

Dear Ms. Wurtzel,

I became an adult when I was twelve years old. While most twelve-year-olds were busy with their friends and listening to the new boy bands, I was thrust into the world of addiction. Your book, *Prozac Nation*, revealed your lifelong battle with chronic depression. My experience with depression was not as consuming as yours, but it did change me in a way most people do not understand. "The girl that I had once been was simply not coming back" (96); on the outside I looked the same, but on the inside, "I was already fundamentally changed" (96). Though you could not see my bruises, I was like you, permanently damaged." (96)

My mother's youngest brother, my uncle, lived in our family home, on and off, for most of my life. He helped to take care of me when I was younger and I loved him tremendously. Outwardly he appeared a scruffy young man with a quick laugh who would always find a way to lighten the mood with a wide crack or a joke. What was hidden under the surface, like an iceberg, was constant marijuana abuse, and a horrific addiction to crack. When my uncle wasn't stealing money from my parents he was mooching money from me, and feeding me lies. I knew, of course, his real intentions, but I feigned indifference to his actions. Eventually he stopped caring enough to lie to me, forcing me to keep his secret.

I should have confessed the truth to my parents, but I couldn't. My uncle was the master of manipulation, constantly pitting me against my mother, making me depend on him as my only ally. I was torn between doing the right thing and betraying the only person who seemed to be on my side. Similarly, your parents made you feel this way, tearing you between people you loved. I understood perfectly your statement, "I remember thinking, I wish one of them would disappear." (94) I too wished for the sweet relief of their disappearance, because inside I was screaming, *I'm a child; I should not have to deal with this!* With the increased pressure and responsibility, I slowly began to withdraw from the world. My mother tried to reach me, but I viewed her as the "the enemy," and withdrew further into myself. Sleeping became a challenge, my mind would not relax and the guilt slowly began to tear me apart.

I was fourteen year old when I saw my first crack house. Locked in my uncle's car, only a plate of glass protected me from the crazed addicts on the street. My nightmares began that night. The endings were always the same, waking in a cold sweat, screaming. The constant fear of falling asleep stayed with me until I was sixteen years old. The days passed but I "sensed I was watching through an opaque cloud" (331), seeing but never really experiencing. Finally, the pressure became too much, and I broke down. I confessed to my parents the whole ugly scenario. They subsequently removed my uncle from our home, but the damage had already been done. The images in my head could not be erased, I still felt hollow inside. My mother sank into a deep depression herself, stemming from the guilt she felt for failing to be my protector.

My experience with depression changed me as a person. I like to think that it made me a stronger individual, a survivor. I constantly remind myself that my depression does not define who I am. Reading *Prozac Nation* helped me to face all of the anger and remorse related to my ordeal that I previously refused to acknowledge. Initially I declined any opportunity to talk about my feelings: *how could anyone comprehend what I have been through?* However, after I read your book I realized that writing your memoir was therapeutic and helped you make peace with your past. Relating my personal story has also helped me accept my past and push forward with my life. I realized I cannot accept myself until I acknowledge ALL of me, past, present, and future. So, for the first time in years, this is my story, and thank you for giving me the courage finally to tell it.

Sincerely yours,

*Genia A. Gaubard*