labels, and behold...the multi-vitamin contained maca, which can be very stimulating. I dropped that immediately and switched back to the previous brand, and my symptoms went back to baseline.

I found that taking Vitamin D really helped me with depression.

Much higher doses of Magnesium were also really helpful. I started taking 1200-1600 mg of Magnesium (Doctor's best brand) each day, after reading Parker's post. This helped me on many fronts...helped with relaxing...reduced muscle pain and tension, and promoted sleep.

I had read that sea salt was very helpful with people suffering from adrenal issues, and I noticed that increasing sea salt in my water and diet was helpful, particular with taking a teaspoon of sea salt with water in the morning. (Some research shows that regular table salt is unhealthy for the body, as most table salt apparently contains silica, or glass, which also creates small tears in the blood vessels).

As with any vitamins, supplements, and other nutritional information, please consult your health professionals about any health supplements you are considering.

8. Drink plenty of water.

Many nutrition experts generally agree that most people are chronically dehydrated under normal conditions. I drink about 4-5 quarts a day, which is my usual amount, and more on days that I am exercising. This helps flush out toxins in the body, as well as emotional toxins that build up as a result of this.

During the recovery process, I also drank chamomile tea throughout the day, and also before bedtime. This helped relax my muscles and calmed the digestion. Now, I drink it every few days.

9. Journal your experience.

If journaling is helpful, then journal. It will also help you to see the progress, and for me, an additional benefit is a remembrance to never to take benzos again...or anti-depressants...that is, to rely on external substances to temporarily feel better. I believe that in the long run, they may or will be destructive. This is exactly what benzos did for me.

Journaling also helps you release negative emotional energy by writing down your experiences, and what you are feeling and thinking. You may also notice correlations between activities you do or things you ingest, and how you feel.

10. Meditate daily.

Even for five minutes a day, and more as you can handle it and develop your abilities. I suggest meditating in silence, and simply watch the breath enter and exit your nostrils, focusing your attention there. When you have a thought, and you will have many, especially at the beginning, just simply notice them. Do not judge them. Simply allow them to pass.

Entering this magical place of silence is very beneficial, allowing your body to become calm. It also cultivates healing in the body, and helps develop a more positive experience and attitude in your life.

If you feel agitated, jumpy, and nervous, which was a challenging symptom for me, especially for at least the first six months, just simply be with that and notice it. It is ok to shake, cry, have the urge to move, and feel restless. Just be with where you are and what you are experiencing.

11. Accept this recovery process as an opportunity for spiritual and inner work.

For me, the worst fears that had been lying dormant came up. Apparently, the amygdala, the place where fears in the brain are stored, becomes unlocked with benzos. When benzos have impacted the HPA cortex, it seems like the floodgates of hell are opened, and then one can start experiencing nearly any fear that they may have had...present or repressed. And this happened to me.

To work with the fears, and all of the emotional and mental stuff that arose, I began to see this as an opportunity for working on them. I surrounded myself with more positive people and started attending a more spiritually aware and less religious church. I took a group class on CBT (Cognitive Behavior Therapy), which was also helpful. EFT helped release much of the negative emotional energy and helped me grow tremendously on many levels.

#### 12. Push yourself...slowly.

I was raised in an environment where pushing myself was paramount. There was very little sensitivity to individual needs, such as taking my time for myself and rest. All of the B.S. messages about “work, work, work” and “an idle mind is the devil’s playground”, among many other dumb and unhelpful messages and negative belief systems rose to the surface for me to look at them.

Walk. Move your body...move the energy, but do so slowly at your own pace. There are some on this forum who talk about working out at the gym is so important. Perhaps for them, it is. For me, I was unable to do that...and many are not able to lift weights or do vigorous cardio for 30-45 minutes. It was very discouraging for me to deal with this issue, as I had previously gone to the gym three times a week.

In the recovery process, however, do what you can. Setting little goals in various areas of your life is helpful, because these little gains will become huge advances. Rome wasn’t built in a day, you know?

I found that being out in nature was important and healing. I took many opportunities to walk outside, even for 20-30 minutes, and even if I needed to rest.

I worked as I was able to. For many months, I could not. When I was too weak to walk and move much, I used the opportunity to write my next book while lying on the sofa.

#### 13. Let the power of prayer help you heal.

Whether or not you are religious or follow spiritual practices, the power of prayer may be very helpful. For me, it simply was a way for people to focus their attention on my healing.

Throughout the recovery process, I went to church and requested prayer through their silent prayer box. I visited many websites of various religious and spiritual persuasions, requesting prayer for healing of my mind, body, and spirit. I also asked close friends

and relatives to pray for me as well.

I believe that prayer really helped me heal.

#### 14. Get out of your home.

Feeling and being isolated is detrimental. Experts say being isolated is an early step to someone going insane. Taking the time to rest at home is key. At other times, however, get out as you can.

This was really key to my mental and emotional survival. I got out of the house as much as possible. In the winter time, I would go to a local quiet coffee house and sit on the sofa with my laptop, distracting myself with browsing the Internet. I read positive books and other reading materials that were interested to me, often falling asleep in the coffee house for a few seconds, then being jolted awake because of the electric shocks and the electric feelings in my nerves, muscles, and skin.

Volunteer. I volunteered at an animal shelter, and found that being around these beautiful animals can be very helpful and healing. Also, it has been a good way to distract myself from the pain and other challenging symptoms.

#### 15. Practice self-love.

This is a major opportunity to practice nurturing, loving, and taking care of yourself. This may be, indeed, a lesson for you in this, if you have not done this in the past. Take the time to practice nurturing self-talk, rather than all of the self-critical things we say to beat ourselves up.

Take care of yourself in all aspects...loving yourself in ways that you have not before. Learn to be your own best friend, and treat yourself accordingly. During the recovery process, you may find out who your true friends are, while others may seem to abandon you. See this as a good thing.

For me, it was an incredibly difficult time of deep despair, as I felt very alone many times. But if you can see the truth of this, this time of seeming darkness can be a weeding out process to discover who is truly loyal and caring, versus who just wants someone happy and joyful to be around to make themselves feel better. Use this time to see the truth in it.

In short, the journey of recovering from benzos has been one of the most interesting and healing times of my life. Sure, it sucked. Yes, it was an unbelievable hell to go through. But what I used the experience for and the positive changes in my life that I made as a result of this have been so incredible and amazing, and I have yet to see what other miracles are unfolding because of this journey.

Positive changes I have made:

1. I have dramatically reduced my alcohol consumption as compared to before benzos. (I drank none during benzo recovery, except to test my limits with a glass of wine now and then).
2. I eat much more carefully, and have given up gluten, dairy, and red meat. I have significantly reduced the amount of animal protein in my diet, moving toward a diet that is 60-80% raw food. My energy levels are considering higher, and I feel more alert, rested, and positive.
3. I have created a better balance between work, rest, play, time for myself, and my spiritual growth and evolution.
4. I have learned to say “no” to what doesn’t feel good, or what doesn’t work well for me.

## Story 85

Sorry it has taken me so long to write this, but here I am! 😊❤️

I just wanted to let everyone know, you can heal from this nightmare!

At 18 months I realized my complete healing!

My w/d sxs were so severe that I could not even fathom there would be an end to it.

I am here to say that I am able to ingest absolutely anything I choose too. I have no supplement, RX, food or otherwise reactions or sensitivities to anything anymore, and at one point I could take almost nothing after this started. They are all gone!

I had my Gallbladder taken out 6 months ago, outside of telling them no Benzo's or anything related, I came through the surgery with flying colors! No side effects or adverse reactions. 😊👏

If you go back and read my Blog here, you will see I was one of the worst of the worst, and I made it and so can you!

I am very grateful for this site, it saved my life, and I met so many wonderful people, some of whom I am still friends with to this day and it has been 3 years now.

My life is back to normal and I lead a normal life. Oh and I can sleeeeeeep!

I of course will still always take it slow with meds, just because of the knowledge I have learned from this experience. But I no longer live in fear every time I need to take medication or supplements of any sort. The fear no longer hangs in the back of my head.

So hang in there, you will recover! 😊❤️

Cheers! And Happy New Year!

Love to you all,

## Story 86

So I want to write my success story because they really helped me when I needed them most. Another reason is because I was a short term user. I saw so many people say that short term users can't have protracted withdrawal and I am here to prove them wrong and to give short term users some hope! I was symptomatic for 21 months.

Well here I am and I can hardly believe it, I never thought I would get to write my success story. I was one of those people that no matter how much reassurance I would receive, I just never thought I would get better. I didn't see how being better was even possible, but it is. We do heal! YOU WILL HEAL!

Back in July 2012 I went to the doctor for a routine check up and decided to complain about some muscle twitches I had been having. The doctor asked me if I was stressed out more than usual and I said I didn't think so but that could be it. So she decided to prescribe me 20mg Paxil just to see if it would help with the tremors by making me less stressed. So I figured why not and the next day I took the magic pill. On the second day I was in a rush so I skipped breakfast and took the Paxil with a small sip of water and headed to my mothers house because she wanted to come with me to the urologist since I was having frequent urinary problems for years. On our way to the urologist I grabbed a bottle of water from the back seat of her car and guzzled it down. Within minutes I was sent into my first panic attack ever. I couldn't control myself. I still went into my appt with the urologist but couldn't stop crying and I was absolutely terrified. The world felt fake I felt like I was dying. My heart was racing a mile a minute and I instantly knew it was the Paxil that was sitting in my empty stomach activating because I drank all of that water. I told my mom and she called the doctor that prescribed it and they said to take it easy and I would be better by the next day.

Well the next day came and I was worse than ever. I couldn't even get out of bed. My entire body was shaking as if I was having a seizure and the terrified panic would not stop. The doctors office began to get angry with me calling and told me that if I was having so much trouble then to go to the ER. So on the 5th day of endless panic, burning skin, tremors, and derealization I went into the ER. That is when I was prescribed Klonopin. The Klonopin did not help but for some reason I thought it would if I kept taking it so I took .5mg Klonopin every day for a month. During that time I also saw a doctor that convinced me to also take Effexor. I still was not getting better. In fact I was getting worse. I had toxic naps, I would hear things that weren't there, brain fog, no short term memory whatsoever. I got desperate to find an answer and just kept searching the internet for help. That is when I found BenzoBuddies and my taper quickly began and I became benzo free Oct 7, 2012 and med free less than a month after that. This place gave me hope even though I didn't believe it. I would sit on here for hours reading success stories and I even made some good friends that I would PM daily for months. They have since healed and moved on themselves.

At home I was a mess. I quickly lost my job because I couldn't go and I was so upset because after 4 years with the company I had finally been promoted to supervisor just

months before this mess. My husband (fiance at the time) would have to bring me my meals in bed. I would lay in bed and starve while he worked because I was afraid to leave our bedroom. My agoraphobia was out of control. I was crying constantly. I would scream into my pillow begging for this to end. When my husband was home I begged him to stay with me. So he set up his computer next to our bed and he would stay there for hours. I cut contact with all of my friends because none of them understood. When my phone would go off I would feel afraid because I didn't want to hear someone else tell me to snap out of it. My family thought I had absolutely lost it and they would all tell me to get over it. I went through 6 doctors and each one of them said I needed to be on meds because I was a severe case and wouldn't get better without them. I went into social isolation for a year. I was bed bound for a year. I was absolutely helpless. All I wanted to do was sleep the day away so I wouldn't have to feel the pain but I had severe toxic naps, so as soon as I would start to doze off it would send my body into a complete panic.

I want to say my turning point was probably this time last year. It felt like practically over night I was able to go out again without agoraphobia holding me back. I was still panicky but this was a great start. My derealization started to go away, I felt real again. As soon as that started to fade so did everything else. I was able to handle social situations without panic. Around this time when I finally started seeing improvement I began developing hypnagogic hallucinations every night when I would go to bed. Looking back I believe that this was a sign my brain was finally healing. I used to tell myself that I would know I was healed when I could finally take a nap again. Well by June this year that became a reality. I can finally take naps without a problem. By July my hypnagogic hallucinations disappeared. I am finally free. I used to become slightly panicked when I began to get better and someone would ask me how I was doing. I was afraid to admit I was better because I didn't think it was true. Well today I can say with confidence that I am better and my brain is back to being my brain.

I used to think I would have PTSD, I didn't see how it was possible that I couldn't. Well I definitely do not have PTSD. My brain is completely back to the way it was before and I don't even think about benzo's or benzo brain anymore and I used to count the days. I have been completely mentally back since July but I wanted to give it time before I wrote my success story just to make sure.

Now I know people usually give a % for how much better they are but my situation is complicated. The stress that my body had to endure for over a year and a half mixed with me doing nothing but lying in bed has left me with some health complications. The doctors and myself believe that it is a Candida overgrowth that was triggered by the stress I endured. I am still unable to work due to these physical issues and I am doing what I can to fix them. Is this pain withdrawal though? No. I do not believe it is withdrawal. I believe I am 100% cured from my benzo nightmare and that is what is most important. This is just the aftermath because my body physically couldn't handle the stress. Just like a hurricane leaves broken houses once it is gone. I would totally be able to work now if my body could physically do it. I am so happy every day and would absolutely love working and I would welcome it with open arms. I have all of my old

confidence back and anxiety is a thing of the past.

Now since getting better I have moved, gotten married, and best of all I got a puppy! I just enjoy every day now regardless of how I feel physically. After the benzo nightmare there is nothing we can't handle!

Please don't give up hope! It will happen to you too. I really REALLY did not believe I would ever be myself again and here I am!

## Story 87

Here is my Success Story, it's kinda long and parts of it are excerpted from my Buddie Blog at Benzo Buddies.com.

I was first put on drugs due to anxiety issues and I've had depression all my life due to a traumatic childhood upbringing. But I was able to handle life and all its challenges pretty well until Sept 1999 when I had my first panic attack. I was put on Benzos right away to try to keep the anxiety under control but it just snowballed into something terrible. When the drugs wore off I was back in the ER thinking that I was dying! But it was just the W/D from the Benzos that was making things worse! I didn't know it at the time but I was being set up to take these drugs for life. I was told that I was majorly depressed and that only drugs were the answer along with therapy. I had been doing fine before the mess with the ER Benzos! I was looking forward to a new job, and getting married and a whole new life was going to be opening up for me. Now the drugs came in and made my life a living Hell.

For the past 13 years I've been medicated with everything the Drs could push at me, name the drug and I've probably taken it for a while. Too many to count. Finally I stabilized in a few years on Welbutrin, Risperdal, Klonopin. Klonopin was there from the very get go, and I've taken it at doses of 0.5 to 1mg for years now. I've been diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder, Bipolar II, and even Schizo-effective Disorder, along with Generalized Anxiety Disorder. Screw those diagnosis's! I was just in major w/d from the drugs wearing off, I never was sick before the meds came along. It still makes me so angry at all the Dr.s who thought that I was crazy!

So finally in 2008, I finally realized that I've lost a whole decade of my life being on these drugs. I cannot work and am totally disabled and my husband takes care of me. I also realized that I don't like being in this position of helplessness. I have been disabled by the drug use and I knew that I had to somehow get my life back and heal from all the abuse. It was legal abuse of course, but sanctioned by the Dr.s who knew best they said. I refused to believe that and knew that I HAD to get my life back. So I started down the road of trying to get off all the meds and reclaim my life.

After all this mess I tried to taper down off my Klonopin. I realized that I had to get off the drug. I took it for over 14 years, the last 8 in Tolerance Withdrawals. The drug no longer worked for me and was contributing to my depressive episodes and ever increasing anxiety, and sometimes panic attacks.

I tried to taper with a schedule from Dr. Armstrong who is a benzo-wise Dr who helps people get off these dangerous drugs. I tried to taper down twice and failed both times. It was hopeless, I was never going to get off this evil drug.

Finally, I had yet another breakdown and was hospitalized, (I have had many many hospitalizations due to anxiety and depression, all caused by the drug, but mostly due to Klonopin, I think) and was put into their Detox ward. I stayed there for 5 days was

titrated onto Librium and basically cold-turkied and set free to go home and suffer.

And suffer, I did for 8 long months.

From my blog:

I've been on AD since my hellish hospital experiences way back in 1999 and continuing. I've been hospitalized for various drug side effects and w/d's over 20 times. Sometimes I would go in 3 times a year! To change meds, to get ECT, everything to try to stop my debilitating depression and suicidal thoughts. All along it was the Benzo doing this to me, the Klonoposition! It has made me more careful about my health and more distrustful of Pdocs than ever. I will never visit another Pdoc when I'm finally off this stuff, or ever take another benzo or AD as long as I live. I would rather suffer then die on these meds. Or use more natural methods if I start feeling down again. My goal is to enjoy and live life again when I get off these meds and get healthy again.

Reading my old blog, it's a nightmare of pain, terror and fear. I couldn't believe how SICK I was! it's like it happened to someone else now. So glad to be free!

My main s/x when jumping off were:

Dizziness, Fatigue, Eye Pain, Vertigo, Depression, Anxiety, Nausea, Bloating, GI upset, Headaches, DR, DP, Cog-Fog, Hypochondria, Exercise Intolerance.

Daily Fatigue--it still haunts me. That's what I deal with most of my days now along with the Depression and slight anxiety, but I no longer had major panic attacks like I used to. From my blog about my daily life for 7 months since jumping:

So finally got back home and fell on the couch again staring at the TV inane chatter. I go from the bed in the morning to my place on the couch, with breaks to get to the computer to type my thoughts. I have my knitting projects around me, my books for reading, and my tablet to stay on BB, or on my Facebook groups. That's my life now and has been for these past 7 months.

From my blog:

I know you guys want answers so here is my experience. You want to know when you might get windows or will be totally healed. No one knows for sure as everyone is totally different, so I don't have an easy answer for you. I started getting windows only last month, at month 7. I CTed last Oct 2012 from 1mg of Klonopin. I had one 2 day window and then it slammed shut, that was it. Except for those 2 days that whole month sucked! I mean it was awful. Not as bad as the first couple of months but pretty bad. I could go to my exercise class, run errands, and go out to dinner but it was still hard as I was so sensitive to any stimuli. Also my brain is still badly cog-fogged.

At 8 months these were gone:

Insomnia  
Electric shock sensations  
Blurred vision  
Dizziness  
Depersonalization  
Derealisation (Feelings of unreality)  
Gastrointestinal problems (Benzo-Belly)  
Twitches (mostly in my feet)  
Hypnagogia-hallucinations (Big-Bang noises, very scary!)  
Nausea

At 8 months I still had these:

Anxiety  
Depression  
Hypochondriasis (still severe)  
Impaired concentration  
Aches and pains  
Fatigue!!! (BAD!!!!)  
Impaired memory  
Hot and cold flushes (mostly cold, my thyroid has been checked by it comes out normal)  
Headache (off and on, maybe 3-4 times a month)  
Rebound REM sleep (Whoa, Nelly! This is awful, like a carnival circus in my brain each night!)  
Hyperosmia (I sleep too much due to the Serougel that I'm still tapering and on)  
Mood swings  
Indecision and lack of Motivation

From my blog:

But I know that I'm healing each day and I long for the day when I'm totally psych med free! I just have to keep trusting and keeping the faith that I will get there someday. I wish and hope for each of you to get completely recovered and free as well.

I just want to leave you guys with a letter of encouragement.

Have ever felt like this whole process is hopeless and you want to just give up? Of course you do. But don't give up because there's always one thing that will make you keep going no matter what. That thing can be courage, willpower, family, friends, dreams, life itself or the things you enjoy.

Life is not about "I got to the grave safely" but "Well that trip was sure was worth a lifetime" sort of thing, which means you rather have a journey of a lifetime which includes heartbreak, highs and lows rather than a perfect life.

## Fight On Strong, Victory is Near

Always remember that...

After one year I stopped posting on my blog as I started to make much better progress. The second year was so much better, I was coming back alive again.

Now, I'm totally recovered, except for the anxiety and depression that still hounds me. I'll probably never be completely free of it. It will follow me for quite a while still. But I made great strides at the second year. The 1st year was HELL, the second year progress happened but it was so subtle and strange. I just started to do more and more things and get out of the house more. I moved during my second year and was able to do that, I could travel and go places and see shows, concerts, movies and the like and not feel that I was going to die anymore.

Today, I am a totally new person. I don't wish this journey on anyone and I relate to your suffering and pain. But I got there and you can too! No matter if it takes 2 years or 3, it will come in time, and will probably be subtle like my recovery was. I just stopped taking notice of the healing process and it happened anyway without me knowing. Some days were bad, others were like rays of sunshine after a dark, cloudy storm. But healing will come to everyone, it just takes so much time! I know it sucks to just have to wait but the end will be glorious as you make it up the mountain. Just rest assured that if others have done it, you will too. I just wanted to post my story to tell you that I had a hellish CT and I made it out alive and from such a small dose too. I've heard of people on 5mgs of this crap and they CT'ed. I was so afraid all of the time but I finally just had to push through and do it this way. I could not taper, there was so much wrapped up in me and my mind that I was forced to CT. I do not recommend this to anyone! DON'T CT! It will only cause more pain and be harder to heal.

Anyway, I just wanted to give others support and help others on their journeys. I wish all of you healing love, and light.

## Story 88

Hello everyone...

I was going to wait to write here until I was 100%....but all that is left for me is very low tinnitus.....and it is only occasionally...

I have been s/x free for 3 wks...

That may not seem long, but I know my body, and how my healing has progressed, so I feel I am, for the most part at the end of this journey....I was one that never had a window....some days were just better than others....

I had settled in for the time frame of being healed in 1 1/2 to 2 years just before my s/xs suddenly lifted.....it happened almost over night...of course I had been noticing improvements after acute ended (at about 6 wks)....

It just shows how everyone is different and yet very similar....

I lost hope of healing many times in the first several mos.....I was in the er 3 times in the acute phase....one trip they admitted me and did a complete heart work-up...everything was fine, but I thought I was dying....

Many times what kept me going was just reading on bbs about how so many people were suffering the same s/x as myself.....I also read the success stories over and over...Even with that I was not sure I would be one of the lucky ones...

Everyone one of you will heal it is just the matter of time and that is so hard to accept....for me the more I raged against the process the worse I felt...I was not always able to accept the process but I tried really hard....positive self talk over and over.....and over....

I finally convinced myself that I would heal, I just had to get through each day the best I could.....it was never EASY....

I will list as many s/x as I can remember...some I do not think I will forget easily....

- Head and ear pressure were one of the absolute worst
- Burning and tearing eyes
- Bad nausea
- Neck and jaw pain
- Sinus issues
- Insomnia
- Sweating
- Terrible chemical anxiety (always felt like I needed to move)
- Heart palps

B/p spikes  
Pulling muscles in stomach and back  
Pins and needles in hands and feet  
Trouble getting my breath, felt like there was a weight on my chest  
Exhaustion  
Headaches  
Did not want to leave my house or talk on the phone  
Adrenalin rushes  
Terrible nightmares  
Irritable bladder

I may have forgot a few....but I know I listed the worst ones.....

I wish everyone the best.....my heart goes out to everyone on here that is still

suffering.....and please remember you will all heal 😊💕

## Story 89

Well benzobuddies... I finally gave myself the true self-esteem and respect that I deserved and I'm truly a success story and I say that with more complete confidence that I have ever owned in my life. My life is changing and going to be positive. I have read so many self help books on subjects like being happy, depression, Bipolar, A.D.D. and I have done so,so much research on the internet. This last book I just read was the last bit of information to honestly cure me. Here's the details. I hope any of my logic helps anyone out there.

I am a creative born person and I keep many scraps of information in my head. I'm not so good at spitting it out in words or on paper and explaining myself because I suck at logic stuff. That's organizing which is logic. Guess what people, I don't care that I'm not good at logic. It's a flaw!!! Oh good before I was secretly quiet about not having great logic/organize skills and boy did that hurt me. I was very cruel to myself. This impaired me so bad all through my life. Oh my god, I couldn't admit to not being that organized and I felt horrible, I had horrible shame about it. It was way to horrible and embarrassing to admit to anyone. I carried that shame for a very long time. Exhausting and a royal waste of my time and that never once helped me in my life. What an idiot I was. I know that I need some logic in my life and I can improve it if I want, but that said,

I can also put as much creativity in my life as I want. Now that's exciting for me. This really is my choice. My children are all grown up so it's so me time! Creativity is my true gift at birth and my brain likes it so why wouldn't I do it? I know why I didn't ... old stupid stuck logic in my head. That logic is totally gone forever. I was a very black and white person. There was no grey and I knew that but what I didn't know is this was hindering me. Again, crap logic...lol .. it's gone. New logic is grey all the way. If everything is either good or bad and if it's bad it's bad, there cannot be any grey, only black, absolutely no grey areas, no white. Hey think about this ... lose friends?? Yup sure did so, as they did something I thought was bad, they were bad ... why can't my friends have flaws, I thought.?

Now that I live in the grey world my friends can have flaws and I can too and actually acknowledge them and choose to accept them or work on them if its going to benefit me or if it's actually hurting others I can work on it, and feel solidly comfortable with that. They are just flaws.. earth to Sue. Everyone have flaws. Yeah.. isn't that awesome, I can have flaws and i truly don't care. How did I do this... simple.. looked at my life and looked for negative patterns through a period of time and looked at them as not good or bad but just they just are. This way I could not feel horrible shame while analyzing my faults. Figure them out.. see what logic is making me do them and get rid of that logic. If it's hurting me in life.. I truly want to have fun. I have no fear or shame for anything in my past.. it's a downer I did some things that i'm not proud of but it is what it is. It's not good, or bad, it just is. What's important to do now is to not do or think with old logic from this point on. Yup, I can analyze my logic and change it when ever I want. It's that simple and it's actually fun to do cause it makes me feel good about myself and gives me more true self-esteem. Not that fake crap that everyone sees or that I think they

see. I really was a nice good person with just stupid old logic, just as some of you on this site are carrying as well ... but I can now feel like better and happier person. HAHHAHA!!! Yippee!!! I gave myself freedom to change the logic and drop shame. One more silly thing on logic... I was secretly jealous of lots of things. Again analyzed how it helped me. It never did, each and every time. Here's the kicker... it hurt me every time and gave me more shame, because my mother told me it was bad and I felt guilty each and every time I thought it.... More horrible shame.

I I took that logic/filter off .... Now the current plan is, if it sneaks back in.. it's just simple, remove it again. Laughing at myself, because hey, it's going to happen. I have to take myself lightly. It's no big deal. Almost everything in the world makes me think jealously, or did. That's our lives in this day in age. You can't get away from negativity. Speaking of negativity, who needs it?... it always produces negative results. Now, if I always present the world with positivity? 🤔 Think, think, yup it's true, now that can almost always produce positive. Almost always unless someone has a miscommunication error interpreting what I said and if so, no reason to get mad, it's just communication. Just apologize that they took it wrong. Their logic could be a little squewed, like mine was. Yes, if negativity comes flying at you ... neutralize it with another positive. If that doesn't work.. don't get riled. Do nothing. It's best to neutralize that person's negativity. You don't want to buy into their negativity. This is better for them and you.

Oh dear, here's a big one on this site. Angry at the doctors that put you all this crap! It only hurts you... yup YOU!. Don't you want to be nice to yourself? Let it go... in order to do that you have to somehow forgive. I know, very hard to do. Now, instead of getting angry, think productively for positive things that you can do and present the logic that you think might help for the next poor soul that gets hooked on this stuff to your doctor or whoever. I think of it this way. I think I'm a good person in the morning and I'm sure the doctor thinks he/she is a good person too. They have been trained and lured into this too people. Big Pharm, now that's an ugly beast!!! Yup, doctors logic is squewed or incorrect. But, until they learn anything else, their logic stays there. We have to enlighten them somehow, yes always positive, or in a neutral non-offensive manner so they can actually change their logic. Life is all about playing nice. They say everything you need to survive in this world, you learn in play school. I never got to go to play school.. so how would I know this...lol. Ok, here's another big, big lesson. I'm a narcissist and almost everyone else is too.

Our parents and the times we grew up gave us some real negative logic to follow. Hurt a lot of us bad. But, it's not their fault, they were doing mostly what they thought was right just as you did to if you had children. Guess what, you probably gave it to your children too. Yup, human dysfunction at its finest. History repeats it's again and again until someone breaks the chain. Some of you are going to say.. I really liked my childhood... well, I did too. But, according to the last book I read (Why is it always about you? by Sandy Hotchkiss), this is a really ugly mess in our society today.. a big, big monster and it's hurting everyone emotionally. Killing them day by day by day. Wake up and learn about this. I highly, highly recommend this book! I now know it

is very important what emotions I am portraying.... And yup some of are missing them or simple ignoring and pretending they are not there. Completely avoiding them. Shame and fear are the two biggest emotions very few people have been taught to understand. How can you remove fear if it's paralyzing your life if you don't understand how to deal with it?

I'm going to leave anyone with this tid bit of logic that I believe. Your choice to by into it if you want. People are born logical or emotional. Each child gets hurt by life in general because of the way we think. I personally think the creative people get the worst of it. This is a left brain (logic) world and we have to live in it when we are right brained (creative) and we have to learn to adapt to left brain. We are pushed that way, we even push ourselves that way. We are setting ourselves up for failure again and again until finally it punishes us and shames us so bad that we are paralyzed. I think this where anxiety comes from. I have to laugh because many mental illness I believe is due to low self esteem in our heads that is held secret only by us, but when diagnosed by the medical profession you are told it's depression, bipolar, ADD, ADHD, asperburgers... I'm sure the list goes on.

What ever label they give you, and I get it. You can't medically help someone unless you have a label (that just hold multiple traits are grouped together; human traits.. not mental human traits, normal human traits, but if you have 35 of the 50 listed as an example, lucky you, you can wear the label) so you can group the drugs or cbt that they require. But hey, would you rather hear that you have low self esteem that are giving you bipolar tendancies for example. Wouldn't you rather have on your medical records that you have low self esteem and we tried bipolar medication for this person low self esteem. I know I would have liked to know that my low self esteem was my problem and if I worked on it I could fix myself. I always secretly had low self esteem, didn't advertise it... yup carried shame again. But to give me bipolar too... oh god, yup more shame..... shame, shame, shame. A lot of it is learning why you have shame and how to fix it. Ok... I'm done that's my story/analysis of how I perceive all of this mess. Or some of it anyways. I truly hope this works for absolutely anyone out there. I will fill blessed if I can help anyone. Think about what I'm saying.. see if any of this leans into how your thinking.

Love you all very much... benzobuddies and you had lots to do with it. Whether I wrote something on your blog or not. I read lots of blogs and never left my foot print that I was there and everything on this site helped me.

Guess what ... after thinking I was finally important enough person to have my own blog.... Yes my low self esteem had me thinking I didn't deserve a my own blog. I hardly used it and I don't have a need to anymore. I am cured and well on my way to a normal balanced healthy life.

Big, big thanks to Buddy – the jumping buddies group!!! Thank you Buddy for starting that one. I really liked to interact on that blog.

(lastly I know there are lot's of spelling mistakes and a lot of the sentences don't make perfect sense ... but hey .. I don't care!!! Won't carry any shame for that)

oh ya one more thing ... because of this book I know what I really need for real self esteem!!!

## Story 90

Hello fellow BBs,

Let me start by saying that I have been waiting about two months to write this post, and it feels great to be able to do it finally. Next month I will be starting a new career in a new city, knowing that the worst days with respect to benzo symptoms are behind me. Going through this process was arduous, even as a prn user, but I can confidently say that time has cured me. Reading some of these success stories gave me the encouragement that recovery is eventually possible, so I thought it was important to share my story too.

tl;dr - prn user of Ativan/Ambien for about 18 months who has fully recovered with no recurring sx about 5.5 months after w/d

Allow me to give you a snapshot of my current situation. My symptoms have completely disappeared and have not returned for a number of weeks, including any cognitive impairment issues. I am enjoying a coffee that would have pushed me over the edge just a few short months ago. And, while I rarely consume alcohol, I can say that I've had a few drinks at recent social functions with no ill effects. The biggest break, however, came the other week when I was given an offer for a full-time opportunity in a new career. To provide a bit of context I left my most recent job in August with the belief that I would be chronically unemployed or underemployed due to my impaired mental state and ability to get through interviews. Receiving this opportunity was the last step in my recovery process and was the catalyst that allowed me to write this post.

My situation began three years ago (late 2011) while I was in a stressful graduate program. I went to a local pdoc who prescribed some Ambien (10 mg prn) for sleeping. I started taking it a couple of times per week, and I didn't notice - or so I thought - any side effects. In March 2012 I was also prescribed Adderall (10 mg twice daily) and Ativan (0.5 mg prn). I started taking the Adderall immediately, but I didn't even open the Ativan bottle for six months. I was getting by on Adderall and Ambien and not feeling any side effects and was even pleased with my improved cognition and concentration made possible by the two medications. I was excelling both professionally and personally. However, in September 2012, I began to search for a full-time position and encounter the stress of the interviews. I started taking the Ativan before interviews so I wouldn't be completely worked up. After I finally landed on a job after school, I settled on a cadence of taking Ativan on a prn basis, usually on Sunday nights to reset myself before the start of the new week.

I noticed my first symptoms around February/March 2013. I had a head pressure that wouldn't go away. I also had difficulty speaking, and this was the first cognitive issue that I experienced even though I didn't recognize it at the time. Almost magically these symptoms would disappear after taking an Ativan, and I had assumed it was just my nerves and anxiety over the anticipation of graduating, getting married, and starting a new job. I ended up getting married in May 2013, and it was my spouse who noticed my

erratic behavior after having taken Ambien and Ativan. She said I would shake violently in my sleep - enough to give her motion sickness, and there were times when she caught me in the kitchen binge eating on food. The worst part, however, was that I would wake up and manage to take two or three Ambien pills after my initial dose. The only logical conclusion we could come to was that the shaking would wake me up, and I would think in my drugged state that I would need to take Ambien because Ambien = sleep. Of course, I would wake up the next morning with no recollection whatsoever of these events.

I obtained a primary care physician in the new city where I lived, and he told me to discontinue Adderall, but he didn't seem to take issue with prn use of Ambien or Ativan. Meanwhile, the head pressure was still there, my mental faculties had degraded - I thought Adderall had fried my brain, and I was having increased anxiety. All of these factors adversely impacted my ability to succeed at my new job, and I felt like I was having to work blindfolded with one hand tied behind my back. I had previously been an articulate individual, but I had devolved into a mumblor who would lose his train of thought mid sentence. I had an inability to concentrate, horrible insomnia, anhedonia, and what I know recognize as DP/DR - at the time I would have described as an out-of-body experience. I returned to the doctor's office, and I was prescribed a nasal decongestant for post-nasal drip. The doctor's office thought my general malaise might be caused by poor quality sleep - true - because of what was causing the inflammation, such as sleep apnea - false. All the while I fully disclosed the medications I was taking and the frequency with which I took them. None of the four physicians I had seen in the span of a year raised an eyebrow at the Ativan and Ambien combo.

I did try quitting both Ativan and Ambien unsuccessfully from July 2013 - July 2014, but my symptoms would either get worse or, at best, not improve. I would have horrible rebound insomnia which would lead me back to Ativan and Ambien to reset my sleeping schedules. I had more or less made peace with my symptoms and thought I could live with them until I felt like my cognitive abilities were degrading further. It got so bad that in June 2014 I was overwhelmed when trying to order from a fast food menu. I went home and after searching about my symptoms and medications stumbled upon BB.

Everything suddenly made sense. All of the symptoms were consistent with benzodiazepine use. While I knew about the side effects of chronic benzodiazepine use, I had ruled it out as a possibility since I was a prn user taking the medicine at the prescribed dose. Furthermore, I thought if it were a possibility that one of the physicians would have mentioned it as a root cause of my symptoms since I had disclosed the medication I was taking. It was at this point I realized that simply ceasing the meds for 7-10 days to see if things improve wouldn't be long enough to see if symptoms would go away.

I quit Ambien and Ativan cold turkey in early July. The first two weeks were rough as far as rebound insomnia, but my other symptoms were stable. After a few weeks I noticed my throat wasn't scratchy anymore, and I stopped taking the decongestants. My spouse said I had stopped shaking in my sleep. I was also able to sleep a normal 8-9 hours

rather than waking up after every 2-3 hours during the night. My level of confusion went down to the point where I could hold a sustained telephone conversation. (But I was still losing my train of thought and having trouble searching for words.)

The muscle spasms/jelly legs/motor skills had improved by August, but I still felt as though my cog fog wasn't improving. Then it hit me without me realizing it initially. In September I was having periods of lucidity for a few hours in the late afternoon. I don't know why it was this time of day, but I felt like I was my pre-benzo self. I knew that I was on the path to full recovery. I tried some coffee around that time, and that was a huge mistake. 😞 I don't know if I suffered a setback, but my windows disappeared. It wasn't until October that I started seeing more improvement. Four months out I was beginning to have entire days of clarity but still slightly impaired cognitive abilities. However, in December it was like a switch flipped on in my brain. A few weeks ago I realized that I was no longer searching for words or having any difficulty thinking about what I was going to say. The change was almost too subtle to notice. The final validation was getting a full-time job in a career that much more closely matches where I wanted to be two years ago.

While I am cautiously approaching the coming weeks and months, I have been completely asymptomatic for the last 2-3 weeks. Even if symptoms do recur, I know that I can just give things more time. I've talked with a number of fellow BB members who've expressed concern, especially about cog fog/impairment, and I hope this can give encouragement that these symptoms are reversible. In closing, I want to thank the wealth of information available on this forum. Without it, it is likely I would still be taking the meds and suffering the side effects. 😊👍

Thanks for reading if you've made it this far, and happy healing!

## Story 91

This is super long, there are cliffs at the bottom. I really wanted to be thorough, and share my story and everything I have learned through this experience. I cannot thank the Benzo Buddie community enough.

The start of my success story...

Waking up from a 7-year coma, prescribed dependence and getting free.

### Introduction

As you may already be able to tell, this is going to be a little lengthy. I encourage everyone to read the whole thing, and feel free to share with anyone. If you are like me, you probably want to skim the cliffs first and decide if it's worth your time to read fully; there are cliffs at the bottom.

Everything in here is my opinion, based on my experience, perspective and research. Please look up stuff on your own as you go along and/or Google any word or concept that you don't understand. I would advise you to take this same approach with anything you are prescribed from your doctor. I'm not trying to bash doctors, it is just important to remember that doctors are human and not superheroes and don't know everything. General Medicine or Family Medicine doctors, serve a good purpose, but are rarely experts of much. I am not claiming to be an expert in regards to anything, but I have educated myself and am more knowledgeable about Benzos and Benzo withdrawal than any of the doctors I have personally met.

We will, for the most part, be talking about Benzodiazepines. The most famous Benzodiazepine is Valium, though there are many other popular & highly prescribed variants, such as Xanax, Klonopin & Ativan, they are almost all the same mechanism, differing in degrees of potency, metabolism and half-life. Some modern sleeping pills such as Ambien and Lunesta are also in the Benzodiazepine 'family' they are like a mini super dose, with an insane half-life, being almost completely out of your system in 8-16 hours. We'll be abbreviating Benzodiazepines with Benzos, with Benzos consisting of any of the Benzo family, but in my case for the most part, we'll be referring to Klonopin.

My story is about how easy it is to become chemically dependent on Benzos, how they take over your nervous system, the difficulty and process of coming off of them.

—

Setting (from the start).

It was right around 7 or so years ago, that I walked into my doctor's office for a regular check up. I'll give you a little bit of a setting as it pertains to the story. I was 27 years old. I was in a very rocky marriage for about 5 years, I had 2 children, ages 2 & 4, and I was working a full time corporate job with a pretty good company. About a year prior, I had quit playing in a band that was moderately successful. My ex-wife had given me an

ultimatum to either quit the band or she would leave with my kids. I was a little bummed to not be pursuing my passions, but I didn't want to lose my kids.

How I first was prescribed Benzos.

An attempt to quit smoking.

I explained to my doctor that I was exercising pretty regularly; she noted that I was fairly healthy and that I should continue to try to quit smoking, to which I agreed. I also casually told my doctor, that I was having a little insomnia & felt stressed from not playing music. The doctor had insisted that I try Zyban. Zyban is an SSRI or antidepressant normally distributed as Wellbutrin. Many of the users of Wellbutrin had noticed they had lost the desire to smoke cigarettes while taking the medicine and so the manufacturers decided to market it as drug to quit smoking. They knew the stigma often associated with antidepressants, so they renamed it Zyban and trained their pharmaceutical reps to urge doctors to suggest it as a way to quit smoking. So I respond to my doctor, "what is the drug?" She explains that it is Bupropion or more commonly known as Wellbutrin and that taking it for roughly about 6 weeks should help me to quit smoking and could have some other added benefits, like better sleep & mood, and might help with my disdain from not playing music, but those would be, "only very mild and helpful side effects." She assured me that I shouldn't worry about any of the other side effects, as those are very rare. The only personal experience that I had with antidepressants was when my mother was given it for a few months when I was in high school; she morphed into a different person that I did not know. It was super scary, she was just kind of blank, she got off of it right away and returned to normal shortly after. I was apprehensive but I thought, "I trust my doctor, I'll give it a try."

Selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRIs).

It was a Saturday morning, I had access to work by myself on Saturdays and catch up the excess work left over each week. I really enjoyed working Saturdays, I would crank the music, be focused, get junk done, and get some overtime. This morning I think it was my 3rd dose. I remember as I was pulling up to the back of the building, everything looked different, not like hallucinations, but just everything was tinged orange like with an Instagram filter or something. I went to the door, turned off the alarm, and made my way to my desk, but everything was way off. I was unfamiliar with my surroundings, and I kept asking myself, "What am I doing here?" I tried to shake it off, but I kept having this mix of metallic taste, and plastic like smells. I was unable to focus and I was getting extremely agitated. I kept thinking this must be a weird side effect; maybe it will go away if I get some coffee, maybe it will go away if I drink some water, and maybe it will go away if I eat. But I didn't want to eat, or drink or anything. I just wanted to escape this agitation. I decided I would go outside and have a smoke. I lit my cigarette, and it was instantly disgusting, and I didn't want it. Now I was annoyed because I wanted to want a smoke. Whatever the mechanism is that stops the desire for smoking, is a giant blanket that stops the desire for a whole bunch of things. I was getting angrier and angrier, I decided to lock up and go home. When I got home, I was so angry I just laid on the floor and told my wife to stay away from me and keep the kids away from me. After a couple days I felt pretty normal again. That was the last time I took or will ever

take any form of antidepressant.

How about trying a mild medicine, Klonopin.

Sometime several weeks or months later I was back at the doctor with a mild shoulder injury. Again the topic of smoking came up and I explained to her that I am not taking any form of SSRI no way, no how. She said that she had another idea; I should try a medicine called Klonopin. She said the “K” is a Benzodiazepine, a cousin of Valium or kind of like a super mild form of Ambien. I had taken Ambien before, and didn’t have any problem with it. I actually kind of like the weird psychedelic sleep state it gave you. I was like “Ok”. She said to try to quit smoking and take one .5 mg tablet before bedtime. So I did. The first couple weeks I didn’t really notice much except that it was working to help with my sleep. After about week 3 however things started to get ‘different’. I noticed that I wasn’t really stressed much, about anything, ever. I am normally pretty easy going, but this was to like a super human level. I didn’t really think much of it. I remember having a few friends over for a BBQ and while I only had like 2 beers, I was completely hammered, like passing out, drooling drunk. I didn’t really make the connection at the time, I thought I must’ve had an empty stomach or been hungry or something.

I became more and more indifferent.

A few months later I separated from my wife and eventually got a divorce. I am not blaming this outcome on the medicine, just maybe my state of tranquilization helped spur it along. In other words, I was most likely getting a divorce at some point, but because of my medicated state, now seemed like the obvious time. We had tried to work things out for years, but I was just worn out. I could not fix things and I didn’t want my kids to live in a house with non-stop fighting. If anything good came from this medicine, was that it gave me the emotional disconnect to get out of a toxic relationship. On the other hand, I feel like maybe I could have handled things maybe a little more sensitively or maturely. It’s hard to say what role the medicine played in all or any of that, as those circumstances are never pretty. I don’t know if the process would have been any smoother or if things would be as tough now as they are if we had split up under different circumstances, it’s impossible to say. I just know that regardless of anything I have to be accountable for my own actions.

After a divorce.

At this point I dove into work and just tried to figure out where to go or what to do next, the weird thing with the K was that I had to go to the doctor every 3 months to get it refilled. I didn’t think anything of it at the time; though later this would be a red flag that maybe this medicine isn’t that benign. I explained to the doctor what I was going through and what I was experiencing with the medicine and she suggested that I stay on it at this time, as it, ‘may be helpful to you during this time’. I was like whatever. She also told me that if I was having a bad day with everything that I could break the pill into 4ths and take a 4th as needed or take 1/4th 3x a day w/ breakfast, lunch & dinner. And that’s what I did. I wasn’t really thinking about what the medicine was doing, I just knew that I missed my kids, and that I had to continue working, and this medicine somehow seemed to be the glue that kept all that together.

Lucky to make it through this phase.

The next year really only had a couple of themes pertaining to the K. The first is I became extremely social, going out very often, more social than I have ever been in my life. I started playing in a band again and was partying a lot. I had a complete numbness to consequence. I would equate this to being alert yet sedated to risk or 'tranquilized', hence the name tranquilizers and/or sedatives. It is a hard thing to describe. During this phase I didn't really give any thought to drinking too much, or drinking and driving, or being careful "socially". I was careless with people's feelings and I was careless with my own. It's not that I was in rebellion or didn't care or anything like that, it was just that I didn't have the wave of thought that would normally make you careful or hesitant. Part of this was obviously exponentiated by the divorce and all of that, but the line was non-existent for me. This was especially odd when it is my personality to be more cautious.

Feeling the hook.

There were 2 scenarios that came up with running out of Klonopin; the first is I just ran out once. I didn't really know at the time that I 'needed it'. You see, I never craved it or got high from it or anything like that, it was almost like hunger, if I missed a dose, my body would say, 'hey you need to take your medicine' and I would. So it ran out, and the next day, I thought I was going to die, I was extremely sick, ice cold, shaking, I called in to work and slept all day. I called the doctor's office and they called in a partial refill until I could get in. As obvious as that sounds I didn't really make the connection directly, that it was the medicine, I thought I might have had a bug or something, and not having the medicine was just making me more uncomfortable or something. Later that year my car got broken into and my gym bag was stolen that had my medicine in it, I knew I needed more medicine immediately and this is when I realized that there was a problem with this medicine. Again the doctor's called in some more medicine and I knew I wanted to get off of this stuff, but I still didn't fully understand what I was up against.

I don't know why I am still taking this.

At this point I really felt like the medicine wasn't doing anything I could really see, and I didn't really know why I was taking it, other than not having it would make me ill. I started to cut the medicine down and started to notice some weird patterns pop up. A mild feeling of paranoia and cynicism took over. I got really annoyed with most of my current circumstances, I was frustrated with my job & my band, I didn't like them anymore and became slightly paranoid that they were bad environments, that people were somehow taking advantage of me. I felt held down and I wanted to get free. I sort of started to passive aggressively rebel against everything, I eventually got laid off from my job, and decided to quit my band. I developed this teenage; 'screw everybody' mentality mixed with nonchalance and didn't really feel any consequence to burning any bridges.

Round 1

Cold turkey.

At this point I was taking what I thought was a very small dose of Klonopin at only like 1/8th of a pill 3x a day. My girlfriend and I were looking for a change of pace and decided to move to Austin from Dallas. I weaned down a little more and as we were packing up, I decided I weaned down enough and just chucked the rest of my medicine and we moved. I felt I was taking an irrelevant dose at this point, (way wrong). I'll go into more detail later about the easy to misunderstand dosing of Benzos.

6 months of hell.

When we got to Austin, I felt ill for a few days, but overall I thought I was doing pretty well.

Panic attacks.

I have had a few panic attacks in my life. When I was 18, I pretty much had a life changing nervous breakdown, and from that point I experienced a few minor panic attacks. In total I would say that I had a total of between 5-10 total anxiety attacks in my life before Klonopin. I learned to manage them using coping mechanisms. Again they weren't that frequent or severe so I really didn't give them much thought. I would describe them as an adrenaline rush, with a feeling of fear or doom. They would usually only last about 15-30 minutes at the most with only a few minutes being intense. Other times they would only be like a 10 second 'rush'. I don't know what triggered them or their underlying cause. Sometimes they would come in clusters for a few days, and sometimes they would not appear for several months or longer. But like I said, I became pretty good at managing them and didn't really even consider them as anything that affected my overall well-being or way of life.

Tolerance.

One thing that I noticed with Klonopin, is since I started taking it, I didn't really have any anxiety or panic attacks, at all, at first. After taking it for almost a year, I started to have them coming back, minor but still it was weird. It seemed to be they were just increasingly emerging more frequently and at random. All the while taking the medicine, it was like the medicine was not working anymore.

I must really be screwed up.

So now we're in Austin, new apartment & new jobs. I am off the medicine, basically cold turkey. Our goal is to start playing music in Austin and all of that jazz. But here is what happened. I became insanely paranoid with a feeling of fear & depression almost 24/7. I never wanted to leave the apartment. I am amazed that I even worked a job. I began to have intense panic attacks and rage. I tried every night to drink myself to sleep and not freak out my girlfriend. She had to feel lonely and helpless during this time. The crazy thing about this is that I didn't make the connection to Klonopin. I thought I was depressed and possibly manic. You see, I was off the medicine at this time for well over a month or two, and from all I have learned about most drugs at this point, is that usually withdrawal is intense at first and can last for a few weeks or longer but that symptoms should start to diminish. It is because of this information that I thought it was something non-related to being off of the medicine. I began to believe

that I had some sort of mental issues or psychosis and that Klonopin was a healing medicine to me. I figured I could just tough it out, and maybe use self-calming and breathing techniques and become better. I became an expert in self-cognitive behavioral therapy. I mastered recognizing and re-programming negative thoughts. It is my opinion that CBT is an excellent treatment option for stress relief and improving your state of mind. It also my opinion that CBT, not drugs should be the number one recommended treatment for anxiety. However, my situation continued and became excruciatingly worse.

Protracted withdrawal.

I learned of protracted withdrawal well after the fact. Protracted withdrawal is a situation that is almost completely exclusive to Benzodiazepines and the withdrawal process. Some people have been known to go into protracted withdrawal while still on their medicine due to tolerance. Protracted withdrawal is often linked with post acute withdrawal, i.e. an infant born with withdrawal or temporary mental deficiency with a drug-abusing mother. This is different in the case of Benzos. There is also post acute withdrawal with Benzos, but we'll go into that later. Right now we are just talking about protracted withdrawal. What is protracted withdrawal from Benzos? I would invite you at this point to do some google'ing and read up on it, as I am not going to break all of it down or paste a bunch of literature here. But I will try explaining some.

YO GABA GABA

Before we proceed, let's break down GABA, GABA receptors in the brain and how Benzos work. Again I am going to speak very generically and invite you to do more research if you are clinically minded. Otherwise just read on and I will explain the meat and potatoes of the subject. Your brain functions through a series of communicating agents called neurotransmitters. The head honcho or main neurotransmitter is called GABA; GABA regulates the entire nervous system and regulation of muscle tone, and more. There are also GABA receptors in several organs including the stomach, kidneys, bladder and more. Benzos work basically by 'enhancing' the effect of the GABA receptors. In your brain you have chemical reactions that make you excited and chemical reactions that make you calm. Your brain works on it's own to balance these every split second. When you get startled and have an adrenaline rush your brain gives you the chemicals you need to for fighting or running. Too much of these chemicals unchecked and you have panic and in extreme cases seizures. Benzos have become the #1 seizure medicine. Your brain also naturally produces the chemical reaction to make you calm, allowing you to breath at a normal rate and sleep, amongst other things. In reality it works more like a sink governor, allowing a natural flow of energy to function and think, and increases or slows that flow, as the brain deems necessary. What happens when you use Benzos long term, sometimes in as little time as a few weeks for some people, the brain stops relying on it's own GABA to calm itself down. You see, an outside chemical is stimulating the GABA, and our brain is very lean, and does not want excess, the brain and body are constantly fighting to maintain perfect balance. When something from the outside starts doing something the brain normally does on it's own, it stops doing that action on it's own. So now your brain is dependant on the outside chemical to regulate your GABA. When you remove the

chemical, the brain is not quick to change its course and you have acute withdrawal, where there is very little to no GABA stimulation. This is why severe alcoholics who detox too rapidly or quit cold turkey can go into seizures. Alcohol also works on GABA. And this is also what also happens to people who abruptly quit Benzos after long-term use. (Long term being as little as a few weeks for some).

Back to protracted withdrawal.

Protracted withdrawal is when you are past the stage of acute withdrawal but you are still having many of the issues that come with the withdrawal of Benzos. The reason for this is that it can take anywhere from 6 months to 2 or more years for your natural GABA receptors to heal and function as they did before Benzos. This isn't really the case in drugs like alcohol, cocaine and opiates. Usually the damage that is done by those drugs is done. The body goes through withdrawals and goes forward as normal as possible with the toxicity out of the system. Yes, there is some long-term damage and a healing process with those examples, but typically not encompassing of the entire nervous system. Feel free to research more about those on your own.

Paranoid.

So what I was left with during this time was fear, extreme fear almost 24/7. This lasted for close to a year and wasn't going to let up until I either I reinstated the medicine or my brain healed. It is important to note that this 'fear' was not mental, but rather chemical from my brain. My nerves were basically firing at all times, with no slowing down. The governor was off the clock, and the chemicals were gone as well.

If I would have stayed off, I would have healed in time, maybe a few more months, maybe a year or more but I would have had this all behind me by now.

Round 2

If it helps you, you should maybe try it again.

My girlfriend and I moved back to Dallas, and I immediately went to my doctor and explained to her what I was going through. Now mind you I did not have the knowledge of the information I just shared with you. I just thought that I was depressed or mentally sick some how. My doctor assumed that I was extremely stressed with the move, and possibly mildly depressed, she suggested I reinstate Klonopin and just see, 'how I do'. So I did, and it was a miracle, I was back to normal! I reconnected with friends and family and got back into playing music again and found a new good job. When I was in Austin I had learned how to play poker, it was one of the few things I could do to successfully pass the time, and now that I was in a temporary better state of mind, I began to understand the game better and was winning at high rate. The band I was in eventually broke up, but things were still going pretty good overall for about a year or so.

I was reinstated with the medicine, my receptors were saturated, and I was moving into tolerance withdrawal. Tolerance withdrawal is when you are taking a chemical, but you have become tolerant to it, your body starts to slowly go into withdrawal from the medicine while you are still on it.

Then things started to get pretty weird again.

I started to feel flat out stupid. My memory and attention span were very limited. I really don't know how to describe it any better. It was massive, yet subtle at the same time. I would just go blank all of the time, and forget things. It wasn't like your normal forgetfulness, where you would be like, "I'm having a hard time remembering such & such." It was more like you would forget things and not even know it. Amnesia. Others would rarely notice, and I would rarely notice. I started to lose the desire to play music or hang with friends. I was having a hard time playing poker without just going into a fog and playing terrible. It was around this time I got a job at a music school. This was great because it kind of forced me to be around music and musicians and it was really close to home. But it was still weird; I continually became more and more dumb and dull. I continued to work and eventually was promoted to GM of the school. This was a lot of stressful work, rewarding, but long hours and stressful. The school was also in a shift with some new ownership that was complicating the business as well as the day to day routine. I felt like at this time I needed to come off of this medicine as I was having a hard time focusing on the smallest details.

You could take the medicine indefinitely.

I went to my doctor, and my doctor suggested that I stay on the medicine 'indefinitely' and that it was probably stress that was causing my apathy and cloudiness. I knew it was the medicine that was doing this to me and I needed to get off of it. I didn't want to cold turkey like I did last time, so I decided I would try something different. I would take all of the medicine I had left and break into tiny pieces, like 1/16ths, and wean down over a few months from 1/8th 3x a day, 2 1/16th 3x a day, to 2x a day, etc. until I was down to only taking crumbs a few times a day. Throughout this process a couple different things started to happen. One is that I started to regain some clarity, not fully, but in bits and pieces. Secondly, I started to play my guitar again and was getting excited about the possibility of trying to play in a band again.

The rapid taper and jump.

It was working! So I thought... I started to notice a ringing in my ears, a high-pitched ringing all of the time. I would get 'adrenaline surges' and mild panic attacks. I would get tingling in my fingertips and I would get sick to my stomach. I was feeling like all of this was manageable and I would march on. I ran out of medicine and was out for a couple weeks and was feeling great. I got over the worst transitional season at the music school and I was looking forward to the future and being off of the medicine. Then I was given a choice to be demoted or fired. I was informed that I was not able to 'handle the job', even though the school continued to be one of the most profitable in the nation. Regardless, in objective hindsight, part of this could have been the new megalomaniac owner and the remaining powerless owners, and part of it could have been that I was not doing the work at a level that I was expected to. I mean, I was way sicker than I realized. The truth is, probably somewhere in between. Anyways, I was like, "whatever, I'm over it." The demotion would net me less than I was willing to accept so I just accepted that I was being fired and decided to move on. I felt like I was doing well with it. But with it being a school, I had over a hundred kids and parents that

wanted to talk to me and ask what was going on, etc. etc. I was now about 3 weeks out of medicine, I learned later that you are to avoid stress as much as possible during your withdrawal from Benzos...

#### Acute withdrawal

I was not prepared for what came next. I was relaxing one evening a few days after all of that drama, when my heart started beating faster. My hands became clammy and I could not catch my breath. I decided I was maybe having a little anxiety attack probably brought on by some of the recent events. But it got more intense, my left arm and leg began to rock back and forth on their own. I was starting to get freaked out, I hopped in a hot shower to try to calm down, but it was just getting worse, second by second. At this point my chest was starting to hurt like I was being stabbed with a hot skewer. My mouth was dry and I couldn't formulate sentences, I got into bed and turned out the lights. My heart rate continued to climb and I felt a tingling in my face and body. I was certain that I was having a heart attack and asked my girlfriend to call 911. The medics arrived and rolled me over, my lip was quivering and I was praying I would not die. They attached EKGs to my chest, arms and legs. They warmed up the electro pads as they printed out the results. They said the EKG looks good but I need oxygen. They gave me oxygen and asked me to sit up. They told me I was 100% not having a heart attack. And I was most likely having an anxiety attack. I asked them, "but what about my arm & leg convulsing?" They said, "yeah man, it's a pretty bad one, you might want to go to the ER just to ease your mind." I went that night to the ER and I went again the next day, more chest pains and convulsions and shaking, so I went a few days later and a few days after that. They did EKGs, X-Rays, MRIs, and MRIs with contrast and continually just told me to go home and try to relax. One doctor, suggested I take an Ativan, (similar to Xanax or Klonopin), just to see how I feel. I took the small white tablet and laid on the ER bed for 15 minutes shaking and shaking. And then the shaking stopped. I sat up and took a deep breath. I got up and walked out. On the drive home I was 100% normal and calm. I knew that it was going to be the biggest challenge I ever had trying to come off of this medicine.

#### Now what?

In acute withdrawal I was basically having mostly physical symptoms with some anxiety attacks sprinkled in for good measure. I was having mini seizures, tingling sensations, burning sensations, shortness of breath, increased heart rate, most of the day, most of the time. I had to remedy this somehow as I had to get back to work as soon as possible. I couldn't function like this. I decided I would get back on the medicine and research everything I could about getting off of this medicine and not attempt to get off until I had devoured every piece of information I could about how to best do it and then go from there. I was determined to not be on this poison 'indefinitely'.

#### Round 3

#### Dr Ashton & Benzo Buddies

Through my research I discovered the Ashton Manual. The Ashton Manual was written by a doctor in the UK who was treating thousands of people coming off of Benzos and outlined their experience with withdrawal.

If you are considering coming off Benzos, I strongly urge you to start with the Ashton Manual.

Dr Ashton suggests switching over to Valium, as it has a much longer half-life and can be administered in doses much smaller than Klonopin or Xanax. Though this is sometimes not tolerated well with Klonopin in particular. You see Klonopin & Xanax are 20x stronger than Valium, i.e. .5 mg of Klonopin is equal to 20mg of Valium. You can also get Valium in liquid form making it easier to taper smaller doses. The previous attempts at getting off the k, even though I was taking the tiniest pieces, I was still jumping cold turkey from 5-10mg of Valium equivalent. In order to successfully taper I was going to have to get liquid Valium or do some other sort of liquid titration directly with the Klonopin. We'll go more into that later. But at least at this point I knew what I needed to do, and I knew it was going to take a long time. It is suggested to taper at a rate of 10% cuts every 10-14 days, with slowing down, as things get rough. It took me almost a year (including stabilization) to successfully taper.

I went to another doctor and proceeded to explain my situation. I asked for Valium, the doctor declined and suggested an SSRI; I said thanks, but no thanks. I told him that I just needed to reinstate long enough to get my sickness under control and then I wanted to immediately begin to taper off. He was unfortunately unknowledgeable of the side effects with coming off of Benzos. He at one point even suggested that I take a dose every other day. That is terrible idea due to interdose withdrawals, leaving the body with inconsistent blood/Benzo levels. Thankfully the doctor was at least somewhat helpful and sympathetic and agreed to give me as much K as I needed to reinstate and taper.

I also found a website & forum, Benzobuddies.org. This has been the biggest help to me in all of this.

I began reinstatement in July of 2012. Within a few weeks I was stabilized and functioning well. I started by taking a consistent dose at the same exact time, everyday for 1 month and then began to taper. Making small cuts along the way. Below is a list of my cuts sorted by dates. I will go into more detail about milk titration and the withdrawal symptoms that went along with them as we go along.

7/12 - reinstated & stabilized.

9/12 - began slow dry cut taper.

2/13 - switched to milk titration.

\*amount divided by 3x daily

.180 - 3/08/13

.125 - 3/12/13 - big jump

(switched from 3x daily to 2x daily)

.093 - 3/18/13  
.083 - 3/23/13 - held  
.075 - 4/16/13 - held  
.072 - 4/22/13  
.060 - 5/11/13  
.055 - 5/16/13  
.050 - 5/21/13  
.044 - 5/24/13  
.037 - 6/01/13  
.035 - 6/03/13  
.030 - 6/11/13  
.020 - 6/13/13  
.015 - 6/17/13  
.010 - 6/21/13  
.005 - 6/25/13  
6/29/13 - Benzo Free.

September through January was pretty normal for me. As normal in regards to what I had gone through before when dry cutting the medicine. I was working and functioning at an overall pretty decent level. At this point I could not cut my pills any smaller while maintaining consistency. So since I could not cut the pills any smaller, and since my doctor was unwilling to prescribe liquid Valium, I had to find another way. I learned about titration. I started with a water titration and eventually switched to a milk titration. The way it works is like this: You take your pill and crush in a mortar into powder. You then mix it with a specific amount of milk. Next you extract the amount for your dose and dispose of the rest. (This is how it is most commonly done). For me I did it a little bit different. I would make my mixture and then extract my dose keeping the leftover liquid for a few days. The milk mixture would usually last for about 3-4 days and then I would have to make a new dose. I would take my dose morning, noon and night. And after a couple of weeks I would take a slightly smaller dose. Rinse and repeat. If you are trying to taper, you can find lots of information on the internet and on Benzobuddies, or through the forums. Feel free to shoot me a message and I would be more than willing to go into more detail about this process with you.

Symptoms and side effects of Benzo withdrawal (while tapering)

At first I thought everything was going pretty smooth. I thought I was going to get off easy. Then one day it hit. It was like I could feel the medicine unlatching from my GABA receptors. Pandora's box opened up. That February began the hardest time of my life. I quit drinking all alcohol, and will continue to do so for the minimum of a year. As I stated earlier, alcohol acts on the same receptors as Benzos and will interfere in the healing process. I became sensitive to all processed foods, sugars, fried foods and caffeine, so I cut all of those out as well. I became a vigilante when it came to possible interferences with healing. Cutting out all vitamins, supplements, and OTC medications, with the exception of aspirin, though I cut out aspirin as well at the end of my taper. I refused to take or ingest anything that could possibly be a hindrance to healing or that might agitate my hyper sensitive nervous system. I had zero energy

and it was a challenge to do anything besides sleep and sit on the couch. I napped and slept whenever I could. I miraculously continued to go to work everyday, though I still really don't know how.

Here are some of the things that happened during the next months, at random. Some are interconnected, and some are repeated due to variations. Some things were consistent every day; some would only come on for brief seconds. Things intensified and peaked and then gradually subsided over the course of the next 6 months.

I know there are more specific medical terms for most of these, but I am just going to explain them generically. Many readers may be unfamiliar with some of the medical terms or abbreviations otherwise.

- General anxiety, anxiety & panic attacks.
- Hyperventilation and shortness of breath, breathing into paper bags helps with hyperventilation.
- Hypochondria with a constant feeling of heart attacks or heart issues.
- Mood swings, going from happy to depressed in seconds.
- Disconnected emotionally.
- Became quiet and introverted.
- Refused to go outside, except back and forth to work.
- Broke off all communication with all friends and family, everyone.
- Developed red and white splotchy spots all over my skin.
- Heart 'flutters' and palpitations.
- Buzzing or humming feeling in my chest and torso.
- Hair turned to straw and began to fall out.
- Wasted away, with complete muscle atrophy, losing 30lbs.
- High pitched ringing in the ear.
- Tiny red blood dots on my legs.
- No strength.
- Lethargy.
- Brain zaps, it felt like a large wave of electricity was washing through my skull, most often when trying to sleep at the very second of falling asleep.
- Became afraid, paranoid and depressed.
- Audio and visual hallucinations. Not like a psychedelic trip more of just hearing and seeing random things.
- A constant feeling of physical, emotional and mental discomfort.
- Constant feeling of doom and obsessing over possible worst-case scenarios.
- Heaviness in my chest and other times a sharp pain in my chest.
- Tingling sensations, pins and needles in my arms and legs.
- Sometimes I would feel like there was water on my arms or legs.
- I lost all creative desire or inspiration.
- No motivation.
- Felt like I had a string of hair on my face or arms, or a bug crawling on me.
- Could not formulate thoughts.
- Often in a constant state of mental fog.

- I had a period with random suicidal thoughts and suicidal fixations.
- \*I was not suicidal, and knew that I wasn't, but I just had these crazy uncontrollable thoughts. They only lasted a few weeks and even while having them I was able to rationalize that this was the chemical reaction in my head, and I promised to get help if they persisted.
- \*\*\*If you are having suicidal thoughts and feel unsafe and/or considering self harm please get help.\*\*\*
- I would be freezing cold and burning hot.
- Insomnia set in and rest was rare. Several months of hardly any sleep.
- Felt out of my body or in a dream.
- Vertigo, dizziness or a feeling of just being at an angle (really weird).
- Rage and anger, a general 'meanness'.
- Muscle spasms and tightness in the shoulders, neck and back.
- Headaches
- Blurry vision.
- Tremors and trembling of the hands.
- I would hear things as echoes and sometimes things would get loud and unpronounced and other times almost silent.
- At the lowest I 100% believed I was going to die.

I felt like I just couldn't do it, it was too much, and I could not get back on the medicine and start the process over. I just put my head down, and just put one foot in front of the other, I just kept going.

Just keep going.

—

End of the taper & jump.

Around May or June of this year, I started to get some relief; I was at the very end of my taper and would be jumping any time. My symptoms started to subside slowly. Not all at once, some days with few symptoms, other days with many. I would have windows and waves. Windows of feeling good, almost completely normal for like 5 minutes. Then I would fall back down to base line, with the baseline being my, 'most often state' where I was 'sick' most of the time. And other times I would have waves, where I felt like I was going backwards 2 months. This would last usually for a few days, with the fog slowly lifting. This back and forth process continued for about a month, with the windows, becoming more frequent and for longer durations, and with my baseline slowly rising. Around this time I was at the end of my taper and jumped off. Everything kind of stayed the same for about 2 weeks, and then I felt like I drifted backwards about a month, but things got better at a faster rate as that month went on. For the next 6 weeks, I felt like I was at about 30-40% healed. While I was still mostly sick, I felt massive amounts of relief and I wasn't handcuffed to taking doses of medicine. After that I moved to about a 50/50 baseline, with very little negative waves. My mental clarity returned for days, sometimes weeks at time, with a drift back to a foggy baseline, but the baseline not being all that bad.

Where we are now.

Currently I would consider myself at about 70-80% healed, with giant 90-100% windows. My baseline is consistent at around 75% healed progress and slowly rising. Sometimes my windows will last for a few days, though they will normally fade in the evenings if I have over exerted myself earlier in the day. My waves really only consist of minor fatigue, clumsiness and cloudiness. My sleep has not only returned, but I am getting more rest. During the tapering process (between months February – May) I was getting very little to no sleep. After my jump, I was still dependant on a no less than 8 hour sleep window, or I else I would be in wave. But as of now, I can get between 6-8 hours of sleep and feel fine. My overall energy is high and I can now tolerate caffeine. I am still boney, soft & muscle-less and I look forward to getting back into the gym to try to put on a few pounds of muscle. I am slowly getting back into poker and music. Though inspiration, creativity and humor seem to be the last things to return. There are times when I feel the best I have ever felt in my life. At about 3 months out I experienced a pretty hardcore wave. It started with a panic attack and a week of feeling pretty ill, while it was bad; it was not as bad as it was during the worst of the taper. The next two weeks were better but extremely fatigued and fog brained. These symptoms slowly started to lift until I returned to baseline. I am expecting this process to continue over the next few months with better windows and weaker waves and an increasing baseline.

\*Now at about 4.5 months post jump, I am feeling rarely any sickness, though still not 100% myself. Still get a little foggy, but I have been working some overtime, went to a couple concerts, been back in the gym and my body is taking to it. Haven't had any anxiety attacks or symptoms in a couple months.

A few random thoughts.

You do heal while you taper. You have to go slow, and you have to find the balance, of withdrawing enough to make yourself sick, but still able to function on a day-to-day basis. What I mean by that is, at some point during your taper, you are going to be deficient of Benzo & GABA at the same time. This is the signal to your brain that you are broke and need repair. If you taper too fast, you will get too sick. If you taper too slowly, your brain will delay healing. No one can prescribe this balance to you. You have to listen to your body. At some point you will probably be very sick, hold as long as you need to, but if you are not improving after a couple of weeks at the most, taper on. The human body is absolutely amazing and will heal. To me it felt like it needed all of it's resources: fat, muscle, food, etc to heal. And it takes time, months to years. But it does and will heal.

Diet

As I stated earlier I went to a pretty crazy strict diet. My diet consisted of gallons of water, Muscle Milk (protein shakes), granola, greek yogurt and blueberries, strawberries, blackberries, grilled chicken, salad, avocado, broccoli, green beans, asparagus, bananas, (I didn't tolerate bananas during my worst phase), Cliff Bars (protein bars), almonds, cashews, spinach, zucchini, squash, and cheese quesadillas. I tried to drink as much water as I could, and made note to try to eat avocados & blueberries every day. I drank lots and lots of Gatorade. Gatorade was huge for me, I

craved it, I don't know the science behind it, maybe my body was craving electrolytes, but it helped a ton. A lot of people have had success with Magnesium Citrate, it seems to help with muscle cramping/tension, as well as, 'smoothes out your heart flutters' again I do not know how this works but it did for me. Some swear you need the powder form, but I just had Vitamin Shoppe brand caps and they worked great. I also took Melatonin and L-Theanine at bedtime. When I was in the thick of things I took aspirin daily. I would break a pill into 4ths, and normally take 1/4th in the morning and 1/4th at night. The other 2 pieces I would take if I was having chest pains or heart flutters. My mentality was this, "I am not having a heart attack, though it feels that way, this is only withdrawal, but I will take a piece of this aspirin just to ease my mind." As I was at the end of my taper I found myself forgetting to take it, and eventually I just wasn't taking it anymore.

—

### Benzos in America.

I am not going to go into a rant on Big Pharma, and I am not going to become an anti-medicine advocate. But I will share my opinion for what it's worth. Modern medicine sometimes makes amazing discoveries that heal and save lives. I am a little skeptical at some of the testing process. Not every chemical that is created in the name of medicine is fit for human ingestion. And we should be more careful buying a product that is sold for profit. Just because a medicine may have what could be considered a positive property, the devastating side effects, can make it not worth it. It's my opinion that no one should be prescribed Benzos, or SSRI's unless they are in a state of complete psychosis, depression with intent of self-harm, or for life threatening seizures. It is also my opinion that even under those circumstances, they should be given to individuals for no more than 2 weeks, allowing a patient to bridge the gap between that state and healing with a more healthy course of treatment to be incorporated. The baseline focus should be on health, diet, exercise, stress management and cognitive treatment and rehabilitation, first, and then medicine. Often people are just medicated, and perpetually medicated, taking a drug prescribed to treat symptoms with emotional or physiological roots or the side effects of a previous drug, so on and so forth. This is backwards. Some relatively new medicines are seen as low risk by doctors and passed out as frequently as antibiotics, (even antibiotics carry crazy risks) with most doctors or patients not being fully educated about or accepting of the risk of rapid chemical dependence or possible withdrawal processes or other delayed unknown side effects. If I knew then what I know now, I would have willingly made an educated decision to pass. If you are currently taking any of these meds I would urge you educate yourself on the potential risks. And I would also suggest you to look into withdrawing from them. As a result of the massive prescription of these medicines and long term use, many people are left believing that they have conditions such as panic attacks, or acute anxiety, or general anxiety, etc. Often times these were not actual conditions, until the brains' neurochemistry was compromised with foreign chemical reactions. Reality is, everyone has anxiety, it is normal, especially in this age of information where our senses are bombarded with constant stimuli, of electronics, social media, news, and noise, and crap 24/7. When an otherwise healthy nervous system experiences an anxiety attack it is because the body and brain are trying to tell us that

we are in danger and we need to slow down and learn new coping mechanisms. It is not always a disease we should medicate, maybe in a rare percentage of the population, but I would speculate most of us being prescribed these medications would not need them had they not been introduced in the first place.

Feel free to contact me directly if you have any questions about any of this. I will do my best to provide you with any information I have in more detail.

Links:

Ashton Manual <http://www.Benzo.org.uk/manual/>  
BenzoBuddies <http://www.Benzobuddies.org/>  
BenzoBuddies Forum <http://www.Benzobuddies.org/forum/>  
BeyondMeds [www.beyondmeds.com/Benzos/](http://www.beyondmeds.com/Benzos/)  
BenzosAndBack: <http://www.Benzosandback.org/>  
Benzos Wiki <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benzodiazepine>  
Benzo Withdrawal Wiki  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benzodiazepine\\_withdrawal\\_syndrome](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benzodiazepine_withdrawal_syndrome)

Cliffs:

- 7 years ago was given Klonopin to aid quitting smoking and to help sleep
- Klonopin was awesome at first, helped with sleep & anxiety
- Got a divorce, doctor suggested taking more Klonopin to help with stress
- Lived recklessly (feeling sedated to any aspect of risk)
- Started to realize I was chemically dependant
- Tapered a little and jumped cold turkey
- Went into extreme protracted withdrawal lasting almost a year
- Reinstated on Klonopin
- Was doing well at first but soon became tolerant and went into tolerance withdrawal
- Decided to try to taper again on my own, after jumping went into severe acute withdrawal
- Reluctantly reinstated
- Found the Ashton Manual & Benzo Buddies
- 1 year of a long, slow taper using milk titration
- 4-6 months of absolute sickness on the way down
- Healing occurred during the taper
- Almost exactly 7 years later, Benzo free and almost 100% healed.

## Story 92

This story is long. I apologize. I am a writer by nature.

In the beginning there was depression. Deep, dark depression after months of sleepless nights taking care of a new baby and a sick husband. I was desperate. I found a psychiatrist who could see me right away. He prescribed Prozac (it had worked well for my mother), Xanax, and Ambien. Finally, sweet relief from my pain. I looked forward to drugging myself to sleep every night, sometimes taking 2 Xanax with a cocktail before the final hammer of Ambien. I didn't realize I was playing with fire.

After a few months my depression began to resolve but I kept refilling my prescriptions. My doctor didn't seem to think it was a problem. Plenty of people take these meds for years, he told me. Months became years and I kept refilling. Occasionally I would run out and stop taking them for a few weeks, no problem. I stopped everything cold turkey after becoming pregnant with my second child. Again, no problem. I thought I didn't have an addictive personality like my sister, a lifelong alcoholic and prescription drug addict. I was superior.

Almost immediately after my son was born I refilled my prescriptions. I was terrified of becoming sleep deprived again, of getting depressed. In spite of the stupor that Ambien put me in, the late night eating binges, I kept taking it. I began to experience strange mood swings late in the day, after my afternoon Xanax had worn off. I decided it was time to stop. Once again, I stopped taking it cold turkey. There was some anxiety and tightness in my chest late in the afternoons but nothing that couldn't be alleviated by a little evening workout. Next came the Prozac, also cold turkey. No problems there either. Finally the Ambien. Again no problems. I was drug free and felt great.

Then we began a remodeling project on the upstairs part of our house. All four of us camped out in the living room for 2 months. During the holidays. While I was attending grad school. After about 6 weeks I could no longer sleep at night. It was all too much. My husband got a prescription for Ambien from his doctor. I started taking it too. When we ran low I panicked and called my doctor for another prescription. I needed more this time and ran out too soon. Now I couldn't sleep without it. I started to feel desperate. Then in March my son got terribly sick and everything began to spiral out of control.

I began experiencing daytime anxiety. Toward the end of the day I would become obsessively worried about irrational things. I began biting off little chips of Ambien to calm myself down during the day. I made an appointment with my doctor to get a prescription for Xanax and Prozac. I took the Prozac for 3 days and became terribly sick, it didn't work anymore. The first Xanax I took didn't work quite the same either, I felt hopeless and despondent after taking it, but I was desperate so I continued. I wasn't sure exactly what was happening. Was I losing my mind? I began to experience alternating states of anxiety and depression. I felt like I couldn't cope. The only time I felt like myself was after I had taken my bedtime Ambien. The rest of the time I was a nervous wreck. I was losing weight fast. By the end of May I had lost 20 lbs. Friends

were noticing. Another mom from my son's school suggested that I see her doctor, a psychopharmacologist. I called and he was able to fit me in the next day. As luck would have it, he was also an addiction specialist.

I was more desperate than ever on that day, which made me extremely suggestible. My heart rate was 120 in his office. I told him what I had been taking and he said that Ambien and Xanax were the worst possible drugs to take for people who were prone to mood disorders. He told me I was bipolar. He gave me a prescription for 3 other drugs that I had never heard of and told me to stop the Ambien and Xanax immediately. He said I would go through withdrawal. I had no idea what that meant.

I started taking the other drugs (Lyrica, Lamictal, and Phenobarbital) that day and immediately felt horrible. I called him, terrified and told him I felt awful. He told me that if I didn't like his methods that I should seek treatment elsewhere.

Fortunately I had a friend who had experience working in a detox unit. I called her and told her what was happening. She told me that the doctor had put me on a detox cocktail. She talked to me about what was happening and it finally started to hit me – I was an accidental addict. I had played with fire for too long.

I tried to stick with the detox but it was beyond hellish. I began to experience derealization. I have a degree in psychology and was familiar with the concept of a psychotic break. I was terrified that was what was happening to me. I aborted the detox. I had to find another way.

Back on Ambien and Xanax, I kept getting sicker and sicker. Unable to eat, I was wasting away to nothing. My mother bought me a book, *The Benzo Book*, and suggested that I speak to my sister, who was recently sober and had acquired a great deal of knowledge about benzos. She suggested that I look into the Ashton manual and come to benzobuddies. She saved my life.

I managed to make an appointment with another doctor, a psychiatrist who was a good deal more empathetic than the detox doctor. I desperately wanted to attempt a crossover to Valium. Afraid that he would think I was doctor shopping (since by this time I looked very much like a drug addict), I brought my husband and mother with me to my appointment. I explained my situation and he agreed to give me Valium.

My husband had been home from work taking care of me for 3 weeks, my parents were worried sick, my children didn't know what was happening. This HAD to work. But I was terrified. What if it didn't? I called detox and rehab facilities all over town, I spoke with an interventionist. When I told them the dosage I was taking (.5mg Xanax per day), they said "How much are you really taking honey?" Nobody could believe that I was so sick from such a low dose.

I began the slow cross to Valium. I started to feel better almost immediately. It took me

4 weeks to cross over to 5 mg./day of Valium (a much lower dose than I had expected). Sweet relief! It worked! I was sedated but so incredibly relieved and grateful, as was my family. The Ambien was easy to drop once my nervous system was stable. I'm still not sure if I was ever physically dependent on it, even though it had started the trouble to begin with.

But now I had to taper. I held a month and asked questions on BB every day. What would happen next? I began by cutting .1 mg per week.

Bracing myself with each cut, I quietly prayed that I would die before things got too hard. I followed other buddies who had similar histories to mine and sought their advice as I tapered. At 3.5mg I switched to a daily taper of .01 using water titration. Things were fine, still no symptoms. Still, to be safe, I took a semester off from the stress of grad school.

Around 2.5 mg I started to wonder if there was a possibility that I was not actually addicted to Valium since I had not experienced any withdrawal symptoms at all. I was told by another buddy that this was like switching from gin to vodka and no longer being an alcoholic. So I proceeded with caution. The last thing I wanted was to plunge back into hell.

Feeling fine, I returned to grad school in January and kept on tapering each day. It became part of my routine that I didn't think much about. My husband would ask me about it every now and then. I told him no news was good news and that we should be thankful to my sister, who was trying to put her life back together after years of drug addiction that had ironically begun with a Xanax prescription to help her through postpartum depression.

I kept her apprised of my progress and she sought my advice on supplements and natural remedies to the inevitable health problems that she was now experiencing after so many years of poor habits. I hoped it wasn't too late for her.

In June, as I neared the end of my taper, we took a brief family vacation. I received a phone call from my mother telling me that my sister had died in her sleep the night before. The toxicology report said that she had died from an overdose of multiple drugs including Xanax, Valium, and several opioid pain medications. I was dumbfounded. There was no doubt that I would never take another one of these drugs in my lifetime. Ever.

Finally at 1 mg and still symptom-free, I sped up my taper to .02 per day. I "jumped" in August 2014 with no symptoms. A very anticlimactic end to an experience that I wasn't sure I would live through just a year before.

Now, on Christmas day, I reflect on the past 2 years in a strange state of shock, confusion, and gratitude. How did I get so lucky when so many others haven't been? I have had many blessings in my life, and many lessons have been learned. I am

optimistic and hopeful about the future. I think if I could offer anything to those who are looking for hope, it's the advice offered to me when I so desperately needed it, and that is "IT'S NOT GOING TO BE LIKE YOU THINK."

Which is, I suppose, the lesson I have learned over and over again in this life.

## Story 93

Posted a 'success story' 2-3 months ago (I think ~Sep 1) but it was premature. Doing much better these days, waves are almost nonexistent (although eating heavy carbs and shit - pizza is the worst! - definitely flares things up). Have had a bit of exhaustion but am now capable of sleeping a full 10-11 hours on weekends. Bit of hyperacusis left, jumpiness etc.. My big symptom was total wreckage of the nerves on the left side of my body, which has all but disappeared - feels a little funny but that's it. Slight concentration problems left too, "cog fog". Most of my symptoms were physical as opposed to mental. Slight brain zaps - I was getting about 1 per second at the beginning of withdrawal, now it's about 1 per day, and a lot gentler.

This is from a Klonopin addiction - I was doing 1.5-2mg every other day, did a cold turkey for a week, reinstate, then 2-3 week taper and about 6 months since then. I was absolutely non-functional at the deepest point in withdrawal. I kept a loong list of symptoms which I don't even want to look at, lest I remind myself of it. Feared death about a hundred times, with sudden spikes of symptoms making my heart rate race probably up to 160BPM, fortunately it never happened.

A little messed up still - a couple things involving relaxation are weird (in the "lower chakra" area mainly, they've gotten much better). I do my best not to eat cooked foods, sticking to raw vegan (it's healthiest anyway) - I am certain that benzo w/d makes you feel blood sugar spikes about 10x harder. I totally stopped drinking and also stopped doing e-cigarettes (they do mess with GABA), as with cannabis - pretty much just straightedge these days.

Eating well is really important! I am really serious about raw vegan foods during benzo w/d, and I'm not the first person to say so. However, you do definitely need protein to rebuild GABA receptors, but you don't want to overload your body with saturated fats from meats - veggie burgers, veggie chicken etc. are perfect!

Tried coffee and ginkgo extract both. I can tolerate coffee better than nicotine and carbs both, isn't that weird? Ginkgo made me want to put a corkscrew in my head, one of the few really atypical thoughts I had during withdrawal - back down to normal sanity the next day - that stuff is dangerous, if for no reason but the ~24 hour (?) half life. My personal experience - and advice I would give if not for the forum rules - is not to try to use either to speed up recovery. Your CNS is damaged and your body needs to repair it at its own rate. It's like if you're trying to teach a kid to ride a bike, and you put nitrous boosters on their bike to make it go faster. Your body is trying to repair *systems* of nerves. It's not an 'up or down' thing.

Anyway - I was convinced a trillion times I was never going to get better, that I was psychologically traumatized beyond repair, etc., and while I'm still pretty sure some of the damage from benzos is stuff you have to repair psychologically, the majority of it does heal on its own, just with enough time. At least it certainly seems that way, because almost everything has cleared up. I am pretty much certain at this point I'll be

feeling 100% in 1-3 months.

I had worries early in withdrawal that glutamate flooding my nervous system would cause excitotoxicity and permanent nerve damage. In retrospect, I don't think that actually happened.

I would have been in worse trouble than I was if not for Baylissa Frederick AKA Bliss Johns/Jones. I watched her main video, and then later bought her book (the second printing of it with the different title). I took her advice on half of coping with w/d, like relaxing, accepting symptoms, letting it roll over you, etc.. I recommend her book to anyone going through benzo w/d.

## Story 94

I just want to give everyone bit of hope, especially those still going through the hard times. I was there, and it was terrible. I'm sorry, but you WILL get through it, I don't know you but I know what I experienced and you WILL be normal again and able to function. You just have to ride it out. This site helped me very much. I am the real me again 😊. My life has improved since the withdrawal. I am a better person for it. Distraction is key. Diet and exercise help. Masturbation helps. Benadryl, tylenol pm, chamomile, valerian root and lavender all help. Tea. Baths help. Everything will be okay. Just look at it as one big trip youre gonna ride out. Cherish the window days so you can remember that they do exist when the hard days come back. I was on Clonpoin for ten years, at 3mgs a day. I went to a rehab detox program which was awful. Rapid withdrawal sucks. There are no words to describe that hell. I am now ten months out and I am doing amazing 😊 You will too. Just hang in there. I wish I could sound more supportive, but it's difficult over a screen. Just know that LIFE GOES ON AND YOU WILL HEAL AND GET BETTER!!!!!! 😊

## Story 95

Hi everyone,I just dropped in for a few words of encouragement. Most of you were not here when I was here crying 24/7 a year and a half ago. I know the holidays are the most difficult period,but trust me,you will enjoy the holidays again. It will all go away. I was one of the people who thought that I would be screwed up forever,but I gradually got better,and better.

I went cold turkey off 1mg of Ativan after only taking them for two months,and descended into an unimaginable hell that took all that God gave me to fight through,but I did,and so will you because the same God that made me,made you also.

I'm okay now,I feel like me,and that was one of my biggest fears,would I ever feel like me again.

Stay the course,give your brain the time it needs to heal.

## Story 96

Hey guys Ive come back to bb to spread some cheer for all you guys and gals who are still scared as hell and think that your life is well and truly over. Im here to tell you its only just beginning.

Heres the scoop I was polydrugged to near death and had adverse drug reactions when some kind doctor hehehe decided in his wisdom to give a five foot three woman weighing just 115 pounds 4mg of Xanax just in case I got a bad reaction to some OCD pills id already reacted to well Im sure 4mg of Xanax is meant for an elephant not a human but oh well the doctors know best so I did what he said and from that day forward I went to a place that made hell look like a party. After seven months I cold turkeyed straight up the morning dose of 2mg no one told me not to do this ever and I was already couch bound unable to read or write only be terrified and cry so it kind of hurt that one but nothing like two weeks later when I stopped the 2nd 2mg I had a seizure on the couch and ended up in hospital for a horrifying 7 weeks during this time I was reinstated to three mg of Xanax but nothing was working so they stopped it again. I told my dr about the ashton manual and he decided it was a great idea to switch me to valium but he clearly didn't read the rest of the manual where it said slow taper. He took me off that 45mg of valium in 18 days WOW is right. I left hospital after getting down to zero he reinstated me at 2.5mg of valium and two weeks later I went down to 2mg and was screaming in corners I promptly went back to hospital and got off the remainder in ten days. There were no water titrations or measuring devices my cuts come from nurses fingernails snapping pills. The hell I endured I cannot begin to tell you and don't want to make it the dominating feature of my story Im already boring my own self with it. Im here to tell you the crying the dp the dr the burning skin the insomnia the constant pacing the horror and fear the paranoia and everything else all ENDS. Heres what kept me alive and trust me those suicidal thoughts are the most brutal thing right you seriously only can think about dying because there are worse things than death this bs being one of them. However what you don't know right now that paradise awaits you. A life where you can live how you want again but this time only better. You are more appreciative you know who and what you are you know how strong you are and what is important to you. here is a little list for you to focus on.

1. You will not die
2. Your benzo brain is a liar
3. You are not permanently brain damaged
4. You are still you
5. Feelings will come back you will feel love again
6. You can drink coffee again and eat what you want
7. You are safe on benzo buddies
8. Tell yourself its the benzos not you the drugs did this to your brain
9. Your brain does heal itself
10. Read the success stories again and again here and anywhere else you can find them
11. Get yourself a benzo support network sort out the people you click with and get rid

of those who don't

12. Don't keep trying to explain yourself to your family they don't know what they don't know the same way you don't know what it feels like to have a disease that someone else is trying to explain to you what its like.
13. Be patient this crap doesn't disappear overnight it goes on and on and on
14. Yes you are in hell and you will come out of it
15. I found great help in helping others anything to distract yourself I don't regret a thing even the inhouse fighting on bb kept me alive.
16. Choose your friends wisely I mean there are sick people on here but there are sick people if ya know what I mean.
17. Recovery is not linear that's the truth one step forward two steps back
18. A window is something you open to let fresh air In don't expect just because you are not getting windows you are not healing
19. You will stop pacing the floors
20. YOU WILL BE HAPPY AGAIN

Ok Im sure there is more but before I go I will tell you how I am now.

Im sooooo happy I cannot begin to tell you my life is more fulfilled now than ever before. I have gone back to work and am now in school fulltime I just got 32 out of 40 on my science exam yesterday so WOOHOO no brain damage here. I laugh lots and drink loads of coffee eat candy aka lollies and sleep AMAZING sleep oh how I love just having dreams again without a skull looking at me or some other freaky image. Cant remember the last time I cried and if I do its a brief boo hoo not hours of wailing. I have found the most amazing boyfriend who I love so much he heard the story and we have not made it part of our lives its become just that another story of my life. Cant believe I found love again and its all thanks to this hell. If this didn't happen to me Id be stuck in a job I hated a sucky marriage and I was miserable as all hell. Now Im HAPPY do you get it YOU are going to be OK. Life is waiting for you its beautiful I promise you I don't tell lies. I remember reading these stories and going yeah as if im dying from this shit and you may have recovered but I am doomed NO YOU ARE NOT. Every second you get through is a step closer to healing. oh get out and walk I walked the streets crying but I came out of it fit as. Hey your hair and skin will be beautiful again. You may look hotter than what you did before for real stranger things have happened. I travel again before all this I lived my life In fear maybe you did to now Im like whatever plane you crash what can I do about it Ive survived this hell Ill survive anything well maybe not a plane crash but you get the picture. 😊 Before I go no one around here is an expert on your withdrawal they will try and tell you they are and you may think they are because you are temporarily vulnerable and feel like you have lost your mind but trust me you haven't and you know what works best for you. I hope someone gets something out of this Im not sure Ill be back. Please don't think im a bad person for not sticking around because I just cant. I have stuff to do people to meet places to go. I lost two years of my life to this crap and I need to make up for some lost time.

Lastly and before I seriously do go I need to say thank you to all of you the people who stayed by my side for my five thousand posts and supported me even through all the

fighting we had a remarkable bond. To name you all would be unfair because none of you were more important than the other. My love for you all will be ongoing and that only you guys know how it is to truly suffer something so horrifically painful. I respect each and every one of you and I will never forget you. Once again I say thank you. To Colin and the team OMG I know I was such a pain In the ar\$e at times and I hung around with all the naughty people but really I had the best time in hell a girl could ask for given the circumstances. I cant believe the stuff we used to argue about but distract distract right so even if we had a little bit of drama on bb it got us through another day. Thanks so much for the constant monitoring of the forum you all do a wonderful job I so admire you for sticking with it its a grueling process. Colin thanks for providing everyone with a safe place to come to and educate us on what the hell was happening and is happening to so many people. OK please take care hang in there and remember life is amazing on the other side.

## Story 97

Hi everyone, I used to belong to the Benzo Forum back in 2004 when I came off benzos (Xanax) cold turkey after 9 years of varying doses. A terrible nightmare of a withdrawal, every w/d symptom in the book - cogfog, d/r and d/p like you cannot believe, couldn't breathe properly, body ached, some teeth crumbled, floor moved up and down, hair fell out, it was just an unimaginable nightmare that only fellow-sufferers on the Forum could understand and empathise with.

But I pushed forward, day by day, most days only on the thread of hope by those who had gone before me, that things would improve with time. How many days I thought I would go totally mad, things felt worse instead of better, I couldn't breathe, I couldn't focus or concentrate, every muscle in my body ached and ached.

Fast forward, in June I will be 8 years off benzos and I can ASSURE you this, things do get better, MUCH MUCH BETTER. I have achieved many things with a brain I never thought would be able to think again, or be rid of the cogfog. I have a normal life, I enjoy life, I work, I drive, I study, I laugh, I do all normal things perfectly normally.....

So please don't despair, don't give up, BELIEVE this if nothing else, things will improve and you will get your life back. My advice is where possible, take all stress off yourself, if it means not working for a while so you can rest your body and nerves, then do it, or as I did, I took a really "mindless" kind of job where no-one would notice my "cogfogged" thinking, that way I took stress off myself. Be as gentle with yourself as you can. Share your experience with your family, it helps if they can understand what you are going through. Stay AWAY from alcohol, it will only set you back I guarantee you.

Life will be GOOD again, not just good, but GREAT. Emotions dulled by benzos return, and we can feel and cry and laugh and feel joy and compassion 100% again. The depression WILL pass and the light will shine again.

All the best to you all. There is so much more to my experience I could tell but I am telling you mostly what I needed to hear to get me through, and what actually DID get me through.....

Love to you all and hang in there.....its worth it I PROMISE!!

## Story 98

Greetings all

Well after 39 months of withdrawal hell(plus another 8 months of tapering), my experience with the benzo demons seems to be over. I was on Ativan at mostly 1.5mg for about 13 years for insomnia due to anxiety. Finally all of my symptoms have faded and I am now in the process of putting my life back together. As I'm sitting here writing this I'm drinking a Starbucks coffee(cafeinated) which only a few months ago would have brought on the head pressure and anxiety which most of you know too well. I've been experimenting with alcohol and seem to be able to have a couple of drinks with no ill effects. I even had a MRI recently which I flat out would not even have considered while in withdrawal and while I did perspire a bit, I didn't have the problems that I thought I would.

A lot of people on this forum have often wondered why there aren't more success stories submitted, some even speculating that most of us don't actually recover. Sitting where I am now I think I can answer that. Benzo withdrawal is such a traumatic life altering event that when it is finally over the natural human reaction is to just slam the door on it and move on. Actually I am only writing this because I owe so much to the support of all the people here who have shared so much of their pain and recovery experiences. I've pretty much been a lurker on this forum, never really feeling comfortable chatting with and offering support to fellow victims. I can only hope that this little reinforcement can repay at least part of what I've gotten out of benzobuddies.

My heart goes out to all of the people who have had their lives turned upside down, both emotionally and financially from this whole experience. I guess I've been more fortunate than many. Benzo withdrawal forced me to retire a bit earlier than I would have preferred but not drastically so. I've also been blessed by having an incredibly supportive wife who was understanding even those times that I had to blow off holiday dinners with family. Many people here complain that close relations are not very understanding when it comes to withdrawal. I personally just withdrew from the world, pulling the covers over my head and waited for the horror to end. I guess maybe I'm still undergoing some PTSD, I'm still a bit reluctant to reintroduce myself to my friends who probably have just written me off from their lives. I'm sure that eventually I will reenter society but the important thing is what I've discovered about myself. I came through one of the most horrific experiences most of us will ever experience and won. This is probably what a cancer survivor feels like. And you know what, everybody reading this will feel the same way eventually. It really is only a matter of time. I tried all or at least most of the pills powders and potions that others suggested to ease withdrawal to no effect. Just got to wait it out, as frustrating as that can be.

Finally I'd like to thank Professor Ashton. How many of us literally owe our lives to her pioneering work.

## Story 99

I became a user of Xanax in June 2014 with a script of .25mg up to 3x a day. I never took the maximum dose and used my medication hesitantly taking no more than two .25mg per day and sometimes taking none. Needless to say, after a few weeks I reached tolerance and started experiencing physical and mental issues: flu-like symptoms, pain in my back and spine, weakness in my legs, vertigo, tinnitus, increased anxiety, fatigue, insomnia and on and on. After three months on Xanax I felt like I was a different person almost detached from myself and my lived life. I was not having a good summer. Fortunately, I had the presence of mind to do some research on Xanax and found BenzoBuddies! If I hadn't discovered BB I believe I may have made the mistake of upping my prescription furthering my accidental addiction to this benzo. I educated myself sufficiently to know that I could probably jump with the low dose regimen I was on. So on Sept 18, two months ago, I took my last .25mg tablet of Xanax and threw the rest of my pills away! I never came close to experiencing the awful withdrawal symptoms and suffering so many of you have had. My heart goes out to you and I feel a deep anger at big pharma and our government for allowing benzo poisons to be prescribed. All my symptoms are pretty much gone and I am so grateful! 😊 I am left with tinnitus which I feel will lessen with time. I am a 68 year old woman and thought I had learned all there was to learn about myself and life. This little misadventure taught me new lessons and I believe I am stronger for it. My heart goes out to all here who are struggling and though my story is much less compelling, I did suffer enough to know of the awful pain that all of you have experienced. I leave you with hope that all who suffer here will recover and regain your lives.

## Story 100

Hey dear buddies,

Can hardly believe that I am well enough to write my success story...I am happy but overwhelmed with this task...Happy because ...I am happy and leading a life that I believe is full of promise and wonderful things to come...I am doing so many things that honestly bring me so much happiness...I feel strong and capable...I feel overwhelmed because I want to do this right...want to write the correct words so that you will also believe that you will heal and have the life you deserve...Its a huge task right? I know that many of you feel that you will never have that kind of life. I felt that way too for quite a while. So here goes.

I got out of detox in March 2010...there are no words to describe to you what I have gone through...just pure agony on every level. But that was then and this is now. I'm good. Good enough to live and love and let nothing get in my way. All of the pain, fear and uncertainty have been worth it to get to where I am today. Still have a few things, but its okay. I'm good enough.

I hope I have not frightened anyone...I wish I would have healed so much faster...am three months short of 4 years off klonopin, morphine and soma. The thing is, I know someone out there needs to read my story... maybe I can reassure you a little bit and bring you some comfort. I know that you are out there...that person that relates to my story of ct detox, my high dose of klon...maybe its that I was kindled, or that I was on morphine, maybe the length of time I was on my meds, maybe you don't have windows... (I never had a window either) despite all the complicating issues in my story I still got better and so will you. Please do not give up...when you fall apart ( I have so many times ) try not to stay down too long...talk to a friend, regroup. It will be ok. Even when you feel stuck you are still healing...you are healing every day. Hope you wont be too annoyed at me if I share a little about what helped me... lol I have annoyed my share of people...you have heard it before....acceptance and adjustment, both with capitol As...one day at a time....don't be too hard on yourself or those around you.....early on I realized my brain was not something I could count on so I relied on my heart to guide me.....when I got further out, about 18 months I could listen to music...at 2 years I could read books...at three years I was walking several miles a day and spending lots of time outside being active and listening to my IPod (my most prized possession) I actually can feel my brain sighing in happiness when I'm outside walking with my IPod and the sun is shining. I started driving at 3 years (yay).. Recently I have applied to volunteer positions working in no kill shelters for animals. So soon my days will be even more meaningful. This second chance I have been given is more than I ever could have hoped for. I'm so grateful, so very, very grateful.

Finally wish to thank...all the special people here at BB... I have made wonderful friends here who will last a lifetime. Much love,

## Story 101

Please listen to me and believe me. I was on benzos from age 17 to 35. By the time I realized I had to get off of them, I was on 90 mg of temazepam daily and from there switched to 40 mg Valium for a year-long taper. I went into withdrawal about a week after my taper was done. I thought withdrawal would kill me, and it lasted for over two years. Over the first year and a half, it progressively got worse. I couldn't think at all. I was in bed for over a year, only getting up to use the bathroom. My body was made of rubber and full of constant humming and burning. I had the chills for close to two years. Any little noise made me feel like I had just been in an auto wreck.

I can go on forever, but all I want to say is I finally got over it and I don't ever remember feeling so good. Ever. Hang in and realize it is going to take a while, but it will go away.

## Story 102

My Fellow Sufferers,

To those of you in withdrawal now, I want you to know you will recover! I never thought I would be saying these words, but I am just about my old self again after a severe withdrawal from cold turkey Ativan. It took me 8 months off the poison to get my chemistry back to normal. I have had some setbacks, but the symptoms always go away and I feel better than ever after them!

I was soooo very sick I cannot believe most has passed. The first 2-3 months off I could not read, write, watch TV or do ANYTHING but pace and rock. I had such severe anxiety I knew I was in HELL. All I could do was hold on and pray and talk to God to keep my sanity. No one should ever have to go through this. Yes, we all could handle this for maybe a week or so, but mine lasted months. And up until last month, I had pretty bad anxiety just driving and going places. It was unreal. I had just about every symptom, but the anxiety/panic was the worst. Also the FEARS that lived inside my head for months. If I had gone to a shrink, they would have said I was a severe hopeless case. Also, thank God I quit doctors, for not one of them believed I could be in withdrawal after a month off. Thank God I stopped believing in them, or else I would be on Paxil, back on benzos, Ambien, you name it, they wanted me on it.

Well folks, the only thing that heals us is TIME. And I promise you, you will heal. Mine took very long, much longer than I would have believed, but it happened and it will for you too, hopefully sooner than my healing.

I write this letter in remembrance and thankfulness to all those ahead of me that wrote me letters of hope and recovery. If I hadn't had others writing I would have stayed in a terrified state.

Eventually the adrenals get back to normal!!! I can laugh now and joke, ride my bike all over the place, and live like I used to!!!

My prayers go to each and every one of you going through this. You will come out of this too.

PS, If you don't believe in God, you will by the time you heal!!!

### Story 103

It's been just over a year since I finished a 4 ½ month taper of Klonopin. It was absolutely the most difficult thing that I have ever encountered in my life and there were a few times when I thought I might be better off dead.

I am here to say that I feel, at this point, that I am 100% or so close to 100% that it's insignificant. I tapered directly from Klonopin. It was a slow process. When I got down to 0.5 mg (1 tablet), I cut 1/16<sup>th</sup> of a tablet each time. Once I finished my taper, things began to improve a lot and it just got better and better. It took a full year to be 100% but even after a month off I saw significant improvement. A few months ago I was still having restless legs, muscle aches, but I just realized a few days ago that they were gone. I hadn't noticed that they were gone because they went away so very slowly. My energy has really returned to normal. It took about nine months for my energy to return to normal.

My sensitivities also seem to be improving. I have a daily cola now and tolerate it well. I still can't tolerate sugar, but then I always was somewhat sensitive to sugar. It might be a little worse now but I don't know that I can blame the benzos since I am also entering menopause.

I really wondered if I would ever totally heal, but I did. Once my symptoms were completely gone, I found that I was no longer reading the Benzo Group posts. I do correspond with several members of the group who are still tapering but I no longer feel the strong connection that I once did with the Benzo Group. I think this is a real problem in that the Group needs to hear that healing does happen. I am here to say that I am proof. It takes a load of patience, but it does happen.

My best to each and every one of you!

## Story 104

My healing came in starts and stops...I would improve... then go backwards...the improve again...etc.

It really is difficult to put a timeline on someone else's healing. I know people who cold turkeyed that were symptom-free in less than 6 months. Conversely, I know people who tapered properly who continued to suffer after they were off.

It's a crap shoot.

Aligning your needs to someone else's process is not productive...just keep moving forward.

The withdrawal syndrome is different for everyone. I don't think I know ANY examples of ANY to people who had identical experiences. So many different factors make this impossible to predict.

Some helpful hints to focus on:

Distractions are your friend...the forum is a great distraction.

Push yourself to try to do some normal type activity everyday...walking worked wonders for me.

Drink lots of water.

Stay away from caffeine, alcohol, sugar, processed foods, white carbs...eat PROTEIN.

Rest when you can.

Reduce noise, light and stress.

Another point that I'd like to make is that I did not just wake up one day, and it was all over. It was a meandering process. Setbacks are NORMAL and EXPECTED. But, as more and more time went by, the improvements became more and more concrete.

You will get there.

Everyone heals eventually.



## Story 106

Dear Friends,

When I first started my blog (Here I am), I entitled it that way because I was here and I desperately needed help. Oh my gosh I was in a bad place. My story is like many here – I was overwhelmed, went to a Psych doctor, was misdiagnosed, put on far too much medication, had doses increased/cut/tapered too fast. I had NO idea that even after that last Xanax pill was taken that my journey would take 14 months longer until I would post here. I was convinced that I would NEVER be healed and delivered from the hell that we have all been through. It was a long road that was ONLY made tolerable because of my dear friends here on the forum and the love of Jesus Christ.

So 14 months later I want each of you to know that I am healed 100%. There I have officially written what I have been afraid to say. Please let me be clear – I have had NO s/x for over 40 days – NONE. No anxiety, stomach jitters, depression, etc. I have weathered stressful situations, worked too many hours, had an argument with my Mom and had NO s/x spikes. I tell you this because even in August I was doubtful that wd really would fully end. Sure, I had read that people felt relatively better, but then I would read on and see that there were still lingering s/x. That would freak me out and I just knew that my life was NOT going to get any better. See why we should all have faith?

Today I am living a full life – a life where I no longer am hanging on just to get through the day. I get up, walk the dog, interact with my children, work, take time for myself, cook/do laundry/run errands, etc. and find that this whole experience is becoming fuzzy around the edges. I do not feel raw or edgy. I do not feel discombobulated or out of it.

I am also recognizing that some things are just as they are for me – I don't sleep well (or long enough) but that is because I have 5 kids who are up and down through the night. My memory, while better, is still not perfect – but I try to do too much in too little time!!!! I have found that I can enjoy being at home in the quiet but also love to get out and see my friends.

There are relationships to rebuild, classrooms to volunteer in, books to read, and cookies to bake.

Know this – you WILL heal. It may take months or over a year, but it WILL happen. Do NOT EVER give up hope!! Do not ever think you will be in this state forever. Take each day as it comes and remember that you are not alone.

To every person here who took the time to write tome and encourage me may God bless you greatly. What would I ever have done without you? Eyes are leaking now Happy tears. God has blessed me with your friendships and I will NEVER forget you. When I was ready to give up, there you were with a kind word or personal message. I know that had I not found this forum I would not be where I am today. Each of you were

responsible for helping me rebuild my life. I thank you, my husband thanks you and my five children thank you.

You are all wonderful and I love each of you very much. Isn't it amazing that we come here as strangers but find such strength and encouragement from people that we will never have the privilege of meeting face to face.

So dear friends HERE I AM on the other side of this journey, and I will be waiting here until I see that you are standing along side me with our hands held high and our hearts full of gratitude.

God bless.