

Fear, Faith, Hope, and Courage

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After my episodes of schizoaffective disorder I felt completely lost and had no idea how to put my life back together. My mind was so dysfunctional, I had trouble processing language and I couldn't speak coherent sentences. I struggled from day to day and I only had the foresight to see a few days ahead of myself. The vision for those days was an expectation to relive the dregs of the previous several days. For several years I could only envision a life similar to that of my more immediate surroundings where I had no friends, I was barely able to socialize, I struggled to make it through a work day and could barely hold the most basic of jobs, and I lived at home in a state of depression. After coming home from work I mostly sat alone in the basement either playing video games or just mindlessly watching television in an effort to take my mind off my life. I had no idea how to make my mind function well again and my life was very dark. I didn't have plans for having any sort of future because it was difficult for me to see how I could improve my mental health to a point where I could live and experience an enjoyable life.

Going on age 25 I began working on my mental health and I decided I was going to make an effort to improve my functionality and my life in any way I could. I was scared and I was nervous because I had a lot of issues from trauma, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, anxiety, difficulties while growing up, and some other issues. I began facing my fears with the help of my doctor who is still my doctor. I initially never had very much hope but after a couple months of therapy sessions I noticed some small improvements.

My doctor and I talked about the power of faith but I had difficulty believing in a higher power or any divine force. After experiencing 4 years of schizoaffective disorder it was and still is almost impossible for me to believe a divine force could have planned or have played any part in the years of suffering and morbid adversity I was forced to face through no fault of my own. I think this is a common belief for people who have experienced extreme adversity. He argued that I still had faith but I disagreed. Faith is a firm belief that there is a factor or series of factors that someone can

count on, usually to cause good outcomes. After making some small improvements my motivation to work hard increased. Faith comes in many forms and my doctor helped me realize my faith is firmly rooted in my ability to move past adversity and improve the quality of my life. I developed faith because I made a decision to put forth effort and resources to change and work towards improving my mental health and functionality. This came in the form of changing the way I viewed the world and also by changing my thoughts surrounding the myriad of traumatic experiences I had been through.

For several dark years I couldn't picture myself living the life I enjoy today. My faith in my ability to improve gave me hope. With every improvement I made my mind's functionality improved, my social activity increased, and my thinking gained clarity. I was still afraid to even dare thinking I could have the things I wanted most out of life but I still had hope that they may come to fruition if I kept working. Hope is a belief that there is a possibility that something may happen and my hope for a better life was created from my faith in my ability to improve. Hope is a belief that positive expectations will come to fruition. The tunnel was very dark and the exit was nowhere in sight but I saw that I was making some improvements and these improvements encouraged me to journey forward.

Through my darkest days there were many demons and fears I was forced to face. Sometimes we picture mythological beasts when we think of demons but I have found it's helpful to know what a demon and a fear is comprised of. Breaking demons down into logical pieces of knowledge makes them easier to attack and eliminate. They are simply keystone issues that are initially extremely difficult to face but once the true identity of the demon is unveiled it's been fairly easy to work the meaning surrounding it and make it a zero. Knowing this has broken demons and fears down into something I can face and attack. I process everything with my mind in some way, shape, or form, so knowing the nuances of what I'm facing has been extremely helpful in eliminating issues in my life. Once I know what something is I can gain an idea of what to expect from it, and knowing what to expect from

a psychological issue has always given me the ability to logic my way through or around it.

Fear is caused by the expectation that something painful or detrimental will result from a certain experience. When addressing psychological issues and trauma I have been forced to turn inwards and address these fears by reliving and analyzing traumatic experiences. Courage is the ability to face something that can potentially be damaging in some way shape or form. Courage always has a source. My source has been my faith in my ability to improve and the hope that I'll be successful. For a while it was hope that propelled me forward but after several years of work that hope has developed into confidence. I have gotten to the point where I have so much faith in my ability to psychoanalyze and nullify issues from schizoaffective disorder and trauma that I look forward to finding them. I still encounter adverse emotions and other detriments while facing trauma and schizoaffective symptoms but I have the knowledge I'll have eliminated the issues and improved my life once I've faced the adversity. This has encouraged me to search for issues within my psyche.

Sometimes turning inward was difficult because simply thinking about the original traumatic experience triggered emotional and mental pain, anxiety, physiological dysfunction, and also physical pain from anxiety. There were times it also caused bits of psychosis, mental disorientation, and other schizoaffective symptoms. In years following my episodes making close friends was difficult for me because I was afraid of losing them. I had lost all my friends in college because of schizoaffective disorder. This made it difficult for me to let people into my life for a long time because I was always afraid of experiencing the pain of losing them. This was caused by the expectations from the original college experience. I had defense mechanisms of keeping space between myself and others and also never allowing myself to connect to others very well. Trauma is comprised of a cause that can be called an event, which was having lost all my friends from schizoaffective. This then creates an effect(s), which is something or any number of painful things and/or detriments that resulted from the original cause. In this case the negative effects were the pain, loneliness, and detriments experienced from having lost people whom I was close with.

Having an experience where a traumatic event causes extremely negative effects such as losing all my friends created the expectation that this event will always result in the previously experienced results, that being losing the friends again. The cause of losing the friends was having schizoaffective disorder, and that is something I may always have. The negative thoughts attached to the traumatic experiences were so powerful that I felt the pain from having lost friends just by thinking about my college experience and knowing I still have schizoaffective disorder.

When I was hanging out with new friends these thoughts loomed in my mind and kept me from allowing people to know me better and develop close relationships. The meaning surrounding the traumatic experiences I work with has to do with reshaping my expectations that were created from the cause and effect of the traumatic experience. I had to reassure myself that I am completely different than I was during episodes and no one has left me since then. I informed myself schizoaffective doesn't affect me much anymore therefore I have no reason to believe I ever will do anything that will push people away from me, especially since I am continually improving the way I socialize. I had to remember I haven't had psychosis or mental rigidity to a point where people were disinclined to speak to me and I now have good socialization skills.

I motivated myself and developed courage by realizing it's better to have loved and lost than to never have loved at all. I determined if I don't allow myself to connect to my friends and let them be close to me I'll always be lonely. This meant I had nothing to lose. These are the types of thoughts I have been journaling about that have improved my mental health and functionality to a point where people don't have the slightest clue I even have schizoaffective disorder unless I explicitly state it. Even when I have disclosed my disorder they've replied by telling me they had no idea and they were still in a state of disbelief until I had to repeat what I had just told them.

I also realized that thinking about a negative experience has absolutely no way of causing the negative effects to reoccur. When I address a traumatic issue the best thing I can do is to learn more about the cause and effect chain of it. For many years I had difficulty standing up for myself so when I am aware I am going to encounter someone who may treat me poorly I prepare myself mentally. I have sometimes thought ahead and predetermined things I could say or create plans of action if they do decide to be negative towards me. I like to study traumatic situations and learn more about them. In this case I learned these people are insecure and have their own issues and that I have every right to stand up for myself. I also discovered there are good ways and bad ways to stand up for myself but either way I am deserving of doing so. Gaining an understanding of a traumatic situation helped me create plans which help me influence the interaction to my advantage and/or a positive outcome.

Jean Paul Sartre has said the best way of understanding a past traumatic experience can not affect us is establishing that regardless of how similar a situation is to past trauma, we are still in a different situation and there will be a different outcome. This is because we have agency and we have the ability to influence our lives. Sometimes present situations trigger negative affects such as schizoaffective symptoms simply because the present situation has similar characteristics to a past traumatic experience. When I first returned to school

after my episodes I had psychosis and other symptoms on my first day in class just from being there and remembering my first episode. I had difficulty communicating and I was paranoid during my first several classes. I finally realized I'm not in my episode even though I'm in an environment similar to that of my first episode which lasted 2 years. Thinking about a traumatic experience is different than living that experience. The

emotions and thoughts from the trauma are still surrounding the negative cause, which makes it difficult to address, but knowing the thought of it can't cause the full effects of the original traumatic experience has helped me to address a number of issues.

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