

VOLUME 01 | ISSUE 01

THE DEPRESSION CHRONICLES

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When Joy Is Just Camouflage

Letters to Depression

The Day Joy Stopped Answering

Coping Tools

The Mirror in My Hand

Shelly-Ann's Opening Note

Where My Pain Finds a Pen

I have spent years writing about depression, but some truths still arrive quietly.

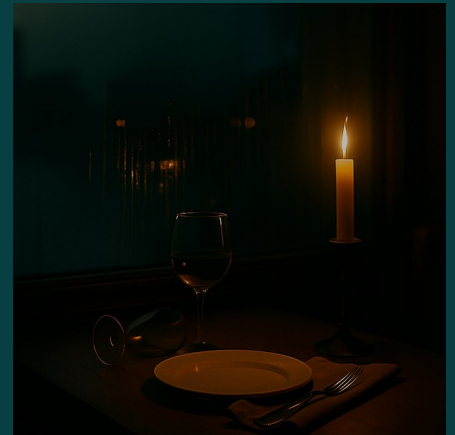
Table for One began with an image I could not shake: a single place setting, a candle still burning, and the strange intimacy of being left alone with your own thoughts. Not every lonely moment is tragic. Not every solitary meal is peaceful. Sometimes the table holds grief, exhaustion, memory, numbness, relief and survival all at once.

This issue is for the person who has learned how to look fine while feeling far away from themselves. It is for the person who misses wanting things. It is for the one who has mistaken exhaustion for failure, and for the one who has discovered that getting through an ordinary day can require extraordinary effort.

I do not want these pages to tell you how to feel. I want them to make room for what is already there.

If something in this issue sounds like your life, take what helps and leave what does not. There is no performance required here. Pull up a chair exactly as you are.

Where my pain finds a pen, I keep trying to turn silence into language. I hope somewhere in these pages, you find a sentence that makes your own silence feel less lonely.



Shelly-Ann Shaw
Founder, The Depression Chronicles

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ISSUE 01

TABLE FOR ONE

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Founder and Editor | Shelly-Ann Shaw

Table for One

A place to sit with what hurts

There is a kind of pain that does not scream. It simply sits.

This issue begins at a quiet table, not because solitude is always beautiful, but because so much of depression happens in ordinary rooms where nobody else can see it.

The table may hold grief, numbness, relief, memory, exhaustion or the small evidence of survival. There is no requirement to turn the moment into a lesson. Sometimes showing up is enough.

A Table for One

I set a table for one,
not because no one showed up,
but because I finally did.

I lit the candle with trembling hands.
Still, it stayed lit.
Like me.

The chair across from mine is empty,
but the silence no longer screams.
I breathe. I taste my survival.

I lift my glass
to every version of me
that crawled through the night
to make it to this moment.

A table for one
is no longer only loneliness.
It is proof
that I chose to stay.



ONE

THE LAUGH CAN BE REAL,
AND THE PAIN CAN BE REAL TOO.

AN INTERLUDE

When Joy Is Just Camouflage

When looking well and feeling well are not the same thing

There are days when laughter arrives on time even when joy does not. The joke is funny, the smile is convincing, the photograph looks warm, and still something inside remains untouched.

Depression does not always announce itself with tears. Sometimes it learns the schedule. It goes to work. It answers messages. It remembers birthdays. It makes people laugh. It says, 'I'm fine,' because explaining the truth would take more energy than the person has.

This is where joy can become camouflage. Not fake in the simple sense, because a person can genuinely laugh and still be struggling. Human emotions are capable of sharing the same room. The danger begins when the visible moment is treated as proof that nothing hurts.

THE JOKE
IS FUNNY.

The smile is convincing.

The photograph looks warm.



THE SMILE IS NOT EVIDENCE.

Camouflage Can Be Useful

Camouflage can be useful. It can protect privacy. It can help someone get through a meeting, a school run or a difficult family gathering. But when performance becomes the only permitted version of a person, pain loses somewhere safe to go.

We often reward people for being easy to worry about. The friend who jokes through everything is called strong. The employee who never complains is called dependable. The parent who keeps moving is praised for resilience. Sometimes those descriptions are true. Sometimes they also make it harder to say, 'I am not doing well.'

WHAT CAMOUFLAGE CAN SOUND LIKE

I've just been busy.

I'm tired.

I'll come next time.

Everything's good.

The invitation is not to distrust every smile. It is to become more curious about the whole person behind it. Ask twice. Listen without rushing to fix. Allow contradictory truths.

Joy does not have to prove that pain is gone. Pain does not cancel every moment of joy. A person can be struggling and still laugh from the belly. Both can be real.

And when the smile has been doing too much work, perhaps the kindest thing is not to demand another one.

ASK TWICE.

Listen without rushing to fix.

STILL HERE.

Some pages need less explanation.

The Day Joy Stopped Answering

MUSIC

became sound.

I do not remember the exact day joy stopped answering. There was no goodbye. Nothing dramatic enough to mark on a calendar. The things I loved simply began to reach me less.

Music became sound. Food became something to finish. A favourite programme moved across the screen without taking me with it. I still loved the people I loved, but sometimes I could not reach the feeling I expected to accompany that love.

There is a name for the loss or reduction of pleasure and interest: anhedonia. The word can sound clinical, but the experience is often painfully ordinary. You may still do the activity. You may remember that you used to enjoy it. You may even want to want it. Yet the internal response feels muted or absent.

FOOD

became something to finish.

A FAVOURITE PROGRAMME

moved across the screen
without taking me with it.



When Familiar Things Go Quiet

That absence can create shame. People ask why you stopped doing the things that made you happy. You ask yourself the same question. The problem is that enjoyment is not always something we can command back into existence.

Instead of forcing joy, it may help to notice smaller signals. Was there one song that irritated you less? Did sunlight feel pleasant for ten seconds? Did you taste the first sip of something warm? Did curiosity appear, even briefly?

No assignment.

No forced joy.

Just noticing.



These are not assignments. They are observations. Healing is not a scavenger hunt where you fail if you cannot find happiness.

Sometimes the first sign of return is not joy. Sometimes it is interest. Sometimes relief. Sometimes the thought, 'Maybe I would like to do that again.'

If joy is quiet right now, you are still allowed to live beside the silence.

Sometimes the first sign of return is
curiosity.

The Missing Things Inventory

No pressure to find joy. Just notice what is true today.



Something I used to enjoy

Something I miss wanting

Something that still reaches me occasionally

Something I might like to try again someday

The Mirror in My Hand

When depression becomes the narrator of identity

Depression can become a narrator with terrible timing and extraordinary confidence.

It takes an unfinished task and calls you lazy. It takes a cancelled plan and calls you unreliable. It takes a difficult season and presents it as evidence about your entire character.

After a while, the voice can sound like your own.

*After a while,
the voice can sound
like your own.*

Event or Verdict?

The mirror in this feature is not only glass. It is every place we look for evidence of who we are: our work, our relationships, our bodies, our bank accounts, our productivity, our past decisions and the expressions on other people's faces.

When depression is speaking loudly, interpretation can become cruel. 'I did not manage much today' becomes 'I accomplish nothing.' 'I need help' becomes 'I am a burden.' 'I made a mistake' becomes 'I ruin everything.'

A gentler response does not require pretending everything is wonderful. It asks us to separate the event from the verdict.

You did not finish the task. That is an event. 'I am useless' is a verdict.

**FACTS CAN BE DIFFICULT
WITHOUT BECOMING WEAPONS.**

You cancelled because you had no capacity. That is an event. 'Nobody can depend on me' is a verdict.

Facts can be difficult without becoming weapons.

The goal is not to stare into a mirror and recite sentences you do not believe. The goal is to become a fairer witness to your own life.

THE MIRROR SAID

You accomplished nothing today.

You need too much help.

I ANSWERED

I survived a day that required more than anyone could see.

Needing support is information, not a character flaw.

THINGS DEPRESSION DOES NOT GET TO RENAME

REST IS NOT LAZINESS.

NEEDING HELP IS NOT FAILURE.

A DIFFICULT SEASON IS NOT AN IDENTITY.

Dear Depression, I Hate What You Took

You took ordinary things and made them heavy. You made mornings negotiations and small tasks feel public failures.

I am angry about the time I lost explaining myself to people who thought sadness was the whole story.

But anger is also evidence. Somewhere beneath it, I still know I deserved more than silence.

Still here.

Dear Depression, You Don't Get to Introduce Me

You have been in my life, but you are not my biography.

You do not get to introduce me as lazy, difficult, unreliable or weak.

You may describe a season. You do not get to name the whole person.

Still here.

Dear Depression, Today I Cannot Fight You

Today I do not have a brave ending for you.

I am tired. I am not interested in turning exhaustion into inspiration.

So today the victory is smaller. I will stay. I will drink something. I will make the next hour gentler if I can.

Still here.

Dear Depression,

Coping Tools for the Hardest Days

Choose for the capacity you actually have, not the capacity you wish you had.

IF YOU HAVE ALMOST NOTHING TODAY

- Turn onto your other side.
- Take one sip of water.
- Plug in your phone.
- Open the curtain a little.
- Send one symbol to someone safe.

IF YOU HAVE A LITTLE MORE

- Wash your face.
- Change your shirt.
- Eat the easiest available thing.
- Sit somewhere different for three minutes.
- Put on something familiar.

IF YOU HAVE SOME CAPACITY

- Take a shower.
- Prepare something simple.
- Answer one message.
- Step outside briefly.
- Make one thing easier for tomorrow.

Pick One. Only One.

No productivity contest. One small action is enough.

☐

Drink something

☐

Wash your face

☐

Eat something easy

☐

Take medication as prescribed

☐

Change position

☐

Put on a familiar song

☐

Get a little fresh air if you can

☐

Rest without earning it first

☐

Text one person

THE GOAL IS NOT TO WIN THE DAY.

**THE GOAL IS TO MAKE THE DAY
SURVIVABLE.**

Some coping strategies require energy you may not have. Adapt them. Shrink them. Replace them. A tool is useful only if it can meet you where you are.

A Gentle Next Step

If you are in immediate danger or think you may act on thoughts of harming yourself, contact local emergency services or a crisis service in your country. If the danger is not immediate, consider telling someone you trust what is happening and seeking professional support.

This magazine offers education, reflection and practical support. It is not a substitute for individualized medical or mental health care.

FROM THE TDC LIBRARY

Explore additional free resources at The Depression Chronicles website.

thedepressionchronicles.com

What If Healing Is Smaller Than We Imagined?

We are often given dramatic pictures of healing. The breakthrough. The sunrise. The triumphant return.

Real life is frequently less cinematic.

Healing can look like eating before the headache arrives. Making the appointment you have postponed. Answering one message. Changing the sheets. Laughing and realizing you did not have to manufacture it.

Ordinary progress
still counts.

It can look like recognizing a pattern sooner than last time. Asking for help before everything collapses. Resting without spending the entire rest period prosecuting yourself for resting.

Small does not mean meaningless.

The quiet changes are often the ones that build a life.

**SMALL DOES NOT MEAN
MEANINGLESS.**

You Are Still Welcome at This Table

The table that began as a picture of solitude does not have to remain one.

It can become a place of witness. A place where you stop performing long enough to hear yourself. A place where you can arrive tired, uncertain, hopeful, angry, numb or relieved.

You do not have to turn this season into a beautiful story before it is over.

You are allowed to be unfinished.

Stay for another page. Stay for another morning. Stay.



About The Depression Chronicles

The Depression Chronicles uses storytelling, education and practical resources to help people understand mental health and find tools they can actually use.

Changing Narratives. Healing Minds. Restoring Hope.

Founded by Shelly-Ann Shaw, The Depression Chronicles began in 2017 with a simple principle: no visitor leaves empty-handed. The work continues through publications, education, digital resources, conversations and community-centred support.

thedepressionchronicles.com

Instagram: [@the_depression_chronicles11](https://www.instagram.com/the_depression_chronicles11)

YouTube: [@thedepressionchronicles11](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCv33333333333333333333)

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MAGAZINE

TABLE FOR ONE

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Thank you for sitting with these pages.

There is still room for you at this table.
