

## Episode 1 - Moving Past Metallic Emptiness - Jef's Story

**James Fisher:** [00:00:02] Please be advised. We will be discussing subjects that may not be suitable for all audiences and will include subjects that some will find challenging traumatic or triggering.

**Keaton Leikam:** [00:00:17] Welcome to You Don't Fight Alone. A podcast sharing the stories of those of us successfully living with mental illness and how we got there.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:00:38] Really started experiencing suicidal thoughts and just a general feeling of. I don't know.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:00:48] Just kind of this metallic emptiness or sound just bounces around inside. At the age of 12

**Jef Crozier:** [00:01:07] My name is Jef Crozier. The official diagnosis is Major Depressive Disorder.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:01:14] Experienced various things throughout my life. That is the official diagnosis.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:01:25] My body's gift to me was self loathing and which I think a lot of kids go through that uh its. I recall sitting in. My quote therapist's office. It wasn't she wasn't a therapist she was just a school. It was it was a Christian school which. Here's another story right there. But I recall drawing this crude picture of my father on one side and mother on the other and me in the middle as this wall that they would shoot their volleys of insults over and sometimes they would miss and hit me. At least that's how it felt and around that time I think my mother was okay with going to see a psychiatrist. For me to go see a psychiatrist and I believe the first thing I was prescribed was Prozac which was still not in its infancy but it was relatively new to the market it is a much safer alternative to some of that tricyclic tricyclic antidepressants where you can't have tuna fish or fava beans or what have you. I think that a lot of kids are adolescents feel out of place in school and it's even in the adolescent psychology there's something called a personal fable where you believe that you are the only one who feels this way and that you know no one else can understand. And that's fairly common. But I guess if I jump ahead a little bit you know what if you never grow out of that. What if it's not something that you can just grow out of. What if it's not something that I don't know. I recall people telling me I need more sleep or more exercise or when I went to church it was You need more faith. You need to do all of these things to fix whatever this is about you that we don't really understand. But God help you.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:04:04] I've been dating a go through high school and I had ... during this time to deal with some of the feelings I've been having. I started to burn myself with things. I know that some people choose to cut themselves. I'm not sure why I gravitated towards burning. It was probably some sort of a metaphor for purification. But regardless it was not a great spot to be in. I found out when I was 18 just about to graduate. Over the phone that my girlfriend at the time had been cheating on me with a friend of ours and that she was basically already seeing him. And that was pretty much it. And I recall hanging up my corded phone because that was back in the 90s and I took out a, A Swiss army knife and tried to plunge it into my left hand which is usually the hand it takes the most abuse from these whether it be cigarettes matches knives and the blade barely pierced the skin until the knife folded over. Because the Swiss Army knife is not made to be a stabbing instrument. And I recall my mother telling me years before that she knew something was going on but ... I don't think she really knew how to deal with it.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:06:03] I mean how do you how do you talk to your son when he's burning himself with cigarettes. What do you say.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:06:20] I put my hope in these certain things both in the relationship in high school and the relationship where she died and also the relationship with my father. I had tied some sort of sense of worth to these relationships working out then when that didn't happen. My first response was just to turn inward to go back to those feelings.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:07:06] There is some comfort to the familiar you're familiar with feeling depressed that that you don't matter that almost so that there really nothing matters that nothing outside of you or inside of you really matters. So you almost float through your existence and weeks months years go by and you're still clinging to that same familiar lover as it were and that somehow these relationships gave me more meaning then. Or the gave me more value than what I already had. Intrinsically which is kind of a lifelong battle for those with mental illness or depression specifically. But again that was the most recent I think that's for.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:08:25] I'm just speaking for most of you out there which maybe isn't my place but I would wager that there's been quite a few times where it's been rockbottom or you've reached your limit and you either take it out on yourself via a suicide attempt. Try and numb it out via self mutilation. Abusing drugs, alcohol. Some way of escaping and controlling. Your problems always come back. And I knew that then but there are certain times when the insides are just screaming so much that you're begging for some sort of outside catharsis.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:09:28] Lets see when things start to change. When I started taking college classes I mean I hated high school hated it. The only thing that I really enjoyed was theater and being in theater because it was just my fellow freaks and geeks. And I didn't think that any education outside of high school was really for me but it was a he was the editor of our local newspaper in Broomfield.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:10:00] He came into the coffee shop I was working at and he saw something in me that I didn't see. And he brought me at a course catalog for a local college and I entertained it and thought to myself I don't know much about botany I should take a botany class.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:10:24] Granted I never did take a botany class but it introduced me. Excuse me it introduced me this whole new world of learning about things that I wanted to learn about and wouldn't you know one of the first classes I took was like 101 and I believe it was in that course my professor warned that and she said I don't know where she got this statistic but she said that it was 60 percent of people majoring in psychology just to figure out their own issues and only 40 percent who were just in it for that completely clinical. Those are the people who are going to go forward. I had no real grand ideas.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:11:14] I knew that I was in at 60 percent but it was actually learning about what was going on inside my head. Putting it in chemical terms or in diagnosis terms. That's it started to take ... not so much some of the stigma but some of the dread out of it some the mystery and I started having panic attacks around that time not sure why but it was through researching what is actually happening inside the body that I first realized OK I can slow my breathing down but I also check my pulse because it's physically impossible to pass out if you have a normal heartbeat.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:12:13] And it was just that kind of learning that gave me this glimmer of hope that this is not some I don't know behemoth out there that is going to rule my life.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:12:32] I may have it forever. But I think actually attaining the knowledge of what

was going on in my brain was going on my body. How certain drugs would affect certain things certain prescription drugs legal drugs would.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:13:01] It was then that I decided at that time that hey maybe I could help others with this because I got better weapon than empathy to fight this epidemic of depression mental illness.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:13:24] I think that some of the, uh, the breakthrough happens at least for me with just accepting that this is something that is very likely lifelong.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:13:40] I've talked with probably hundreds of people who are on medication doing fine. And there is that certain point that you reach where you think that you had. I feel great. I can go off of this as if it was just this broken bone this part just needed time to heal. When you can finally take the cast off. And I think that myself personally and I would assume quite a few people out there who. Have mental illness. They're just waiting for that time when it just goes away.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:14:24] And I think that's part of where you get stuck now rather than living and dealing with how things are right now and not accepting it is all good but all good enough I think that my ideal response if I had a choice would be to stay up late watching movies sleeping in late probably drinking too much not doing anything really productive but just kind of numbing.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:15:12] But I ... I've found over time that that doesn't do any good for several reasons.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:15:28] And I guess that's where the whole fight aspect of it comes in.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:15:36] You Don't Fight Alone. If I can coin the name of the podcast. But but you yourself do have to fight. And that sucks.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:15:48] It is much easier to give in to whatever your illness that day is saying so much easier. But after a while I think some of my depression started to become anger anger at the circumstances of my life but also just how I'd been dealing with them. And my M.O. was just to isolate because I was comfortable and 20 plus years after a diagnosis. I keep going back to the same thing of just isolating. And when you know that still doesn't work.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:16:36] That I had to I had to make an investment in my own life which usually meant investing in other people's lives.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:16:54] And I'm not saying in a go out and help people with their own depression and be a psychologist because that's for a very select few myself not so much but it's I guess rather simple in in some ways the best way to get outside of myself was just to help others. And it started out with just volunteering at homeless shelters are great basic stuff chopping lettuce for three hours and then serving a meal. But for those three hours I was not thinking about my own sense of worthlessness and over time when I added that experience in over and over and over again I realized that for me that was one of the ways that I could fight.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:18:34] It's actually kind of frightening that somebody people can go through their entire lives. With. Diagnoses and just suffering through. But there's only a handful of people out there who will ask very direct very specific questions not just how are you feeling today but when was your rock bottom. Are you hitting it now. Do you feel anything. I think even with how much research has gone in and how much medication is out there now the family members and friends of people with me with mental illness are still so afraid to ask hard questions. And I think that was part

of what education did for me. It didn't ask the hard questions but it answered those things that no one had ever asked. But to have someone in my life that I cared about be brave enough to ask me if I was feeling suicidal if I wanted to cut myself again.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:20:00] That's a that's a vulnerable step on their part.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:20:07] But it's it takes away that fear that so many people with mental illness have that they're not going to be understood or that they need to sweep it under the rug or that if they can just act okay then maybe people won't notice. But if you if you can be that that person who asks those honest questions.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:20:40] And it may not always come out right because you might be afraid.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:20:46] But statistically asking someone point blank if they're contemplating suicide or if their plans for suicide doesn't have any statistical relation to increased suicide ality and if what this podcast I assume is trying to do is take away some of the stigma and make it an open conversation.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:21:16] Then by all means start with that. There's probably lots of people in your life that are just begging to have those hard questions asked because that means you really care that you're not afraid of them. You're not afraid of their diagnosis. Especially now in this climate where seemingly a lot of violent crimes are the scapegoat is mental illness.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:21:53] And oftentimes the people in your life want to understand and they're not and they're not going to know how to fight for you.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:21:59] But ultimately if you're going to live through this you're going to thrive through this. You have to fight for yourself and it's it's going to be really shitty somedays because you will not feel like fighting for anything. Some days that's the only way that you're going to.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:22:53] When I was leading groups. At the hospital for eating disorders there was a newer cell therapy. It's kind of a hybrid. It's called ACT acceptance and commitment therapy.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:23:15] And I've found that even decades after.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:23:25] I mean I was the one who was actually supposed to be leading this but I was still learning. And the first aspect was just acceptance acceptance of where you are at this moment in time. Is that saying that you think it's good but you have to accept it as it just is because you can live you can live your entire life in denial of what you're going through or what reality is. Second step is commitment you have to commit to something that you value and for so many people who struggle with mental illness it's it's almost kind of a luxury to find that thing that's outside of you that you not just think is important but that you actually value whether it's your faith whether it's your spouse. But it's not even though was it just kind of the intangibles. It's got to be something that actually moves you. And once you've found that that one thing you can commit to that one thing that you value those outside of you then you start to take steps and of course if you've lived a long enough time ... without finding value in much is going to be difficult to not just rush into it but even just taking baby steps.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:25:25] Whether that is you know volunteering at a shelter or a shelter for animals or something outside of you that you value just take the first step towards that.

**Jef Crozier:** [00:25:48] And eventually you find that your thoughts don't drift so much towards

your own plight. And then you might be surprised that your own personal sense of value sneaks up on you. As you have enough of these interactions outside of yourself. That those interactions validate those parts of you that you could never do on your own.

**James Fisher:** [00:26:21] For more information please visit [youdontfightalone.org](http://youdontfightalone.org).

**James Fisher:** [00:26:27] You don't fight alone is supported in part by MLH services a service disabled veteran owned small business for your marketing needs. [MLH-services.com](http://MLH-services.com).

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