

# Depression is a Lack of Self Expression

By Chris O'Neil

Depression is a subject that I am on intimate terms with. I never actively attempted suicide but during my 20s I did have a death wish that manifested itself in reckless behaviour: drinking to excess and often driving afterward. At one point when I was 26 I nearly found myself living on the street and I couldn't hold a job for any length of time.

I think depression among men is more pervasive than most people realize. We're taught to put a clamp on our feelings and, as one wise man once told me, depression is not a medical problem, it's a lack of self-expression. Those words have resonated powerfully for me. I was hospitalized with depression in 1979. The next year I was back for six weeks, twice as long as the first time, and it cost me a job. In 1984, halfway to my university degree, I was nearly hospitalized again and two years later my recurring depression further disrupted my studies. In 1992 I moved to British Columbia and began another slide into despair that lasted nearly a year. The grand-daddy came in 1998 and lasted until August 2000, when I did the New Warrior Training Adventure. Since then my depression has disappeared. Imagine; I do a weekend that puts me in touch with my heart and intimately connects me to the sacred masculine and suddenly I'm symptom-free.

I'm not even taking medication any more. That was *always* the solution. And then there was therapy or what laughably passed for it. My psychiatrist at the hospital would have been great as a prison camp commandant. His idea of therapy was medication, the more the merrier, and to read Psycho-Cybernetics. Nothing else was required. I spent my fair share of time in groups with other depressed people and in sessions with psychologists. Altogether I probably spent 18 years in therapy and nothing much ever changed. The most valuable thing to come out of that time was it put me in touch with the unbridled fury I felt for my mother.

Let me put the usefulness of the drugs and therapy into perspective for you. In 1999 I had two sessions of Shaffering with Bob McGuire at the Windsor Family Forum. Those two sessions alone (three hours total) peeled away more layers of the onion than 18 years of therapy and all the pills ever did. The Shaffering allowed me to express myself, to touch my wounds at a heart level and to use the emotionality around my pain to heal. Doing the NWTA furthered that process and since then I've continued to do work in various groups, accessing my grief and using it to heal while having the sacred masculine honoured. If I had not done all this my sense is I'd still be blundering around knowing something was wrong with me but without a clue how to deal with it.

I'm wondering if this is not something most men go through. No matter how good our parenting might have been, we all have wounds. Those are a precious commodity *when* we are able to address them, but how many men have that opportunity? Men don't generally talk to each other about these things since we've been taught it isn't 'manly.' Most of us walk around as I did, thinking everyone else has the key to the good life, and what is *their* secret? It was a revelation to me when I discovered that other men were in the same boat I was. My father, I'm sure, was in this boat, He had deep wounds and a grief so deep it could only be expressed in anger. Even at

the best of times he was simmering and contemptuous of just about everyone. So was I. I never understood what my dad was going through until I experienced my grief and discovered the incredible healing in it. Then I understood my dad in a way that moved me to compassion for him. What is it like to stand in your pain every day and not have any idea what to do about it? My father died at 51 from his third heart attack. I have no doubt that his heart was truly broken. My dad did not kill himself although he was a prime candidate for suicide. He smoked heavily, drank to excess, ate poorly, and didn't take care of himself. This always sounded to me like suicide on the installment plan. I have known two men who did kill themselves, both by blowing their brains out. The difference between them and my dad was that their pain was so great they wanted immediate release and acted on it. Too many men are living in similar degrees of pain.

What can be done? It starts by recognizing the problem - not an easy task given the pervasive feminist agenda today. How bizarre is it that while men die sooner from all causes and are far more likely to kill themselves, it is women's health issues that receive the bulk of publicity? Some time ago a nationwide coffee shop chain began a fund-raiser for prostate cancer. To date the downtown store has run up about \$10. I know because people who contribute are asked to fill out cards to festoon the walls and there are not many up there. Why do I feel the walls would already be full if this was a breast cancer fund-raiser?

Awareness of the problem is a start, but only that, The next step is a paradigm shift away from the idea of depression as a medical problem to a lack of self-expression. To me it is a given that when men intimately connect with their hearts and the sacred masculine, they heal. This is not going to happen at the local pub, at a sports arena, in a garage and certainly not in the family kitchen. The means to give men back to themselves are already present. As the Nike slogan goes, let's JUST DO IT! Men are waiting.

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