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From Chaos to Oneness

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What was utter turmoil and chaos, darkness and pain—the manifestation of wounds of old, trauma held deeply—unable until this point in my life to be unleashed, *was* unleashed and catastrophe ensued. I am referring to my first episode of mental illness: a drug-induced psychosis that lasted for three years.

I plunged into my death. The death of my old self, my past way of being: all I knew and was.

I came into great ruin, a horrible demise and miserable unravelling that, my soul knows now, was not my end but a new beginning. This period of grave darkness brought forth the new light I live now.

I was undone by psychosis to be made new. To be reborn. To live and be my truest, most authentic self.

My psychosis was a raging fire, a needed burning. I was left scorched and bitterly charred. But in this aftermath came the ashes of great healing. Healing I was unable to do before my death, as I had repressed everything attaching myself to peo-

ple, abusing drugs, being promiscuous, and traveling the world to escape. To not feel. I was emotionally disturbed, unavailable, and in many ways extremely detached. I knew myself but not really. My life was good and rich but it also was not. In time, my dysfunction became more apparent. I was self-medicating with marijuana to survive. I was involving myself in toxic relationships because they either falsely fed my fragile ego and/or temporarily filled a void. I was impulsive, behaving recklessly, living on the edge, and not giving a fuck because that is what life is about—is it not? You only live once. This was the catalyst for my undoing, my psychotic break.



My healing process was ushered in by the rising utter despair, shame and devastation that followed my episode. My healing was so necessary but so hard to endure. This healing came gradually; it took time, much time. It did not begin immediately after my searing. It did not take place overnight. I went through it all, the worst depres-

sion; I woke up daily not wanting to be alive. For a long time I felt so low I really was unable to do much. I spent my days in bed, sorrowful and drowning in self-pity. I felt as if there was no hope for me. I was and would remain *nothing*: a schizophrenic who could do little with her life.

These excruciating feelings, the self-imposed stigma and cruel disdain I had for myself, eventually forced me to confront the demons of the inferno, the hell that was the manifestation of my past pain and suffering. I proceeded to do the work—the arduous and brutal inner work. I looked within, deeply, through constant and thorough introspection. This was an active choice. One I made very consciously. I knew it was a choice I had to make in order to reclaim my life and truly live once again. Because I had lived, I have had a rich and wondrous life despite difficult events and circumstances throughout my youth and childhood. I have been enriched by the arts and culture, enabled to cultivate great artistic talents and gifts. I have travelled the world over with loved ones and on my own. I have known adventure and self-discovery. I have walked and observed the beauty of creation. I have had a brilliant education, and an abundant social life: good, longstanding friendships, and connections with people made during travels and from various opportunities in my life. I worked hard and partied harder. I have been young, wild, and free—expressing my spirit as I saw fit. I lived to the beat of my own drum, followed my inner compass, and sought my truth. This eventually coincided more and more with the

dysfunction stated earlier. But still, my life at many points was dynamic and awesome. After my episode came my death. I had completely lost myself; I felt estranged from this person I once was. I made a decision to find that person again. And, in time, I did.

The task of healing and rebuilding my life was not easy; it was and is the hardest journey, yet it has been the most incredibly rewarding. I learned at one point that I had to make the choice to own my experience so it no longer had power over me, so I was no longer imprisoned by the stigma and shame of what happened. I began sharing my story publicly and privately. I held nothing back. Whether it was through public speaking gigs, random run-ins with old acquaintances, or with my psychotherapist, I refused to let my psychotic break be my dirty little secret—something taboo that I could not speak of. Fortunately, nor did my loved ones. I received a healthy dose of supportive and encouraging tough love that helped me get my shit together, helped me no longer feel like a victim. I was not treated like a pariah, written off as a *schizophrenic*. My loved ones did not keep anything hidden either. It was all accepted, out in the open, accepted, and dealt with accordingly. I was not rejected by my near and dear ones or treated differently. My true friends never left my side. They were always there. This is still one of my greatest blessings. I continued to pursue intense self-scrutiny and self-examination, and this inevitably nurtured self-acceptance and self-realization. I returned to various spiritual practices, such

as meditation and prayer, affirmations and journaling, making them my own. I engage heavily in self-care practices (crystal energy healing, candle-lit salt baths, acupuncture, exercising/weight-lifting, restorative yoga, and more), which enhance my daily life and well-being.

Healing, understanding myself, and transforming my life was required for me to thrive and come into fullness, into living my best life, into my purpose and what I believe is my destiny.

And here I am. Imperfect still, but happy, more balanced and content. What was shattered has become whole and is now one. I now know peace. I know the love of self and accept this self unlike ever before. I can stand tall and firm in the abundance of who I am with dignity, without fear or humiliation, and with a healthy sense of pride and honour. I have come far. Although I died, much of the old me (I like to think the best aspects) has returned, and I believe I am a better version of myself. Revitalized and renewed, updated, wiser and more knowledgeable, a little more mature. Much calmer and more centred. I have found that not all was completely lost in the fire of my psychosis. So much of what was broken has been repaired. More than before, I am well, balanced and feel full. I do not lack. I am not without. The severe dysfunction that manifested prior to my break continues to be worked through; I have reconciled with it, learned from it, and made amends. I can acknowledge all that I am and believe in my potential. I lived with schizophrenia. It destroyed my life. I live with bipolar disorder and life can be

very hectic at times, but I am so much more than my diagnosis. These mental health conditions do not define me; they do not encompass all that I am.

I am empowered. I know myself truly, deeply, and this is the gift. What is new is this existence. I have not known this place, but here I am. And it is pure joy.

Sara Traore is a mental health support worker in Toronto, Canada. “My adversity has brought me great purpose and meaning, my lived experience has shaped my life’s work. I have made it my life’s mission to be of service and lend support to the most vulnerable by being a nurturing source of help, an empowering ally, an inspiring example of recovery, and a fierce agent of social justice and social change.”
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