

DEPRESSION; KNOW THE SIGNS

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Retired SFPD

My name is Ed Anzore and I am a recently retired sergeant out of Central Station. I retired 5 months ago and am now able to discuss my departure. Ten years ago, I lost my brother, Charlie, to kidney cancer. Charlie worked at Richmond Station at the time he was diagnosed with this disease. To say my brother and I were close is an understatement. I never knew how much his loss affected me until this year. I could write a whole article just based on our relationship, but that's for another day.

About five years ago, I started to keep people at a distance. This was everybody, wife, kids, friends, and co workers. I never wanted to be close to anyone so I would never feel the pain I felt with the loss of my brother. I was doing this sometimes subconsciously. It was my defense mechanism which I thought was keeping me safe, but it was not. In the last two years, I began to feel myself isolating from people and places. I started losing the desire to go to events. Irritability started to set in and I did not understand why. During the last five years, I was involved to two critical incidents, one on duty and one off, where three people lost their lives. Things started to go downhill and there was inner turmoil including anger in which I could not understand nor let go of. My mind started to really go sideways. When my brother passed, at the age of 52, all I could think about was I hope I make it to 52. I was also the last male member of my family not to have a form of cancer.

Fast forward to Sept of 2010. I was assigned to the 1800-0400 at Central. I really started to lose interest in the job. I rarely read reports completely unless it was very serious as my concentration was going. I stopped wearing my vest and didn't care if something happened. I just didn't care period! I figured I had led a very good life. I did not care about playing golf anymore and would tell my golfing buddies the very same. I would even joke how much I hated people. I would drive home at 4 am after work and on occasion go well over 100mph. This is risky behavior, a symptom I later learned which occurs in people who are depressed. It's an action that makes you feel good for a brief moment, but cures nothing. Thanksgiving 2010, my wife told me she thinks it's time to put our Husky Rascal down. He was with us for 16 years and a big part of our family. So now I take him to be put down and watch the vet administer the injection to calm him down. This was one of the hardest things I have ever had to do, losing another member of my family.

The following week, I'm in CPT for my dreaded week of updates. Sgt. Mary Dunnigan was teaching a class from the Behavioral Science Unit. Mary was talking about depression, and how we just sit on the couch and flip through the channels in our little safety zone, detaching from any emotion. While she was lecturing, I realized I was doing this every day. I would get up around noon and sit on the couch until 4pm. I would ignore everyone and just wanted to be left alone. Of course, I did nothing about it because, "I could handle it on my own." Boy was I ever wrong. So I continued going to work with my miserable, irritable and grouchy self. Everyone else must be the "pain in the butt because it certainly couldn't have been me."

December 2011, and I am at a Sharks game when I get a text from my good friend Norm Rice. My wife and I are scheduled to go on a cruise with Norm and his wife on January 8th. On this day, Norm tells me he has been diagnosed with kidney cancer. I know Norm because of my brother Charlie, and I say to myself, here we go again. The one person whom I emotionally got close to is now diagnosed with the disease that took my brother; and the downward spiral began. We went on the cruise and needless to say it was not the good time I hoped for. There were nights on the ship when I would stand on the balcony thinking I could just throw myself overboard and nobody would know. I have no idea why this thought popped into my brain. Later I would learn about Suicidal Ideation, (these are described as fleeting thoughts of suicide but no plan or follow through). We came back from the cruise and things were the same, more couch sitting and channel surfing, not really paying attention to or caring about what I am watching. The desire to be at work is lessening daily.

Now it is a month away from my 52nd birthday, again I'm sitting on the couch, and everything seemed to be crashing down around me. I just broke down for no reason and started shaking. I told my wife I couldn't do this anymore. My first melt down of my life. Thoughts of suicide came back very intense. I was so scared but I did not know why. I had so much to live for, why were these thoughts coming up? I was able to get a hold of Mary Dunnigan, who calmed me down and talked me through my crisis. She was able to get me into see a psychologist first thing in the morning and I was able to sleep that night.

Even after seeing the clinician I continued to have a series of panic and anxiety attacks. My blood

pressure began to rise and my back and shoulders were always tight. I ended up in the ER one night and my wife told me that I should consider retirement. Well, here comes the dreaded 52nd birthday, and I have an appointment with my therapist and I tell her I'm ready to retire. She concurs. I walked outside of her office and another melt down of anxiety and panic occurred on the sidewalk. I immediately get on the phone with the shrink who prescribes me an anti-depressant. I barely made it home still not feeling well. I then drive to work and went about ten miles when the third melt down occurred. I somehow managed to make it to work and got through line up. I went outside and got on the phone to call for help. I made it through the work-day and as I'm driving across the Golden Gate Bridge, I started shaking again. My panic and anxiety was at its highest. I got home and called Kaiser Emergency and the on-call therapist calmed me down and then said, "Ed, you need to retire." Now three people have told me to retire, two of whom I really don't know. So I tell my wife, "I am done with work." The next day I walked into the Lieutenants office and told him this was my last day and retired two days later. I received a lot of calls telling me how cool people thought it was that I just walked in and pulled the plug. I laugh now because nobody really knew what was going on, but I didn't have the heart or courage to tell them why. I am now retired and go to my last therapist appointment. At the end, I ask the therapist what she thinks. She tells me she believes I am suffering from PTSD, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. She tells me there is a PTSD retreat for first responders out in Inverness. I again talk to Mary Dunnigan who gets me in touch with The West Coast Post Trauma Retreat. I went through an hour intake with a clinician, who told me that I have suffered cumulative stress with some PTSD. I am accepted into the retreat and off I go in May 2011. My wife drives me out there and here I am with 6 other first responders suffering just like me. The retreat is full of volunteer first responders and clinicians. Every one of them has had their own critical incidents. They have all walked in the same shoes. From the minute I walked in to the time I left, I was treated better than any resort I have ever been to. I went through six days of intense therapy and discussion. I learned tools to cope with my issues if and when they come back. I can only explain this place as the 8th Wonder of the World. You are surrounded by professionals who really do care. I walked out on Friday feeling a whole lot better and filled with a new sense of life. I learned there are so many first responders that are in the same situation, yet there are only two places like this retreat in the United States. I learned that it is okay to be prescribed anti-depressants for anxiety and depression as they are no different than any other medication for any other illness or injury. I learned that the brain has a filter and after you absorb so many traumatic events in your life, the filter breaks. My filter has now been repaired. I also learned that I know if I take care of myself, I will be okay.

It's been four months now since I have left the retreat. I am in a much better place in my life. My relationship with my wife is so much better. My family life is so much better. Life is so much better. I have been asked by many why I retired so young and what will I do with my free time. I now volunteer at the WCPR retreat as a Peer. I was asked by the peer coordinator if I would like to volunteer and I was honored and humbled. To assist others in need who are first responders is priceless. This retreat is truly magical.

If this story helps one person, or gets people to look at themselves, then I will be happy. What you don't realize when you are going through depression, is how it affects your family and loved ones. They in essences become victims too. If you wish to talk to me or ask questions, please feel free to email me at edanzore@gmail.com. I would also like to thank Sgt. Mary Dunnigan and Vince Catanzaro. They took the time to listen and help. For that, I am ever grateful. For those in the SFPD, you are truly blessed to have the BSU and people who care. Do not hesitate to use them