



I've been struggling with severe depression since I was a teenager. It's caused me trouble with school, cost me jobs, and damaged relationships. It's made it difficult to be a good father to my daughter, a good son to my parents, and a good friend, as there were times when I simply found stepping in front of an oncoming train to legitimately be a preferable alternative to just about anything else. I tried plenty of things. Lots of doctors though it was something physical. I've been on thyroid medicine, testosterone supplements, adrenal supplements, various vitamins, and more depression medications than I can remember. I've had two suicide attempts and been hospitalized three times for severe depressive episodes, and my record for holding a job has been about two years, with the average being a few months before I would crash and cease to function for an indeterminate amount of time, and in recent years it's just gotten worse. I only got by due to the support of my amazing parents. My divorce, a bad relationship after, the loss of my father, and my multiple failed attempts and trying to do something, anything to make myself better had built up to the point where I was ready to give up. My daughter and my mom were the only things that kept me from going through with it.

When I started this treatment, I did it like so many others. I tried to convince myself that maybe this one would be the one to do something. I didn't have a lot of hope, but I tried to pretend. During my mapping appointment, it seemed like everything that could go wrong did. The lovely people here were very patient and knew what they were doing, but apparently my nerves are wired a little strangely. I joked that even my body was trying to sabotage me getting better.

But they managed to get it done, and I started treatment. I was told people most commonly start seeing a big difference by session twenty one. Imagine my surprise when on my second week, I was already starting to be more active. I like clean environments. I would get very annoyed if certain things aren't just right if I focus on them too hard. But with depression, I never had the energy to do much about it. I just had to learn to ignore things that bothered me, and accept them being crappy. But driving home from treatment on one of those days, I noticed how trashed the inside of my car was and decided to do something about it. I pulled in to a car wash, cleaned out the trash, and vacuumed it out, something I hadn't done in as long as I could remember.

I started getting more active. Started doing more around the house. Started spending more time with my kid. Exercising. Eating healthier. Sleeping better. All things I had been trying to be consistent about for years and constantly failed. I'm dreaming again. My current goal is to go back to work for a while, planning to save up some money and gain some experience so I can start my own business.

I want to thank all of the caretakers at Dauntless for their work. I can't tell you what this experience means to me. You saved my life. I still have a lot of work to do, but now I feel like I actually have the strength to do it. Thank you.

And if you're reading this, struggling with your own mental health battles, please don't give up. I know what it feels like to think there will never be a better tomorrow. That despair and emptiness is all that you're capable of feeling anymore. That no matter how many times you try, it's always going to end the same way, back to square one. But that's not true. I can tell you from experience. That voice telling you to give up lies. One more try. Please. One more try. *Johna Willingham*