

Through a Fogged Glass

■ through-a-fogged-glass.mp3

The air hung heavy that morning, thick with the usual scent of aftershave and cheap cologne, but somehow suffocating today. It clung to me like a shroud as I stared at the reflection in the bathroom mirror, a face both familiar and foreign. My eyes, once sparkling with the thrill of competition, were now dull pools reflecting the stormy gray sky outside. The hot water had become a routine, its warmth failing to penetrate the chill that had settled deep within me. Another morning where getting to school felt like an insurmountable mountain in a blizzard.

The scratchy towel felt like sandpaper against my raw skin as I stepped out of the shower. Each movement was a chore, my body a lead weight dragging me down. The image in the mirror mocked me. The same messy brown hair, the same golden hazel eyes, but a stranger stared back. A ghost of a smile, a relic of happier times, lingered at the corner of my lips, a cruel reminder of the joy that had seeped away. Even brushing my teeth felt monumental, each mundane task an overwhelming obstacle course.

Breakfast was a silent affair, choked down amidst worried glances from my family. The clink of silverware was the only sound breaking the oppressive silence. Their concern was a constant weight, their unspoken questions a constant reminder of my own failings. School wasn't a refuge either. The fluorescent lights hummed overhead, a relentless drone that gnawed at the fragile threads of my sanity. The chatter of classmates sounded miles away, muffled by a thick fog that encased my mind. I moved through the day on autopilot, a hollow shell mimicking the motions

of life. Laughter and joy seemed to exist in a parallel universe, inaccessible to me. Lunch, once a social haven filled with laughter and inside jokes, had become an escape route. The library offered a temporary solace, even if the words blurred on the page as I desperately sought refuge in the silence.

The final bell echoed through the halls, a jarring reminder of the endless cycle. Sports practice, once a source of nervous excitement, felt like a whole new mountain to climb. Every drill, film session, even getting equipment on was a physical and mental struggle. Socializing with teammates, once a source of camaraderie, had become a performance. All my energy went into making things seem normal, though normality felt like a distant memory.

The brief escape after practice, unloading the weight before someone I trusted, was all that kept me going. Sometimes it was a coach, someone who saw the spark dimming and offered a quiet word of encouragement. Other times, it was a teammate, a friend who shared a knowing look and a whispered joke, reminding me I wasn't alone in this fog. These moments were lifelines, temporary anchors in the storm that threatened to pull me under.

Finally, the sanctuary of my room offered a fragile peace. I'd sink into video games or TV, desperate to numb the ache inside. But the reprieve was temporary. The anxiety of facing another day would inevitably creep back in, a cold serpent coiling around my heart, squeezing the life out of any remaining hope. Exhaustion, once a badge of honor after a long day, now felt like a chronic illness, a heavy cloak I couldn't shed. Sleep promised a temporary escape from the pain, but the shrill cry of the alarm would shatter the illusion, forcing me back into the relentless cycle.

Each day was a battle, a fight against an unseen enemy that chipped away at my strength, leaving me wondering if I had the will to keep fighting.

Yet, a tiny ember of hope flickered somewhere deep within. Memories of laughter, the echo of cheers from past victories, these were the reminders that joy still existed, even if it felt buried beneath layers of despair. Maybe, just maybe, I could claw my way back to the surface, one small step at a time. The fight wasn't over. The unfamiliar enemy of depression could not win.

The turning point, if there was one, was subtle. Maybe it was the day I confided in the school counselor, my voice cracking as I spoke the words that had been trapped inside for so long.

Maybe it was the gentle pressure from my parents to see a therapist, a hesitant step towards a path I wasn't sure I was ready for. Whatever it was, a shift began. Therapy wasn't magic, but it was a lifeline. It was a space to unpack the tangled mess of emotions, to learn tools to navigate the fog. It was a slow process, two steps forward, one step back, but slowly, the fog began to thin. The lows turned to lows with the occasional highs, and that was enough to give me hope.

The world didn't suddenly burst into sunshine. There were still bad days, days when the weight threatened to drag me under again. But now, I had a toolbox. There were coping mechanisms, learned strategies to manage the depression and the crushing weight of despair. Laughter started to seep back in, hesitant at first, but growing stronger with each passing day. It wasn't a constant melody, but a welcome harmony that occasionally filled the silence.

Looking back, the journey through the fog feels like a lifetime. It was a battle fought not just against the depression, but against the stigma that surrounded it. There were moments of doubt,

whispers of "snapping out of it" or "just cheering up." But I learned that depression wasn't a choice, it wasn't a weakness. It was an illness, and like any illness, it required treatment and understanding.

The most important lesson I learned was this: I wasn't alone. Reaching out, seeking help, was the bravest step I ever took. It wasn't a sign of defeat, but a declaration of war against the fog. There were people who cared, who offered support, a hand to hold when the path grew too dark.

Therapy wasn't a magic cure, but it was a safe space to confront the shadows, to rebuild myself piece by piece.

The fog may never completely lift, but I've learned to navigate it. There are still days when I see the world through a blurred lens, but the colors are starting to come back. The fight isn't over, but I'm stronger now, armed with the tools and the knowledge to keep moving forward. Depression may have dimmed my light, but it couldn't extinguish it. And that, perhaps, is the greatest victory of all.