

I have OCD...Did I Repeat Myself?

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Danielle Silverstein

<https://www.wheretheeffismyhandbook.com/>

When I first decided to delve in and start Where The Eff Is My Handbook with Farrah, my first thought was that I love writing humorous but genuine pieces that help people feel supported and understood through laughter. Also, I absolutely love the idea that, as moms, we are kind of all in this thing together. Each of our kids has his or her quirks, and each of us as parents has our own strengths and weaknesses. Don't get me wrong, it's so much fun to write about my failures and shortcomings, and how motherhood is completely different (yet still totally wonderful) than what I once imagined it would be. Yet I also feel like I actually do have some personal stories that have been, in a sense, life-changing. Well, this one isn't so much of a story as a part of me; another component of who I am that has made my life more challenging in many ways. Yet it has also tested my strength and caused me to grow and mature so much as a woman and a person. At age 19, when I was a sophomore in college, I was diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. And not the "omg she's so OCD her house is spotless," or the cute "stop obsessing if he's going to call you again" type of OCD. It's legit. I've gone through periods of what I'll call "light OCD" times in my life, and I've gone through full-blown serious, heavy mental illness OCD. But through it all I could have been a spokeswoman for the disorder. If Ice Cube wrote a rap song about me, he would call it Check Yourself (16 times) Before You Wreck Yourself. Ok, had to get a little humor in there, because that's the only real way I know how to deal with anything.

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The truth is, everyone who knows me on a personal level knows I have had periods in my life when I was a type of prisoner in my own mind. I don't hide it. I'm not ashamed of it. I'm not even worried that right now a bunch of strangers are finding out that One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest was actually based on my personal saga. Ok not really, but

I swear it does not bother me that you all now know my baggage, and I hope it only makes us closer and more connected. Isn't that what we all say we're trying to do? Be accepting, honest, understanding human beings? I believe that. I want to practice it. If I don't then how can I ever expect anyone else to? Let's be open books who review one another with praise and accolades for everything we go through and how strong and brave we all are.

For those of you who aren't familiar with medical details of OCD, it is, like most mental illnesses, caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain. It leaves the mind unable to process information the same way a "regular" person does. Something as simple as leaving the house or getting dressed can become an hour long task (if you can do it at all) due to the involved checking, counting, thinking, re-thinking, re-counting, re-thinking, and re-counting. There are so many different facets to OCD that it would take all day to go through them all (and not just because I would need to do it more than once). Simply put, it's a [Expletive Deleted]. It's a mind-[Expletive Deleted] that a person truly believes is a rational way of thinking, when everyone around that person sees clearly that it makes absolutely no sense. Really, you think that if the paper you're throwing doesn't get into that garbage pail three

times in a row you're going to get into a car accident? Is that for real? Um, yes. It's real and it sucks. And that's just the tip of the iceberg.

When I was trying to get pregnant I was 26 and I had been on Zoloft for seven years. My OBGYN at the time told me it would be wise to go off my medication, and because of my naivety, I listened. I got pregnant pretty fast which of course I considered a huge blessing. Unfortunately though, the sudden change in hormones and abrupt halt of my medication threw my mind into a tailspin. For the first time, my OCD became incredibly debilitating. I was afraid to leave the house, to drive, to walk my dog, and even to talk on the phone. It sounds so crazy in hindsight. But at the time, I was living a real-life nightmare. My husband, parents, in-laws, siblings, and friends were all completely confused and devastated by what was happening. I became convinced that I was going to eat something wrong, do something wrong, smell something wrong that was going to hurt the fetus. It was awful. After a few months, I finally went to see a different obstetrician; one who actually had some knowledge about obsessive-compulsive disorder and pregnancy. One who said things to me like, "they don't tell physically ill people to stop taking medication, so why do they tell mentally ill to do it?" It made so much sense, but I was still worried. My family and friends helped me do some hardcore research, and I was convinced that going back on my medication under a doctor's care was 100% the right call for me. I could no longer live like this, and I didn't have to. If only the first doctor I saw had been more informed, so much would have gone differently.

It took a little while for me to get on the road to recovery. I saw an OCD specialist and psychiatrist who were in constant contact with my OBGYN. It was my relationship with my husband that I was the most concerned about. What had started out as a rocky marriage to begin with was now at a point of utter devastation. But

we both wanted (thank goodness) so desperately to work on things and make it better. When he could have just called me crazy and left, he stuck around (albeit it in a very limited and immature way) and attended my therapy sessions with me. Of course there was also the issue of the baby on the way, and what if an incident like this happened again? I was terrified, but with each day I got healthier and became more capable of being in control of my thoughts. I supplemented my medication with intense cognitive-behavioral therapy. It wasn't cheap, but there was no price to be put on my recovery. I also made the decision not to breastfeed once the baby came, because it was not recommended to breastfeed while on my particular type of medication. I was more than willing to give up that chance in order to ensure I would be as strong and together as a new mom that I could be. I decided that anyone who didn't support that decision was not welcome to discuss it with me. This was my experience, and I was in charge of it. We hired a baby nurse so I could get the right amount of sleep, and was not too stubborn to ask for help from my family and friends.

Honestly, I'm proud that I have had this obstacle which to conquer has taken great courage (and am completely aware that I am in a position of privilege to receive the help I need). I'm tired of women

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(and men) having to feel ashamed to talk about it, whatever that "it" might be for someone. Because I didn't hide my "it", what was a nightmare has instead turned into a story that's at a really happy point. My marriage is one of the strongest, most incredible I know. We have been through so much that we fully understand how committed

we are to accepting one another and getting through whatever comes our way. I stayed on a lower dose of medication through my second and third pregnancies and had much more positive experiences than the first one. My children are amazing, and I am aware that at least one of them will most likely deal with OCD or anxiety. If that occurs, I will be ready to help them face it without shame or embarrassment. I will always deal with this issue in my life in an open and honest manner. I will be here for anyone who ever needs to talk, and I will always be the first one to tell my story so that other people won't be afraid to tell theirs. As moms, we deal with enough heartache, confusion, and struggle. This needs to be one area that we feel we can breathe more easily and find the answers in a sensitive and gentle way, without judgment or ridicule. The decisions we make need to be based on what will make motherhood more wonderful, not based on what will bring the least amount of guilt and intolerance. Let's do that for each other. Let's tell our stories and be proud. Let's all be in this together.