

For Broadcast: 17th October 2021

SEND ME AN ANGEL

Interview with Jane

Jane: There was no definitive moment where I just suddenly realized, Oh man, I'm really sad. I'm really depressed. Like, I'm balling my eyes out for no reason. It just gradually happens. And there's no motivation and no energy to do anything.

Celia: Wouldn't be great if we could deal with depression in a purely logical way. One plus one equals two and follow these three simple steps and everything will be okay. But depression, isn't simple, not for the person struggling with it. And not for the people surrounding that person. But being difficult doesn't mean it's hopeless. Coming up I'll be chatting with Jane about how depression sneaked up on her.

Celia: Jane, I've known you for a few years and I never would have picked you for someone who struggled with depression.

Jane: I've always been what I like to think of myself as a bubbly, happy person, and that's how my friends would know me. But I guess at the same time, you do learn to hide your depression. You don't want people to know necessarily.

Celia: Why? Why do you think that is?

Jane: You don't want to think that anything is wrong. You want to be normal and I hate using that word, but you know what I mean.

Celia: So, what are the signs of depression for you?

Jane: Really moody, closing myself off from everybody. Just isolating myself. If I was struggling with anything, I never reached out to anybody. I would just hide in my own shell. Yeah, even in high school. And then, through my twenties, I had a job where I was, caring for elderly people. And so I was constantly giving my time and energy, and I think that made it worse for me because I was giving so much of myself to them because I loved my job, but it was just emotionally draining.

Celia: So, so even though you loved your job, you were finding that you were dreading getting out of bed to actually go to a job that you loved.

Jane: Yeah.

Celia: So when did you decide this is maybe something that you might have to deal with?

Jane: I don't know, there was no definitive moment where I just suddenly realized, Oh, this is wrong. It just sneaks up on you. You, you just stop going out as much, you start hiding a bit more. And I think my mum said, you need to go and deal with this, so I went to my GP and then saw a psychologist. I was put on some medication and after a while that seemed to help.

Celia: Did you still stay in that job?

Jane: No, I ended up leaving because I just, I couldn't, I couldn't do it. And I think I needed that recovery time, I needed to focus emotionally on myself.

Celia: Nothing left to give to anyone else.

Jane: So then I was able to find an admin job where I was just answering phone calls and passing them on, and there was no responsibility. I didn't take any emotional baggage home.

Celia: You eventually got married, had four kids and were medication free for about nine years when things started unravelling again.

Jane: I was getting really teary and really cranky with the kids for no reason. Like more than just, you know, a strung out mum.

Celia: What about your kids, did that add extra difficulty for you?

Jane: In many ways as demanding as the kids were, at the same time, they got me out of bed more because, you know, I didn't want to completely neglect them. Although when I got to my worst, I probably almost was. Yes, they got fed and they got clothed and all that sort of thing, but they certainly didn't get any quality time. But they did keep me out of my worst for a long time I think.

Celia: What do you reckon the kids were thinking?

Jane: I think they just kind of thought it was normal for me to lie in bed more and they would just come and jump on the bed with me. And, I just, I dunno ignored them, while they did it. They just thought that was normal. I just remember that was the darkest time. I was trying to get counselling but my mum would have to take me to the psychologist because I couldn't get myself there. I just could not get out of bed and drive myself there. And I remember my psychologist setting me homework and my homework for the week was to get up and have a shower every day. That was all I could cope with.

Celia: Coming up, we'll be talking more about the things that helped and the things that didn't help Jane when her depression was at its worst.

Jane: It was hard to accept help because a lot of the help that people were offering wasn't necessarily what I wanted or needed.

Celia: Can you give an example of that?

Jane: Well, I would be staying in bed. So obviously the kids are running around and the house would be getting messy and stuff. So somebody would want to come in and clean my house, which, yes, that's helpful. And for the kids' sake, yes, that's great. But at the same time, that wasn't necessarily what I myself needed and it kind of just made me feel guilty that somebody was cleaning my house and I couldn't do it.

Celia: What else was crappy?

Jane: The whole cheer me up thing, "Oh cheer up. It'll get better". That or ...

Celia: Just go out for a walk?

Jane: Yeah. Yes I know that exercise is key and getting sunlight and all of that. You hear it all and you go to your psychologist and they tell you all the things that you should be doing, but you don't need everybody to tell you all the time. Or for people to assume that you staying in bed is just being lazy. I got a bit of that for a while there.

Celia: So what would have helped instead in that space?

Jane: Honestly, I think the times that helped the most was when someone just made a cup of tea and came and sat on the couch with me or sat on my bed and just chatted or just sat there, didn't

pressure me to talk about anything in particular. They didn't say, what can we do to fix this? They just sat there with me.

Celia: They had a cup of tea with you, watched telly with you. Whatever.

Jane: Yeah. They didn't worry about crumbs on the floor or plates in the sink. They just hung out with me.

Celia: So how did you come out of the depression?

Jane: I just really had to look at it from a gradual process and I couldn't look ahead. I couldn't make plans. I just had to worry about each day. I know they always say, take one day at a time, and that's literally all you can do. Because I was struggling so much with what was going around in my brain there obviously weren't good thoughts there. Not necessarily suicidal thoughts, but just very destructive thoughts of self-harm. You would rather deal with a different kind of pain. Like you would rather deal with a broken leg than emotional pain because that makes sense.

Celia: You can fix it. You can see it, can't you? You can do something about that. And people can see that.

Jane: Yeah. But emotional pains are a lot harder to get away with. You can't take a painkiller for emotional pain.

Celia: Did you suddenly feel like one day, Oh, I think I can cope again now?

Jane: It was completely gradual and you don't even realize that you're getting better until you sort of look back. I bumped into my counsellor just randomly in a shop, you know it was probably about 12 months later. And it was sort of at that point I was like, Oh, hey I'm heaps better. It was only seeing him remembering all of the bad stuff that I've been dealing with, talking to him that I was able to realise.

Celia: That you could see where you'd come.

Jane: Exactly.

Celia: Do you think you'll ever be depression free?

Jane: Am I going to be depression free? I think, no, I'll never be free of it. So I might not have depression now, but I've gotta be aware of it and be aware of when I do start to feel inklings of things.

Celia: And do you know what your triggers are?

Jane: Umm, not entirely. When I start to get really overwhelmed with things. And you can just tell my thought patterns start to get a bit more crazy, and I can't plan things. Or it's like when you get all jumbled.

Celia: So you recognize probably those symptoms of, aha, this is a flag?

Jane: Yeah, I won't sleep very well because my brain's just going a hundred miles an hour, which I know a lot of those things are very similar to just stress.

Celia: But you know that because of those depressive tendencies that you have to be careful of that level of stress, I guess.

Jane: Yeah, I guess that's what it is

Celia: Do you have other strategies that you act on to keep your wellbeing in a healthy place?

Jane: My outlet is reading. I read a lot. So I'll just hide in my bedroom or back verandah or somewhere and read. Because that's an escape from reality for me. That clocks my mind off and just shuts it down for a while. I do listen to music a lot as well, but I have to make sure I don't then lock myself away for the whole day. But that's where I'm, I'm very lucky that I have a family who won't allow me to hide away for longer than a few hours at a time. It's very hard balance for me, my need for downtime, versus me just isolating myself.

Celia: Jane I know you believe in God how has depression challenged that belief.

Jane: That's a really difficult question to answer. I've always had a faith, I've always believed that I'm looked after by God, But I stopped going to church because I didn't want to have to put on a face of happiness and chirpiness. You don't want to, when they say "hi, how're you going?" You don't want to go oh well, actually, I'm having a really terrible time. You know? It's easier just to say, "Oh fine, good, thanks. How are you?" I think probably because of past negativity that I had received, that made me not want to share details with other people, cos they just sort of thought, Oh, she's just being lazy, or she's a bad mum. Look how messy her house is. That's the hardest thing; you become so used to the negative thoughts that that becomes normal in your brain. And that's what the counselling helps you do, is how to break that cycle and realizing that that negative thing actually isn't normal.

I've learned that I don't have to say, oh, I'm great. Or I don't have to go into a whole big spiel of how awful I'm doing. I can just say, yeah, I'm okay, or I've had better. I've learned ways to not scare people away but without completely having to put a mask on.

Celia: So, how do you keep that connection with God?

Jane: Lots of prayer. I just feel looked after in the sense of as much bad that's gone down, I think of all the bad things that I considered doing, the self-harm and that sort of thing, or how bad it could have really gotten for my kids, it could've been so much worse.

I remember crying so many times, you know, please God, help me. I remember driving in my car and I'd just be singing along really loudly to that song Send me an angel. It might not have felt like it at the time but looking back now, I really was looked after and the fact that I'm better now, somebody had to have been looking after me. God was there.

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