

My wacky brain

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I had arguably the picture perfect American childhood: the neighborhood, the family, the friends. Everything seemed, and honestly was, perfect. So when I sat in a psychiatrist's office and listened to a description of my dysthymia, a mild and long-lasting form of depression, I experienced the first crack. I remember leaving that appointment feeling the same way that I had when I walked in: hollow, guilty, messed-up. Only now I had a word for it: depression.

While some days I still do get trapped in my own brain, I try to wake up looking at the brighter side of this crack in my life. Thus, here is my list of 10 gifts I've received from my dysthymia. And forgive my sarcasm; ironically, it's therapy for me too.

1. Depression gave me the opportunity to jump out of a plane with my dad for my 22nd birthday. My experience with depression isn't characterized by sadness, but actually a lack thereof. I find myself in a cycle of feeling nothing, fighting so hard to feel something that I eventually surrender and revert back to nothingness. My solution to breaking that cycle is doing adventures that put my life at risk, and of course my dad's as well.
2. Depression gave me 2 half marathons and 2 full marathons, the absolute best days of my life. There's nothing like feeling that you're in a sinking hole that makes you want to figuratively, and literally, run out of it. Setting goals has been a huge part of me getting through

my days, and thanks to dysthymia, I set goals that strengthen my mind while absolutely destroying my body.

3. Depression gave me a love of the number 3. Every morning, I write 3 things down in my journal that I'm looking forward to for that day. Sometimes they are as simple as straightening my hair. But when I'm depressed, those 3 things are the only way I can get out of bed in the morning. I'm lucky that no matter what, I can always write talking to family, seeing my friends, and eating guacamole.
4. Depression gave me a career. Take note, still currently unemployed, but I know I'd like to take my love for science and figure out just what is happening in these brains of patients with mental illness. Who knows what that will turn into, but hey, if I spend all my free time trying to figure out my brain anyways, why not get paid for it.
5. Depression gave me 2 tattoos. Pre-depression me would have hard-core judged myself at the thought of putting a needle to my hashtag flawless skin. But depression taught me it's okay if I'm not perfect, I can't control everything, and I need to love myself for being a little roughened on the edges. For me, my tattoos represent breaking that generic mold of perfection and embracing my chaotic and crazy story instead, a reminder I absolutely love and need.
6. Depression gave me a new favorite Bible verse. Out of all the things this illness has graced me with, a renewed faith is surely what I am most grateful for. It gave me Song of Solomon 2:16, "my beloved is mine, and I am his", which is now happily inked with me forever.
7. Depression gave me my Harvard. Cliché, I know. But it took hitting a low to realize my high, the immeasurable

amount of support, love, and laughter that exists right through my own Lowell fire door.

8. Depression gave me cookies and cream ice cream. I've had stomach issues all my life, and thus have often had to forgo yummy treats on behalf of my health. But thankfully, I prioritize fighting my dysthymia rather than fighting my large intestine, treating myself to J.P. Licks for its mentally restorative effects.
9. Depression gave me abundant happiness. Ironic, yes. But after living in an unemotional fog for so long, when happiness does finally come, it comes hard. Sometimes overwhelmingly hard, even. I get to feel my happy moments so deeply, both out of appreciation that they are here and out of fear that they might soon pass.
10. Depression gave me home again. People who know me know I truly am obsessed with my home in St. Louis. To have a family who will listen to you hysterically crying on the phone while doing chemistry homework, who will send you care packages even though you told them to in the first place, and who will get a tattoo with you at the age of 53 because, in mom's words, YOLO, I'd take all the cracks and dents and mutated genes in the world to be related to my four perfect humans. So, thanks, depression.

Thank you.