

PATRICK'S STORY

Patrick, 44, thanks all those who helped his winter turn to spring.

I have grown to love the seasons, the variety of colours and temperatures cascading through summer, autumn, winter and spring. You appreciate it so much more when the seasons seem to have been stripped away and replaced by the long, gruelling winter of depression, anxiety or stress. This is no normal winter; the nights are darker and longer, the cold more bitter, the wind chills you to the bone and the rain never stops pouring and pouring and pouring. All around you seems to be flourishing; laughing, breathing, loving, but you remain in hibernation, with solitude, fear and hopelessness your only friends.

This book is written for times like these. It is a collection of personal battles that have been won or are being won, by your fellow man. I have written purely for men, because I am one and recognise how hard it can be to express our feelings and be willing to open up. I hope and pray that there will be some rich treasure in these pages that will mean that your long hard winter becomes more bearable and that, with time, the seasons in all their beauty return fully to your life again.

Let's start with me:

Three times I've had it and three times it's hit me for six, I mean, really crippled me and reduced me to a shivering wreck! It came like a thief in the night stealing my precious sleep and forcing me to sit bolt upright in bed and confront my demons.

I had been canoeing that very day, out on the ocean with a close friend, laughing and smiling - doing what I loved. How could I now be sweating, tossing and turning in bed, unable to stop the bombardment of images replaying in my mind? Three long months of torture: medication, doctor visits, counselling, acupuncture, prayer and still trapped in this inner turmoil. Work stopped, friends became exhausting, relationships one-sided and I could never escape from the panic that gripped my mind day and night.

My infamous energy and sunny disposition had been replaced by a fixed scowl, heavy bags and a heavy cloak of lethargy. I used to get my energy from running, football, excelling at the things that I was good at and enjoying the company of others, but now they seemed to leave me cold and empty, even this crutch had been kicked away!

I can still remember slamming my fists against the walls, cascading tears until I had left pools and screaming at God to let me go. There would be temporary moments of hope, nuggets of light relief, but they would quickly pass and my mouth would dry, hands shake, the sweat would pour and the incessant pounding of doubt would cloud my mind. I knew that not only was I destroying myself, I was damaging all those that came into contact with me and that hurt just as much, if not more.

I thank my wife for sticking by me and my family and friends, they were awesome, even when I treated them like rubbish. I didn't like the me I'd become, how they could possibly tolerate me I will never know. But somehow, they did. I thank my doctor and the medical professionals who counselled wisely and kept me logical when emotions swept through me like a flood. I thank God for sustaining me and never abandoning me, even when I thought He had. There was no magic medicine that eased my pain, no text book or words of wisdom that saw me through, but slowly and surely time healed all wounds and gradually, very gradually spring returned.

TOP TIPS:

- **Seek support and medical advice early and don't be afraid of medication.**
- **Keep some close friends on board for support and lean on them.**
- **Challenge negative thoughts and keep going with exercise, pastimes that give you energy and being with others when you can.**
- **Be kind to yourself, because you are worth it!**