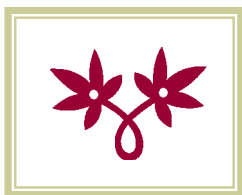


THE COLORADO  
PSYCHIATRIC SOCIETY,  
CHARG RESOURCE CENTER  
& YOUTH ACTION BOARD OF  
CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL  
COLORADO PRESENT:

YOUTH  
MENTAL  
HEALTH  
STORIES  
2018





# MENTAL HEALTH STORIES PROJECT



*Our purpose is to reduce stigma  
though broadly communicating  
mental health stories.*

The Mental Health Stories project is a partnership between the Public Information and Education Committee of the Colorado Psychiatric Society and the CHARG Resource Center.

---

We are proud to partner with Children's Hospital Colorado to recognize 6 outstanding entries to Sonder with honorariums of \$100 each and 2 honorable mentions with \$50 honorariums.

Stigma can be internal as well as external and there is no better way to counter it than to tell the stories that include examples of effective diagnosis, treatment, empathy and support from family, friends, employers and a therapeutic community. We hope you learn as much as we have reading these stories.

## CONGRATULATIONS:

Jaley, Krysta, Jaelynn, Raye, Ellie and Katie Lin

Honorable Mention to:

Leia and Reese

## **To all of the youth who submitted stories —**

We commend you for your courage and eloquence in sharing your stories. Your voice, journey and honesty with yourself and the world are inspiring. We wish you well with your continued recovery. Thank you.

More information at

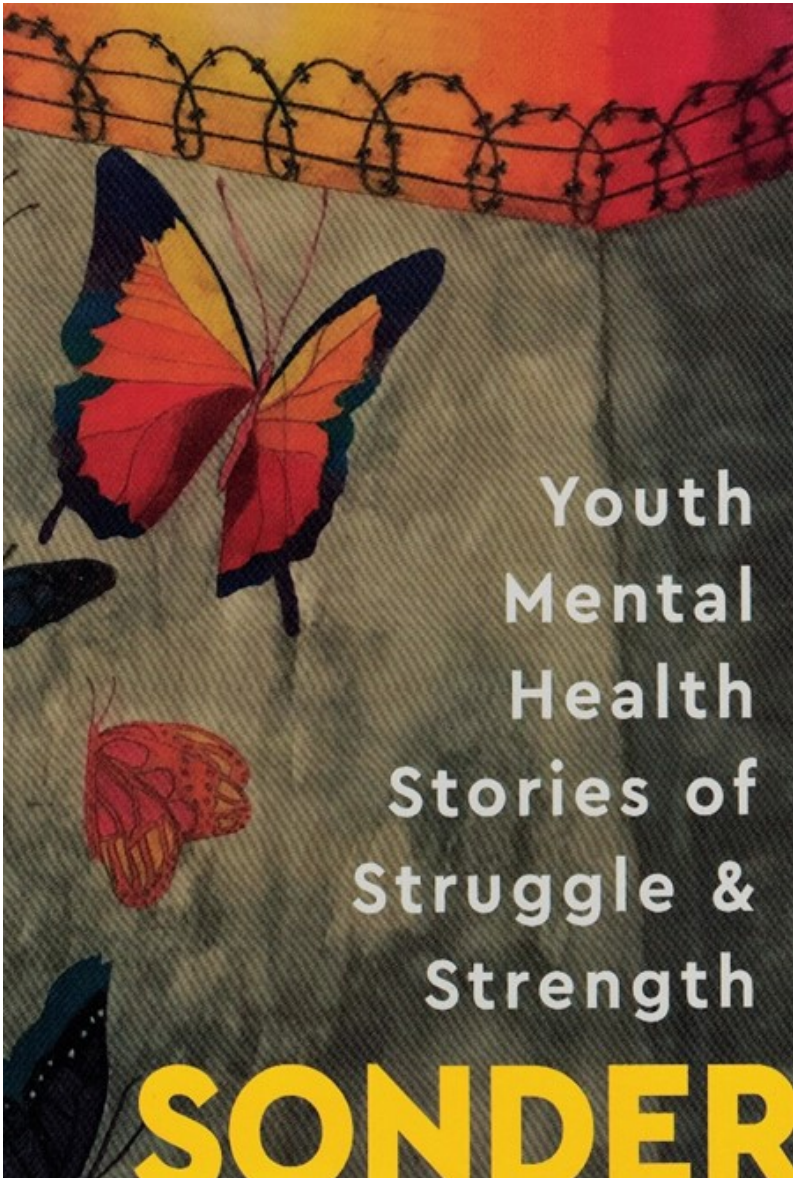
[www.coloradopsychiatric.org/mental-health-stories-project](http://www.coloradopsychiatric.org/mental-health-stories-project)



## Youth Mental Health Stories

*this booklet is excerpts from Sonder*

SONDER IS AVAILABLE TO EXPLORE [HERE](#).



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Beautifully Broken .....	4
Essay and Photo by Jaley Meibos	
Just Speak.....	6
Essay by Krysta Netherton	
Light at the End of the Tunnel.....	8
Essay by Jaelynn Walters	
The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly.....	10
Essay by Raye	
I am Beautiful?.....	12
Poem by Katie Lin Merrill	
To the Boy Whose Heartbeats are Numbered.....	13
Poem by Reese Smith	
Obligatory Depression Agreement.....	15
Visual Art by Leia Rockhold	
The Grass is Greener Where You Water It.....	16
Essay by Ellie Peak	



# BEAUTIFULLY BROKEN

By Jaley Meibos

I had this idea for a photo shoot back when I was reading about a Japanese art called "kintsukoroi", meaning golden repair. What it is, is someone takes broken pieces of pottery and repairs them by using a golden lacquer. The result is stunning, and turns a once broken thing into something even more beautiful than it was before it was broken. I, being a lover of metaphors, found this to be extremely relevant to me. Not just to me, but to all of us...

We are all beautifully broken in one way or another, and I like to believe that our persistence and patience through the plethora of trials that life throws at us fills our cracks with gold. We have the ability to turn our souls into something even more magnificent and beautiful than they were at the start. We are not defined by the pains we go through, we are defined by the strength and courage that is found in our healing.

To me personally, this relates most to my experiences with mental illness, in particular depression. For the longest time I convinced myself that I deserved to feel the sadness and pain that I did. I slept my life away. I avoided people. I told myself the meanest and most irrational lies that destroyed my self confidence. I felt like the more broken I got, the less lovable I was. I felt like I was beyond repair.

I hit an all time low in January of 2015, resulting in a hospital stay. I didn't feel like life was worth it. Actually, I felt like I wasn't worth living. And that breaks my heart to say now, because after all this time, I have seen the cracks that covered my soul slowly be filled with gold.

I am happy. I am so happy right now, and I am happy with who I have become. A year ago, I would not imagine myself to be where I am today. A year ago, I came home from my first semester of college due to depression. I felt worthless, guilty, a failure. There were many times where I would contemplate the idea of escaping life.

My life was saved by countless things, but primarily by my desire to find joy. And I did. I found joy in my family, who has been there through the most painful and heart wrenching times. I found joy in being a nanny, in finding an occupation that made me feel like I was needed. I found joy in finding the right therapist (after cycling through tons of others). I found joy

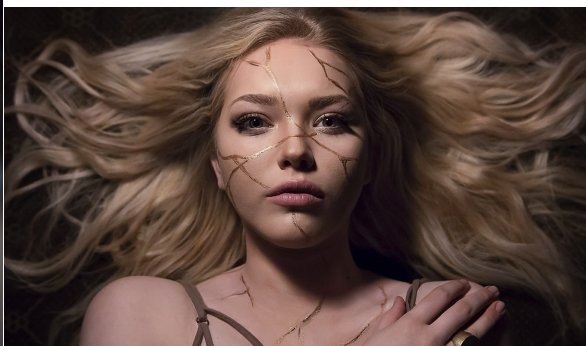
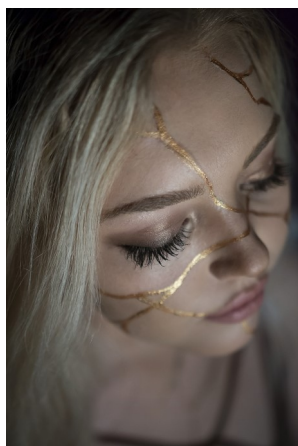
with the right medicines, which are NOT a bad thing when it comes to your health. For so long, I stopped even looking for reasons to be happy. I stopped hoping for to get better. I was so convinced that I deserved unhappiness, that I only paid attention to the negative things in my life while still wearing a mask of positivity. When I realized this wasn't working so well for me, I figured maybe I'd start to seek joy, to seek out wholeness. To seek out what I always told other people they deserved, but hypocritically didn't even let myself feel. And I found joy as soon as I started to look for it.

I didn't only find joy. I found confidence. I found peace. I found wisdom and strength. I found me.

And that is the gold that fills my cracks. The thing about kintsukuroi is that the original cracks are still completely visible, even being magnified by the lacquer that holds the broken pieces together. But part of the beauty is found in knowing that something that was once in pieces can be made whole again. And not only made whole, but more beautiful than before. And I know that I have more cracks just waiting to be etched into my life, but I am okay with that, for I know that there is beauty in the mending.

If you are feeling broken, no matter what sort of pain that may be, please know that you are not stuck. You are never alone, and you are so loved. You will find the gold that fills every crack. You are never "beyond repair".

"We are all broken. That's how the light gets in." -Ernest Hemingway



# JUST SPEAK

By Krysta Netherton

For everyone it's different. For some people it's weights tied to their ankles, for others it's a dark ocean wave dragging them below the surface time and time again. It can be a bully, tripping you while you walk and tugging your hair while you try to focus. But for almost everyone affected by it, it is a daily struggle.

Even though they are depicted commonly in the media, there are whirlwinds of stigma surrounding mental illness. Mental illness is a cunning, versatile enemy of many; yet so many people have almost no understanding of it. Most people struggling with a mental illness are diagnosed, prescribed medication, and then sent on their way. They later get asked how they're adjusting and have no idea how to respond because they have inadequate knowledge of their own personal enemy.

I was eight when I was first diagnosed with depression, I didn't even know what it was. I didn't understand, and nobody explained it to me. My mother just kept giving me the medication, and saying it's what I needed to feel normal. I didn't know what "normal" was. My depression was a neutral party, lying dormant until I reached middle school. Then, it hit me, and it hit me hard. I was twelve the first time I took something sharp to my skin purposely.

It was the internet that first gave me the idea for self-harm, as well as gave me the tiniest bit of knowledge about my mental illness. I still didn't understand why I had depression. I lost myself in self-harm, and eventually starved myself for months on end. I hated myself, my mind, and every aspect of who I was. My mom would take away my razors, scissors, thumbtacks, and hid the kitchen knives, but I would always find a way.

The statement "You can't help people that don't want to be helped" is something not a lot of people understand, and it's often overlooked; but it rings true. I did not want help, I continued to hurt myself, to the point it looked like barbed wire was my outfit of choice. Even though I was struggling, it seemed like everyone was against me.

Being openly mocked and told to kill yourself when you're barely even a teenager has a detrimental impact, especially when it's a daily occurrence. Like a lightning rod, I attracted negativity. I had nobody. I

know now that kids are honestly just ignorant, and usually don't know any better; but I didn't know that back then. I thought I was a freak, that I was just a disappointment to my parents, and it made it a whole lot more difficult on me. I honestly thought that at such a young age I would be better off dead, and it was painfully overwhelming.

I was fourteen when I tried to kill myself, barely a freshman in high school. I overdosed. By the time I made it to the hospital they were unsure about accepting me. I was almost flown Flight For Life because they truly did not think I would make it. But after pumping my stomach, giving me two IV's, an oxygen mask, and heart and lung monitors, I was released after 26 hours.

After that my perspective didn't change much, I continued down the rabbit hole into my own kind of madness. My self-harm got worse, and I put myself in harrowing situations and relationships on multiple occasions. I was a complete wreck, and unsuccessfully tried to commit suicide countless times. I felt so stupid; I was constantly contributing to my own destruction. I made neverending mistakes, and I was blindly doing things without thinking of the consequences.

If I was healthy, the consequences would have been enough to stop me, or at least make me think that maybe what I was doing wasn't safe. But I wasn't concerned about my safety; it was the last thing on my mind. I didn't care about myself, and that made it easier for other people not to care about me. I did not feel like I was alive, only that everybody and everything was passing me by. I felt I was being suffocated by a presence that wasn't even there.

I was completely alone, and nobody cared. It wasn't until after I began dating my old best friend that I began looking for help for myself, and my mental state. He was nowhere near the answer or the cure, and I know that, but he showed me that I deserve happiness, that I deserved recovery, and made me feel like I've never felt. He showed me love and compassion, and I didn't know how to deal with it at first.

I have struggled and struggled for ten years with mental illnesses, and the one aspect I would want to change about the whole thing is that I wish someone would have sat me down and explained it to me. I did not understand at all, and had been misinformed by the internet, by all the stigma that surrounds mental illness. I thought all the negative bullshit was true, and that I was all those negative things. My mental illnesses have hindered me greatly in my life, and it all could have been different if someone would have just talked to me about it.



I still struggle with it everyday, but after being helped by my boyfriend's family and actually getting an understanding of it all, I can see recovery in the horizon. I'm thankful that I understand now. It has made me who I am and taught me a lot of lessons, some that I never thought I'd have to go through.

The stigma surrounding mental illness is lower than it used to be, as well as the notion that asking for help is "weak-minded". Do not be afraid to ask for help, you cannot control the issues infecting your mind. You wouldn't make someone feel bad about having cancer, would you? No, because it is out of that person's control. There are multiple ways to help rid patients of cancer, just like there are many ways to stabilize mental issues.

## **LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL**

**By Jaelynn Walters**

"We don't even know how strong we are until we are forced to bring that hidden strength forward. In times of tragedy, of war, of necessity, people do amazing things (Isabel Allende)."

Throughout all the let downs, disappointment, lies, regrets, anxiety, and depression I managed to stay strong as I could be through the highs and lows of life fighting to survive. I feel like my life started to get bad when my mom and step dad got married. At first, we lived the life of a happy, aspiring family, and that was all I could ever ask for. For about the first 3 to 4 years of my life after my mom got married, life was great and exciting. Life started to get really bad when my step dad started drinking and becoming violent when he was intoxicated. The only thing I remember was my mom and step dad fighting constantly. As the fights and alcohol started to increase my mom turned to drugs. She often claimed that she only tried it once, until addiction became a part of her life. One of the main reasons why my mom started doing drugs was not only my step dad, but because of me, my brother, and sister. Whenever we were all going through a hard time we blamed and punished her by yelling at her. We even threatened to take our own lives because we were so tired of the life we were living. My mom would lie to us by saying she stopped doing drugs and I truly believed her. I started to become suspicious when random people started coming over to our house. At first, I thought they were her friends, but they just wanted drugs. I felt betrayed and couldn't believe anything anymore.

After a year went by, little things started to happen. Just when I thought my life couldn't get any worse, my mom went to jail in 2017 for a month and a half. We lost our home and I was homeless by myself bouncing from couch to couch at friend's houses. I finally found shelter with one of my mom's old drug friends who came over our house long ago. I liked her a lot and related her to a sister figure. Even though she made bad choices that I didn't agree with, she took care of me. She did bad things with men, so she could have money in her pocket to feed me and buy gas money to take me to school. Half the time I did not go to school because the nearest school was 30 minutes away. The school I attended was in Hayden. I got bullied and I was suicidal. Everyone left me, even my best friend.

As weeks went by, my grandma bailed my mom out of jail and we moved to a town called Meeker. I lied to my mom and told her that I was happy there when inside I wasn't. I started to hurt myself again until my mom found out. I was battling with depression when she saw cuts on my arms and legs. We moved back to Pueblo and lived in my grandparent's rental home. At home, I was uncomfortable with my mom's new boyfriend living with us. She was doing great until I found out she and her boyfriend were lying to me and started to do drugs again. My grandma found out and kicked us out of the house. We were forced to put our belonging into storage and moved into a 1-bedroom house with 9 people and a dog. I fell deeper into depression and began hating everything about life. Time passed, and my mom decided to go to rehab. She came out better and started to be herself again. We decided to move back to Hayden when we got the call that someone sold all of our stuff, even my Marilyn Monroe collection that meant a lot to me. Everything in my life was taken from me and broke me into a million pieces. I never had a lot of things to begin with, but when they took everything from me I didn't know how to cope or feel anymore. Every little thing I ever received as so valuable to me.

Life started to slow down after a long run of misery. I am learning to heal after everything that has happened to me. There are bad moments and good, but I am always learning as I go. I am thankful for being here today living with my aunt in Pueblo until one day me, my mom, and my little sister get our own home. I am also thankful for my teacher, she has helped me with so much in life and sets daily goals with me. Most of all, I am proud of my mother for coming a long way trying her best to be happy even on the bad days.

# THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY

## A MENTAL HEALTH MANIFESTO

By Raye

When I'm depressed, Tumblr likes to tell me that I'm not my mental illness. When I'm dysphoric, my best friend reminds me that I'm not my body. When I'm overwhelmed by anxiety, my therapist assures me that I'm not my thoughts or feelings.

But if you strip all of that away, what's left?

I'd like to say that I'm not my depression or dysphoria or anxiety. I'd like to say that I'm not my disassociation or my abandonment. I'd like to say that I don't flinch when people tap me or have panic attacks for no reason.

But I do. And I am.

I am also so so many other things. I make art. I put hot sauce in my mac and cheese and listen to '60s French Pop. I like climbing fourteeners and have a wicked affinity for button ups. I know how to play the ukulele, and I love podcasts. I am many colors of fucked up; I am the sun and all its fire; I am a living dichotomy.

"If neurotic is wanting two mutually exclusive things at one and the same time," Sylvia Plath famously wrote in *The Bell Jar*, "then I'm neurotic as hell."

I'll one up you, Plath. Not only do I often want two mutually exclusive things, but I am them.

I am both happy and sad. Sometimes, I want to see my friends but can't make the effort to communicate. My anxiety makes me care too much and my depression makes me apathetic. I am a perfectionist, but I also constantly want to give up. I stay awake worrying about school and then am too tired to do any classwork. I want to do everything. I want to do nothing. I am the good, the bad, and the ugly all in one human being.

This is how I got here.

It started in eighth grade. The ugliness, I mean. It looked like pulling away from all of my friends and eating lunch in the teachers' office and crying for no reason. It looked like a lot of smiling and saying, "I'm just tired."

The ugly was pulling over on the side of the road and screaming into my hands because I wasn't sure how much longer I could do this. The ugly was sobbing on my bedroom floor and sleeping there because I didn't have the energy to get into bed. The ugly was the cutting. The ugly was biting my thumb during a movie so nobody could hear my teeth chattering with panic. The ugly was looking into a mirror and having no idea where or who I was.

The bad happened freshman year. The bad was the waiting -- the year I spent gathering the resolve to reach out for help. The bad was living through the three slow months after I finally did to secure a therapy appointment. The bad was the first therapist, who told me that "such a pretty girl shouldn't have problems like this." The bad was the second, who didn't believe I was transgender. The bad was Lexapro, which made me want to die. The bad was basically all of high school.

The good has come recently. The good is finding my current therapist, who uses my pronouns. The good is finding yoga and deep breathing, even though I would've punched someone who suggested those activities to me not so long ago. The good is swing dancing, going hiking, riding out the perfect wave while boogie boarding, and playing something in Cards Against Humanity that makes me laugh until my jaw hurts. The good is french toast with extra syrup and blowing out birthday candles and watching the New Year's ball drop.

The good is poetry, community, and volunteering. The good is finding the right medication and talking openly with my friends and teachers about mental health. The good is being okay with an essay that's not perfect -- because I'm happy to be alive to write this at all. The good is believing that my pain has a purpose, and this is it. This is my message, my Story.

The best is letting the good and bad and ugly exist without shame or judgement. The best is knowing that this thing is an uphill battle, but I'm not the only one. If you feel good and bad and ugly at one and the same time, you're not the only one.



# I AM BEAUTIFUL?

By Katie Lin Merrill

People keep telling me that I am beautiful.

They tell me that I am beautiful as I push plates of food away from me.

They tell me that I am beautiful as I go whole days without eating.

They tell me that I am beautiful

They tell me that I am beautiful

They tell me that I am beautiful

When will people realize that this is not about beauty.

This disorder, This THING that afflicts me is not about being  
beautiful.

It is not about me wanting to be the picture-perfect Barbie.

I wish I could explain what it is about.

Pinpoint a single reason why I am doing this to myself.

But I can't

I really can't

I know I need to eat.

Logically I am very aware that my body needs food to survive.

That calories are essential.

But this disorder is anything but logical.

This disorder screams at me when I eat food,

This disorder screams at me when I look at food.

This disorder screams at me when I look at carrots.

I mean seriously... what is wrong with carrots.

So yeah,

I am frustrated.

I am angry.  
I am angry at my disorder.  
I am angry at the world.  
I am angry at myself  
because who the hell can't even force themselves to eat.  
And because I can't explain it  
Because I can't give a reason why  
They tell me that I am beautiful.

## **TO THE BOY WHOSE HEARTBEATS ARE NUMBERED**

**By Reese Smith**

To the boy whose heartbeats are numbered,  
You were born early and tiny and sick  
Breathing through tubes with your finger nails turning blue  
Did you know that every day, every 100,000 heartbeats, was a miracle  
Your days were numbered starting with one  
And your mom and sister and friends have held their breath  
and counted  
Every day  
One- 100,000, Two- 200,000, Three-300,000  
Until you reached 100,000,000 and every heartbeat was a prayer  
*Please, ba-bump, please, ba-bump, please, ba-bump*

And every smile, every Spiderman toy, every half-hour episode was a  
miracle

Because you learned to breathe around a tube

And talk with a hole in your throat

And sleep with the beep, beep, beeping of each heartbeat measured

And your evil laugh and temper tantrums are determined by heartbeats

100,000 miracles

And you breathe in and out,

Your mother and sister listening and counting

Because they will never see you grow

Or become a mature, intelligent, and kind human

And you will never fall in love or have a family of your own

Because each scalpel, each incision to your heart

Slices your innocence and your spirit

Because no laughs can outnumber your counted heartbeats

And so every time I look at you and see your scars

And your beautiful, tragic, hopeful smile

I count your heartbeats

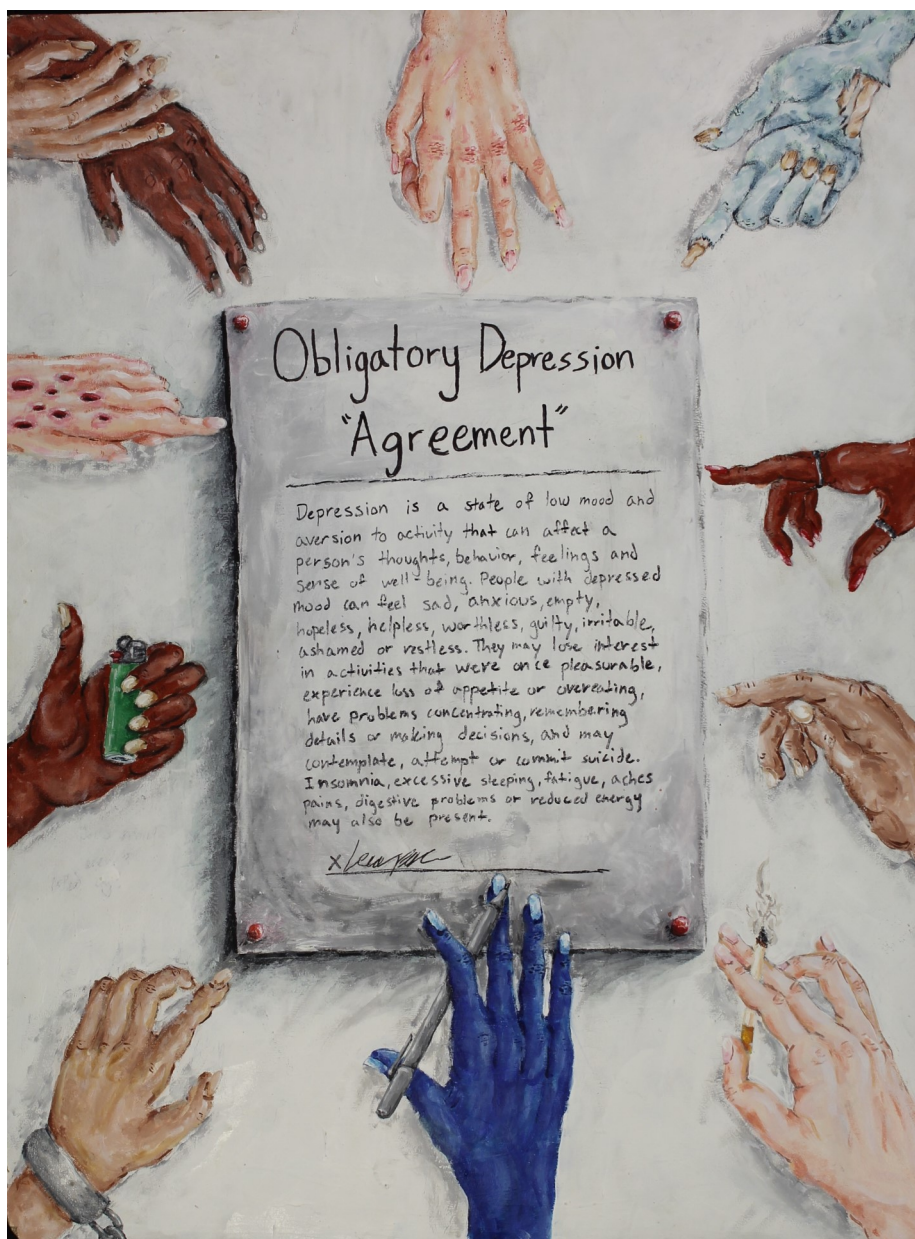
One- 100,000, Two- 200,000, Three- 300,000

Until I count a 100,000,000 and my heart stalls

All of my heartbeats, Reese

# OBLIGATORY DEPRESSION AGREEMENT

By Leia Rockhold





# THE GRASS IS GREENER WHERE YOU WATER IT

By Ellie Peak

When something bad happens in our life, our soul grows weak and our smile no longer shows. Its like all of the happiness is getting pushed out by darkness. Why let that happen? Why not be stronger than that darkness. Focus on the positive in the moment, even when you feel like breaking down. Like what we all say, the grass is greener where you water it.

My emotional struggle happened in the year of 2017. The month was February, that was the month my grandma went into the hospital. When I first heard this news, I was devastated. My grandma was not only my family, but my best friend. I could tell her anything, cry on her shoulder, or laugh until my stomach was sore from all of our giggles. Except, instead of my stomach being sore from laughing, it was filled with butterflies from, as it felt like, the darkest part of the world.

Right away I wanted to see her, hug her and tell it was going to be okay. You are strong enough, you will beat this. Sadly, that did not turn out as I thought it would have. When I got there to her room, level four, room 4402, I walked in with a grin on my face. A grin that shortly turned into a dark frown that turned into tears. Tears on my cheeks, down to my quivering lip. I saw her there, on the bed with a tube on her mouth, and cords in her arm. She couldn't even open her eyes. She couldn't talk. She couldn't smile. She couldn't even breathe on her own. Her face was stuck in time with a feeling that was screaming out to me, *help*. I couldn't help her. I couldn't help my grandma, my best friend, the only person I could tell anything to. That's when my soul was turning dark and crippling down to nothing but negativity and darkness.

I visited her everyday. After school, going to see her was my priority. One day, I walked in her room, and she was sitting up. I could barely move, the only thing I managed to do was smile. Was my grandma going to live? Was she okay now? Can we take her home? All these thoughts swarmed around in my head I looked at her at her tired eyes. Even though my grandma knew she was sick, she still had her warming smile, and loving touch that made you safe. When I gave her a hug, it felt like she was letting go. Her hands were so warm on my back, and the light grip she made was making me realize she was letting go. I tried to push that idea out of my head. I did not want to accept the fact my

grandma wanted to go to heaven. A place where I know she would be safe. A place I trusted as a good home. I knew she was going to be okay, but I wasn't ready to let go, even when she was ready to go home.

My grandma was up and talking for about a week. Family flew in and hopes were up. If this pattern kept improving, she was going to go home. Not back to home on earth, but home with God. The week of her talking and giving out her love, was her way of saying goodbye. I knew that was the reality of it all. I really did not want to believe it though.

Soon after that week of goodbyes, my grandma went into full organ failure. She was transferred to the I.C.U. After that happened, I started to miss school days. Seeing her like that, flipped over on her side, made me cry. She looked so peaceful, her eyelids resting on her eyes. She was just barely breathing, and when she was, the tube made it sound like wheezing. Every time I was there on visiting hours, our family was there. Nobody was fighting and everybody had a shoulder to cry on. Except for me, because my shoulder to cry on was on her journey to heaven, walking with God.

Before my Mom decided to let my grandma go to rest, everybody had their own time to say their goodbyes. When I walked in her room, Began to feel jealous. I felt jealous that my grandma was moving on without me. That she was going to be able to see God without me standing by her side. I was going to miss her so much. I didn't think I could do this thing called life without her. So, before she left me alone, I spilled out all my feelings. I told her that I was going to miss her, and I love her so much. I told her that I will update her on *The Walking Dead*, because that was our show, and lastly I told her to watch over my mom. Even though my mom put on a brave face, I knew she wasn't taking it well, and neither was I.

March 5th was the day my grandma passed. It was sad feeling down to my gut. I also had a bit of relief that she was in a better place than here on earth. After we went home, I went for a walk. I took a deep breath and looked up at the sky. The sky was so pretty that the clouds looked like they were painted on a canvas. The sun peeked through as if it was saying hello. At this point I was smiling because I knew my grandma was safe in god's arms. I accepted the fact that she has moved on to a better place, but I know i'm going to see her again. I knew that even though she wasn't here in person, she will always be in my heart, protecting me like my personal guardian angel.

My grandma's passing was a life changing experience for people that knew her. My uncle came back to the family when he heard the bad news. Nobody has heard from him for about 5 years. Then, he came back and now we all have a healthy relationship with him. Even several months after her passing, one of her good friends named their food truck after her. Another one of her friends did some really beautiful artwork in her backyard in her honor. All these amazing things happened after her passing because people love her and miss her and never want her to get forgotten. Like the artwork for example, they turned a sad event the happened into an amazing memory for all to see. Not every bad event has to stay bad. Every bad event has an positive outcome if you chose to look at it the right way, positively.



## **Youth Mental Health Stories**

PUBLISHED BY COLORADO PSYCHIATRIC SOCIETY

2019