



Testimonial – Danielle Germain  
May 15, 2019

Good evening,

First off, I'd like to thank Revivre, and in particular Jean-Rémy, for giving me this opportunity to share my story with you. I'm truly honoured. I've got a bit of stage fright, but it's a great privilege to be standing here before you tonight.

I'd like to start by taking you back to the beginning of 2004. I was 24, and like many people in their early twenties, I was trying to find my place in the professional world. Trying very hard, in fact. I grew up in a family that strongly valued education and work. So I was really trying to find what I wanted to do, who I was, what I liked. I was sorting out my identity, trying to define myself.

I had started my master's the year before. I thought I'd found my career path. Logically, everything was in place for me to succeed. I had it all planned out, down to a T. I had several courses under my belt and was doing well in school. But just as I started my first practical course, my world totally fell apart. I have a vivid memory of that time. The experience was a real sucker punch. It was brutal. I felt so incompetent, inadequate, completely thrown off course. I imploded.

2004: that was the year I imploded. I often use that word; it describes major depression quite well. I came apart from the inside. My heart, my head and my body all shattered into tiny pieces. Later on I became aware that I had major depression. Yet despite having gotten my bachelor's in psychology, I had no idea what was happening to me at the time! Insomnia, anxiety, indecision, sluggishness, confusion, tearfulness, anger, isolation, rumination, dark thoughts. Pain... Hell.

I was thrown back into this hell three more times in the 10 years that followed. If you've ever had depression, you know what I'm talking about, how it takes over your life. Your relationships, your habits, your daily life, everything! Taking a shower is exhausting. Doing the laundry is a complex task. For me, grocery shopping was anguish. There were too many choices, and every decision felt impossible!

I went through all kinds of things at work during my depressive episodes. I remember sitting in my office in 2006, at my job at the time, in total panic. I was lost, I felt out of place—it was definitely not the right job for me. Fatigue was taking over after several nights of insomnia. I was losing control. I was having it rough. I remember several years later, in another job, trying to hide



the fact that I wasn't well from my coworkers, trying to stay on track. But I felt less and less able to keep going. I would go hide in the bathroom and cry.

I remember another time, starting another job after a period of leave, brain still in a daze, not yet fully recovered. I had trouble concentrating. I was putting all my energy into keeping up appearances, trying to fit in as best I could with another workplace and another team.

There's a lot of unpleasant memories from these four depressive episodes. And with each episode, I tried to understand. I tried to sort out the causes: genetic, environmental, how I managed my thoughts, my emotions, the context. I dissected my life, my choices. I wanted to understand, find some meaning. Why did I become depressed? Why the hell was this happening again?

Every time I became depressed it got harder to pull myself out than the time before. Because I was supposed to have learned. Because I was supposed to have made progress. Because I swore to myself each time that I'd never relive it. I was so ashamed, I felt so guilty!

Thankfully, I've always had a lot of support. My friends. My family. They nurtured me. I received a lot of love. And that's what helped me put myself back together. Without them, I can't imagine what kind of shape I would be in today. I am fully aware that not everyone has this kind of luck. That's why I'm so grateful to have the network I do. And it's one of the reasons that I got involved with Revivre. Revivre plays an extremely important role in the lives of many people, giving them a support network that they wouldn't otherwise have. They can meet people who are going through something similar, which helps to make things less daunting and normalize their situation. Mental illness does its best to make you feel at odds with everyone, apart from the world. So being welcomed and listened to without judgement when you're in this frame of mind is essential to getting better. I'm sure of it.

In my case, I received support from my loved ones and from a psychologist I saw for several years. I spent hundreds of hours getting to know myself better, working on myself, my emotions, my thoughts, my relationships. It was a long journey, but one of which I'm very proud today.

I also adopted all sorts of other strategies: yoga, light therapy, physical exercise, meditation, omega-3s on top of my anti-depressants. I wanted to fully stack the odds in my favour in order to get better and avoid a relapse. Though I didn't realize it, in a way I was creating my own self-management program :)

Even more important than all the effort I put in, what I really needed after four depressive episodes in roughly twelve years was to learn to let go. It is impossible to understand exactly why a depressive episode happens or a mental health problem arises. There are too many factors.



Ultimately, what made all the difference was the kindness and compassion I was shown. I had to accept the state of affairs I was in and hold on tight to the hope that I would recover. It's simple, but at the same time, huge. And everything changed.

15 years later, I'm standing before you today, 40 years old and happier than ever. I carry great strength within me, but also a great vulnerability. I know how precious and fragile life is. How important it is to take care of myself, to keep an eye on myself and remain attentive. I feel rooted, but I don't take anything for granted.

15 years later, my professional identity is clearer than ever. I've found my place. Over the years, as my path criss-crossed back and forth, as my work experiences intersected with my health issues, I've managed to build up a sense of professional confidence. I've worked on projects that were meaningful to me. I've helped people find jobs, I've worked in equal access to employment, I've helped immigrants integrate into Quebec's labour market.

But a little more than a year ago, I took a new step. I left a permanent position to follow my heart. Many of my friends and family couldn't quite understand why I was leaving this job I actually liked. But everything fell into place for me. It made so much sense! My personal journey caught up with my professional one. I now dedicate myself to looking after workers' mental health. I help make workplaces more people-friendly, healthy and supportive of personal wellness.

More specifically, I work for Groupe entreprises en santé. It's an organization that promotes best practices in workplace health and wellness for Quebec businesses.

I recently just facilitated a workshop aimed at supporting self-management in the workplace with Revivre. I am very proud of the tools I've developed, the things I've learned about myself that can help other people living with mental health problems. The pain I've endured can be made into something useful. This also led me to take another look at my life experiences, to put more precise words and concepts to what I went through. I used this to normalize what I went through and to keep treating myself with compassion, while providing the same thing to the group's participants.

I also continue to volunteer for Revivre. Organizing the *J'avance en marchant* walking fundraiser. Tackling the enormous and growing labour of workplace mental health services. This is a fantastic project I am really excited about. I'm working with the managers you were introduced to at the start of this evening. Like them, I believe that we can all do our part to improve the mental health of workers. We can all make a contribution, no matter what role we have in an organization, by taking care of our employees and colleagues, by caring even just a bit. So I'm asking you to join us, to make sure that more and more people in their workplaces feel happy and like they belong.

Thank you so much for listening and enjoy the rest of your evening!