

Thanks for taking the time to read this.

As you now know, I was sexually abused by a relative for roughly six years. This has had an incredible impact on my life thus far. I first discovered this, so to speak, when I was sixteen, and have been working through it ever since. I have lost an incredibly large chunk of my life as a result of the ramifications of this. I developed chronic – but not constant – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (or PTSD). For those unfamiliar, this isn't the easiest thing in the world to live with. On and off, there have been years during which I didn't function. At least, not properly.

What does that mean? And what do you mean you “discovered” it when you were 16?

The human brain does strange things sometimes. If you experience a trauma – particularly during the developmental phase of your brain – it can get blocked out. This doesn't only happen to children, it happens to a lot of people in traumatic situations, like those in war zones. So basically, your brain withholds these memories from you because they're actually really difficult to process and sometimes stressful situations or similar events can trigger them. For me, the actual abuse stopped around the time I was twelve or thirteen and between that time and the time I was sixteen, my brain did that block out thing. When I was in year 11 or 12, we had a half-yearly exam, and I really struggled with Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet*. At the time, my brain didn't make the connection that *Cloudstreet* features familial abuse as part of the narrative. Studying, memorising and analysing that story, whilst also undergoing the pressure of HSC level exams triggered my first flashback. It was pretty inconvenient, other than being completely traumatising, it was in the middle of the exam, right when I was about to write about *Cloudstreet*. I didn't write anything. Instead, I just sat there, and tried to make sense of the information that my brain was trying to filter through to me. It didn't make any sense, but at the same time, it was completely familiar. I knew immediately they were true memories, because I could remember them now, but I didn't understand them because how could they have just magically materialised in my mind?

I couldn't tell anyone, obviously. I didn't understand what was happening. And I was terrified. So, that was the first memory, and these fragments of information continued to seemingly randomly drop into my brain whenever they chose up until about 2008. I think, now, I have as many pieces of the puzzle I am going to get, and remember as much I am probably going to be able to.

So, this is how it starts, I guess.

Okay, you remembered some things. Then what happened?

Like any disorder or disease, PTSD has symptoms. For me, a heightened sense of feeling unsafe was paramount – and anyone who knows me today knows that my 'stranger danger' levels are higher than normal, but in those days, I was completely destabilised. I hadn't reconciled the memories, I didn't know what they meant and no one else knew. It was a dark time, and this destabilisation eventually evolved into full blown depression.

Depression isn't PTSD, and PTSD is not depression.

When you're going through the symptoms of PTSD, you feel a lot of things and it can be very overwhelming. When you have depression, you feel nothing at all. There's an all-encompassing numbness that I think is really well summed up by fellow depressionista, Allie Brosh, in [her blog here](#).

You pretty much feel like there is no reason to exist, because your existence is pointless. That you'll never leave this empty hole that was once your life. I spent many, many years in this hole. Even after my family found out – and were supportive. Even after school ended and university (which I had to find an alternate way into because of above HSC failing) started, even after I found a happy relationship and wonderful friends.

Sounds like life was pretty good, then? Is this how you got better?

No. These things were great, but they didn't mitigate the fact that I had rampant PTSD that was wrapped in persistent depression. A healthy family life, a wonderful support network and good people are a great way to enjoy life, but they weren't a cure for the underlying medical issues that I had going on, and the issues were beginning to impact my day to day life. This really became a problem once uni was done with and then I had to get a job. That I had to be at. Every day. At the same time. On time.

Waking up for work is hard enough for anyone (I feel your pain!), but doing so when you simultaneously don't even really know why you exist is basically impossible. It proved to be actually impossible. I could not do it.

So people knew, and were being supportive, and that wasn't enough?

Pretty much, yeah. It wasn't enough. I had been on anti-depressant medication on and off since 2007, but I hadn't had any proper counselling since the initial disclosure when I was in high school. So, I went about that. This is when things really began to change. It wasn't an easy process. There was a time commitment, and a very confronting process, but ultimately, therapy lead to acceptance and acceptance lead to the steps that lead toward happiness. Over time, I managed to set up a small business and work within my means and have thus far been fairly successful. Each roadblock became surmountable (and I didn't get evicted!).

Basically, in my experience, you can have all the love in the world, but when you have a medical condition – just like pneumonia or asthma – there is no substitute for the trained professionals who are capable of working with you to lead you to a healthy life. And that is why I am standing by Rosie's Place today, and hope you will stand with me. My goal is that my experience wasn't a waste, so that it isn't a secret, offensive, or something thing to hide, to fear or to shame. There are many things we hide within our families, such as domestic violence and abuse. This is something to overcome, to discourage.

Whoever you are, you can and will live happily ever after.

You know why? Because I can. And I will.

