

INTRODUCTION: *A COLLEGE STUDENT'S STORY*

Samantha was an above average student; ambitious and driven to succeed in every aspect of her life. She discovered that in order to succeed she had to have a loving and secure relationship with those closest to her. At the time, Samantha's closest connections were with her parents, younger sister, and brother, as well as her long-term boyfriend. Throughout high school she would often volunteer her time at local nonprofit organizations as well as help out at homeless shelters around her immediate location. After graduation, Samantha prepared to depart for university; she was full of excitement and passion for what lay ahead of her. Despite her sadness at leaving those she loved behind; she told her loved ones that she would stay connected by writing letters and calling as often as possible to try and make the time pass between them smoother and quicker.

When Samantha started school, she immediately expressed extraordinary interest in her psychology course. Her textbooks were full of theories and explanations on learning, emotions, and memory that she seemed to never want to put down. Samantha would spend hours in the library and in her dorm reading and analyzing her books, absorbing all the information she could in a small amount of time.

It was a five-block walk from Samantha's dorm to the library. One night she left the library just before closing time around 1 o'clock in

the morning. On this night in particular, she was in a rush to get home so she decided that she could save some time if she would cut through the back alley behind a few buildings before returning onto the path to her dorm.

As she took this shortcut through the back alley, a dark shape came alive from the shadows and a man's bulky and strong figure seemed to block all the space in front of her. Samantha tried to run, but there was no escaping the menacing figure before her. He was too strong, and she couldn't injure him in any way; he simply overpowered her, leaving her feeling helpless with no hope, alone, and surrounded by darkness. The assailant took a strong hold of her, covered her mouth, and whispered in her ear, "Don't make a sound, or this will end worse than it started." The man released his hold on her face and smacked her across her mouth, proceeding to rape her and then he let her drop to the cold hard cement when he was done. Samantha lay crumpled on the ground with no understanding of time or space, only that all she felt was fear and a sense of being lost. All she could think was that his breath smelled like caramel.

Samantha felt like she had become damaged goods after that night; her philosophy of human nature had forever changed, and she could no longer believe the theories that she once read from her beloved textbooks. Not only was her body scratched and altered, but so was her identity. After that night, Samantha's sense of trust was taken from her, that night where she felt uncertain and lost in a world she now viewed as dangerous and full of terror.

Samantha's grades suffered; she could not find the motivation to study the things that she once believed in with no reservations. She no longer had a relationship with her family members, and she lost her boyfriend in the process. After that night, Samantha could not communicate about her daily activities and experiences. She could not share her story of what happened that night to those she cared about, and she could no longer relate to those around her. Samantha became haunted and terrorized by every shadow. In every dark corner and alley, she saw the same menacing figure from that night. She was so frightened that she no longer left her room at night, regardless of whether others would be accompanying her. She became so obsessed with her attacker that she soon found excuses to not leave her room in the daylight. She

began to hide from the world around her, and she only felt safe in her own room. Even then, at night the attacker would return to her in her dreams, where she believed he had come to finish the job he started in that dark alley. To this day the smell of caramel makes her curl into the fetal position and wait for the memory to end.

Samantha is suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

As you can see from Samantha's story, posttraumatic stress disorder is not as cut and dry as the media and other modern resources have made it out to be. In most cases, society has been led to believe PTSD is only experienced by war veterans or those exposed to war zone areas. Unfortunately, this is not the truth. Posttraumatic stress disorder, better known as PTSD, can be experienced by anyone that has been exposed to a traumatic event, regardless of where it took place. Trauma has been defined in regard to this condition as anything that causes an individual to feel fear, stress, anxiety, or loss of control.

It is important to understand that this book has not been written for an academic audience, rather that it has been specifically designed for the general population. This means that a lot of the technical jargon has been removed when explaining what PTSD is and how it affects individuals. It was important for the author to try and explain PTSD in a way that could be understood by everyone. This is essential, because in many cases when people try to explain mental disorders and conditions, people end up being more confused than before they read the explanation. This does more harm than good because people ignore the explanations they do not understand, and they instead simply pick out the information that they can understand. In an attempt to clarify PTSD, the authors of this book took a simplistic approach to explaining PTSD. Each of the chapters has been broken down into subsections, where these smaller sections of the chapters take the time to explain in nontechnical words what each of the elements are.

Before we dive into the book, it is important to try and get a feel for what PTSD is. As you know, this condition and its symptoms are brought on by a traumatic event. In most cases where PTSD has been developed within an individual, they surround themselves in the belief that it is either their fault or that it was the fault of someone else. In the case of Samantha, it is extremely likely that she will blame herself for

being in the situation. It is also possible that those around her will also blame her and say that nothing would have happened had she not put herself in harm's way in the first place. This is an extremely common scenario that tends to play out when people acknowledge that they are now suffering from PTSD.

Another quite common situation is that when people feel shame or guilt, they will not seek help from anyone, be it a professional or someone they are close to. In cases where people do not try and get help, the symptoms of PTSD begin to take over the individual's life. This causes them to pull away from those that are trying to help them through whatever it is that they are feeling. The individual then puts up a wall between themselves and those around them.

The barrier acts as their protection against the feelings associated with PTSD. This is the wall that many individuals hide behind to avoid talking about their trauma and "forgetting" the trauma ever occurred. Unfortunately, by ignoring the trauma and the associated symptoms, their condition worsens.

The goal for this book is to educate those who don't know much about PTSD. By educating individuals on PTSD, it is not only about learning about a disorder, but it is about teaching people how to adjust to life with PTSD. This book will help those not only directly affected by PTSD but those being affected indirectly.

One major cause for individuals avoiding help is shame. Victims feel shame because they now have to live with this condition, and the shame that the media has led them to believe that they are flawed and that it is why they are now living with a condition. In many cases the media has stated that PTSD is caused by an individual either being crazy or even weak-minded. Fortunately, as society becomes more informed of PTSD and by understanding their circumstances, these individuals will hopefully be more inclined to seek help from those around them as well as from professional resources if needed. Reading a book like this is the first step in a victim's attempt to help their situation.

Another goal of this book is to educate those around a victim of PTSD. It is vital that the victim personally understands what they are going through. But it is of equal importance for bystanders to understand the truth behind the disorder. When those around the victim

acknowledge what is going on, they can then take specific steps to help them work through their issues. It also gives the victim a confidant without having to go public with their PTSD. It allows them to take the first step in admitting that there is something wrong.

Before you read more of this book, it's important to know that PTSD is an overwhelmingly difficult disorder to deal with. Nonetheless, it is not an impossible task to learn to deal with, and even defeat, symptoms associated with PTSD. If you are someone that has PTSD and you are reading this book, remember that things will get better, but not without working to make things better. For those reading this book who are witnesses to someone dealing with PTSD, you have to support the sufferer of PTSD in whatever they do, as long as it is not harming them. It is vital to be there for them, let them know that everything is going to be alright, and that you will be there for them no matter what.

