

Opening our eyes by Nan Dickie

Three traps: Don't get caught in them!

There are at least three traps that those of us who live with chronic depression or bi-polar disorder can easily fall into. Indeed, anyone can fall into these traps, simply by virtue of being human.

How clearly we can all see when we are mentally healthy, when life is going well. We can list specific attitudes and actions we seemed unable to employ while we were going through stress or depression, strategies that may have helped us out in tough times. Here are three traps I've worked my way out of over the years.

Feeling like a victim: I used to think that no illness could be worse than a mental illness. I could list of many ways it was "the worst." Granted, it is a difficult, painful, often despairing experience that impacts my entire life. But there are no real advantages to labelling myself a victim. Holding onto it slows down my healing. When we give up victimhood, we feel vulnerable in an unfamiliar state: we lose the blanket of "I can't do anything about this." We are forced to risk, trust, fall down, get up and move on. It challenges us to accept our chronic illness, and this isn't easy to do.

During my most recent episode, my psychiatrist suggested that I ruminate too much. I reacted strongly and negatively to this assertion, which meant that it was probably true. Thinking and analyzing had become crutches for me, an escape. They were good ways to avoid facing directly my fears, feelings of worthlessness and despair. Trying to avoid them only strengthened them. When I gave up ruminating, I discovered I have positive tools to deal with the symptoms of my illness: patience, perseverance, quiet inner strength - all of which had been suffocated by my ruminating.

I realized some time ago that there is a certain comfort in being depressed, as it has happened so often and therefore I know what to expect, what I had always experienced as inevitable. This is a trap in which one tends to think "I may as well sit back and endure the torment."

Sadly, falling into one of these traps tends to thrust one into the other two. Similarly, if we work ourselves out of one, we can be on the way to working out of others. In doing so, we actively engage in self-care, can pursue healthy strategies, and thereby aid, and often hasten, our own recovery.

[Nan Dickie is facilitator of a peer-led depression support group (DSG) in Salmon Arm. DSG meetings are held the first and third Mondays at Askews Uptown community room at noon. Everyone, including supporters, welcome. Info: ndickie@telus.net; 250 832-3733.]