

# SPEAKUP STORIES

## THE COMMUNITY SPEAKS UP

## SKIP CHOATE SPEAKS UP



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Twenty-nine years ago this holiday season, I began a formal struggle with anxiety and depression. By formal, I mean that whatever progression had been at work in my life to that breaking point, I finally came to the conclusion with the encouragement of Meg Burley, McLin Choate Jr., and my mother, that I should seek help for that struggle.

This struggle was something I was initially fairly open about...certainly with friends, but even in the workplace at school, but unfortunately for my own trust, that openness on my part would prove damaging. And so, like most of my generation, I have remained silent...or at least veiled, about my own struggle, frequently to sneak in from the shadows when I have seen others facing similar challenges.

It occurs to me though, as I embark on this second year of fundraising for the cause of supporting youth in understanding and coping with anxiety and depression that Speaking Up...to let others know that they shouldn't have to hide their pain, that there are supports and treatments out there that are effective, that there are almost certainly those in your immediate circle who are facing their own struggle with this potentially life threatening malady...is entirely THE point!!

I have happily watched as social awareness about this has changed dramatically. I have witnessed the courage of friends like Cody Sigmon sharing his full self with not only his friends and colleagues but his students, a former student sharing her struggle with anxiety for the benefit of those who might learn of it, a former band parent H Eric Liverman publicly naming his struggle with anxiety, depression, and subsequently alcohol in hopes that he may be able to guide another along that path...and I have been inspired to Speak Up as well.

If I have done anything right in this journey it was that I reached out for a hand to help...and found many waiting and willing to reach back. Of the most immediate angels to come to my rescue, there was Jack Winn, Jeanna Tillman DeCarli, and Steve Turner...and later friends and colleagues like Myrne McGonigle, Holly Jordan, and Joseph Wargo to help get me back on my feet professionally.

To do that though, you have to know that it is okay to struggle, that it is normal to struggle, that we are all really broken...or will be, and that it is the propensity to help each other, even those who are beyond hope, that distinguishes humans from the rest, or at least most, of the animal kingdom.



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