Adversity and Justice

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Developing schizoaffective disorder caused me to completely lose most of my friends, it put me out of touch with my family, and it disrupted my mind's functionality for several years. I was left unable to work any type of job and I spent many years facing extreme adversity from a variety of symptoms such as referential thinking, auditory hallucinations, visual hallucinations, psychosis and neurosis, social dysfunction, suicidal thoughts, and obsessive compulsion disorder. Everywhere I turned, adversity was staring across at me and for a while I came to believe I must have done something to cause this.

While growing up I believed that almost everything happening in my life was a result of who I was, the way I lived my life, and the way I treated other people. My life was going well which made it easy to believe “you get what you deserve” because that made me responsible for everything good happening. That was easy enough to accept. Then I experienced about 6 years of schizoaffective disorder, 4 of which were episodic times. For a while experiencing mental illness was—and sometimes still is—a daily battle which is fought moment to moment because the symptoms follow you everywhere you go. You can't simply leave your brain behind for a day. I thought I must have done something wrong to have been forced to face such extreme adversity.

My newest doctor was finally able to get the message across that bad things can happen to good people. Upon reviewing my life story, I found clear evidence of this but I was still unable to fully believe it. Other than one disorderly conduct in college, I've never done anything I could be arrested for but I still had trouble believing I was a good person. The reasons I had trouble seeing myself as a good person had to do with the way I had constructed my belief system. I thought that if bad things happened to me there must be punishment, and if there was something I was being punished for I must have done something wrong to deserve it. I thought my punishment was justified because I believed the world was a just place. Justice prevailing was a common theme on television, in books, and in popular songs.

Within the justice system, retribution is one of the premises for punishments. Experiencing years of adversity

which I considered punishment made me feel I must have done something wrong. This created a ton of guilt. For a long time, I searched for reasons why I was being punished. I concluded that I must have been the cause for the adversity I had faced and was still facing in some way shape or form because I considered life to be a system of cause/effect and actions/consequences and nothing more.

But life doesn't work that way. I have an idea of justice informed by my conscience and by what I've heard others say, but my idea of justice is not universal or imposed by higher beings. Life is not a retribution system where everyone gets what they deserve. Because I contributed to making something happen doesn't mean I am necessarily deserving of its consequences; I'm not necessarily at fault. It's sometimes difficult or impossible for us to see how our actions will play out because there are a number of variables within any given situation, some of which we are unaware of.

The human mind has a tendency to make connections between ideas and to impose a cause and effect chain even when one isn't present. I had to learn that things can happen at random and the way I had lived my life was not the cause for having schizoaffective disorder. I had been in the mindset that everything happens for a reason but that's not always the case. Finding reasons why things happen the way they do can be empowering because it has given me a sense of control over my life but sometimes unforeseeable events can happen.

Disconnecting the earlier years in my life from later adversity was liberating because there truly was no connection and it allowed me to see that I am truly a good person who was just dealt a difficult hand. Nothing I had done in my life was reason for experiencing schizoaffective disorder. The illness happened at random and was not retribution for anything I had ever done. In terms of how well or poorly someone has lived compared to the results of their life, the scales of justice are frequently uneven.

Although so many things in my life seemed to be within my control, I struggled to see how there are many variables beyond my control. One such variable is having a biological inclination toward schizophrenia and

bipolar disorder. Another is running into some extreme adversity during college which definitely contributed to the onset of schizoaffective disorder. A difficult middle-school experience also contributed to mental rigidity and schizoaffective disorder. I finally understood that there are many things that can happen to me which are not my fault but are still my responsibility to resolve.

Life has a great deal of randomness, and it took me a while to realize that I will always be thrown into good and bad situations which I've done nothing to bring about. However, there are many variables within my control

such as having gotten my medication right, finding a good doctor, working hard at therapy, being a good person, and doing everything I can to ensure my life turns out the way I want it to. Although life has thrown me a great deal of adversity, I've found I've been able to rise above it. In doing so I developed many tools and resources including character, personality, intelligence, and wisdom. These tools helped me create a life of my choosing which I'm happy with.

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