

## My Story

It starts at the beginning of 1998. I had just experienced a very rough time in my life, with many things happening at once. I decided to see a therapist to help me get through this rough patch. Before this, I had never seen a therapist, psychiatrist or been on any kind of medication (I didn't even like to take advil for a headache).

When I went to the therapist, I wasn't feeling "depressed" but angry at the situation my husband, Joe, and I were in, and felt talking about it would help me deal with it better. I don't remember how many visits I had (it was under 7) before my therapist told me I had "depression" and thought I should see a psychiatrist so I could be put on antidepressants. I was shocked, I remember telling her, "I don't feel depressed and don't think I need antidepressants". Her response, "Depression isn't just crying all the time and never being happy, what you're experiencing is depression also." My "symptoms of depression" were: crying spells, forgetful, not having as much patience with our sons (who were 4 & 5 at this time). I know now what depression is (which I'll explain later), what I was experiencing when I first went to this therapist was **not** depression. It was very normal for me to have these feelings considering what I was going through. What I needed was **time** and a **good** therapist - not drugs.

I decided to see the psychiatrist she recommended, who agreed I should be on antidepressants. Joe and I were so clueless, we believed what they said, not knowing the dangers of these drugs.

I started on Zoloft, the first 5 weeks were awful, I was so tired and fatigued. But I just kept on hearing, don't stop taking your medication, you'll feel better. At 5 weeks I did notice a difference, I felt really good, nothing bothered me. Joe said he didn't like the way I behaved on Zoloft because nothing seemed to bother me, I was in a constant state of bliss (later I would learn that was a sign my body was producing too much serotonin). I also never cried, had no sex drive and didn't feel anything emotionally anymore. When I discussed my symptoms with my therapist and psychiatrist, I was told "Those were just side effects of the drug, but I needed to be on it because I had a chemical imbalance."

After being on Zoloft almost 2 years I started experiencing symptoms of "depression" the drug had damaged my whole system. But Joe and I were told I needed to try another antidepressant. In the 6 years that followed I was put on 8 different antidepressants and 3 medications for insomnia.

After 2 years on Zoloft I did notice I was worse than before I started on the drug, I was told my depression was getting worse. So it went for the next 6 years, drug after drug and always feeling worse than when I started. Some didn't work at all, some gave me some relief but it didn't last. When I say I got worse, I felt unhappy, didn't enjoy the things I used to. After every antidepressant I was put on my symptoms worsened, to the point that after 8 years my body was so mentally and physically out of balance I experienced the following:

I was overcome with a dreadful sense of doom, couldn't leave the house, lack of concentration, motivation, focus, cried all the time, couldn't function doing everyday tasks, insomnia, extremely sad (I cried all the time), everything was overwhelming, never have a feeling of contentment, sick to my stomach (I had no appetite, nauseas), digestive problems, very achy muscles, started waking up in the middle of the night and in the morning in a panic (sweating, my heart would be racing, I felt very scared). I didn't want to try and get through one more day, the only reason I didn't swallow a bunch of pills was because I truly feel God gave us all the gift of life and it's not up to us to take it away. I did go to bed praying I wouldn't wake up the next day, the feelings were unbearable.

At the beginning of summer 2006, I realized the antidepressants were making me worse, but it still didn't dawn on Joe and I that I never had depression (we were so brainwashed). Then my mom gave me an article about depression and how antidepressants can mess up your whole system. After about a month thinking about this article it **finally** dawned on me, I never had depression or a chemical imbalance, I developed them from the psychiatric drugs I was prescribed. I told my M.D., and we requested my records from the psychiatrist, sure enough, there wasn't anything in those records that justified being prescribed antidepressants. The records showed I was going through a rough time and had normal feelings reflecting that. Joe and I don't understand why we were led to believe I had depression.

I weaned off the antidepressants and sleeping pills but am still going through withdrawals (yes, these drugs cause withdrawals - severe in some cases, both mental and physical), and we don't know if there will be permanent damage.

Joe and I want to get my story out to as many people as possible. We have learned a lot of information since we discovered my misdiagnosis and do not want anyone to have to endure what we have. Knowledge is power, we wanted to share what we have learned so you or someone you know can make a better decision if they are currently taking or a doctor wants to prescribe any psychiatric drug to them.

Cathy & Joe Valone