

A Joyful Life

Michèle Swiderski

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This moving, personal account of overcoming depression is both a memoir and playbook for using creativity to cope with challenges.

In a book that highlights the serious consequences of clinical depression, Michèle Swiderski recounts the year in which her mind “checked out” and she was unable to live normally. It led to her development of a recovery plan, grounded in spiritual strength and creativity, that not only brought her out of her depressed state, but helped her to effectively manage her illness for over a decade.

Swiderski is at times painfully candid in discussing her breakdown, but the bulk of the book is devoted to the process she went through to climb out of her misery. She describes the steps in detail: meditation, visualization exercises, journal writing accompanied by frequent communes with nature, physical exercise, blogging, playing imagination games, and using Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) techniques.

Swiderski’s learning moments come across loud and clear, with reflective insights such as, “Letting go is something I had to learn. And it turned out to be the most important, because it was the very thing that set in motion the true healing process.” She also provides exercises throughout the book to encourage readers to follow her path to self-discovery and healing.

One of the most interesting aspects of *A Joyful Life* is the author’s realization that creativity could become a driving force in overcoming depression. In Swiderski’s case, her creativity manifested itself in her ability to visualize positive outcomes. Writing about her feelings and recording her progress became a key therapeutic aspect of her overall treatment.

Embedded in the text are a number of helpful sections for those searching for solutions to problems. “My Joyful Life Action Plan,” for example, is a 13-point list of specific items designed to keep one moving forward in a positive direction.

Michèle Swiderski’s skill at expressing herself, as well as her fortitude in taking a difficult time of her life and turning it into a learning experience, makes *A Joyful Life* motivational, uplifting, and inspirational.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (March/April 2017)

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