



WITCHERY PRESS

Magick Lives Here

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MAGICK, MENTAL HEALTH, AND THE RELUCTANT WARRIOR

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by Emily Linstrom

A little over three years ago, I found myself trudging through a snowy Connecticut town at dusk. I hadn't eaten in days, my eyes were permanently bloodshot from crying, and the only thing spurring me on was the light emanating from the kitchen window of my sister and mentor in Natural Magick, Paganism, and the study of Witchcraft. Like a true Sicilian, she ushered me in with a ferocious hug, a place already set for me at the table, and ordered me to eat before saying another word. Afterward she listened while calmly shuffling her tarot cards, her enormous brown eyes at once soft and full of that fire every Witch recognizes in the company of their own.

Sobbing, I at last admitted defeat—to NYC, my home of 8 years, and the person I had been, both triumphant and wretched, for so long. My beloved grandmother and one of the greatest souls of this incarnation had passed on that autumn. A romance that meant the cosmos to me had abruptly ended. I had parted ways with several communities I no longer felt I held a compelling place or purpose in. Seemingly steadfast friendships were dissipating with a disquieting air of non-closure, and to this day I can't point the finger without it rightfully turning halfway back around on me. Two separate projects I invested a great deal of time, money, and trust in had gone belly-up for two very different but equally appalling reasons. I was broke and rudderless, having run out of energy and confidence to invest in a life I felt shipwrecked in. Above all, I was tired—so very, very tired. The years—predating as well as in NYC—were littered with abusive relationships, repeat instances of sexual harassment and professional exploitation, and my own litany of irreversible screw-ups. For every period of creative or emotional success, there seemed to be an appendix of disasters.

Others would later contribute much of this to growing pains, the natural and often painful transitioning from one stage of life to the next, and the not-so-subtle tests the universe faceplants you with to see what you're made of. Fine. But in that moment I was the kind of tired that only wants to lay down in the snow and never get up again.

When I had exhausted myself and all my “*whys???*,” my friend reached across the table and pressed her hand over mine. In a voice that was not her own but that of the deity speaking through her, she said: “They know you can take it. You have always been a warrior, even in your reluctance. Every life. They're saying it now: *She can handle it.*” And then, as the atmosphere broke, she returned to her familiar voice and added, “I know, it's SO fucked up.”

I laughed for the first time in what felt like ages, and so began the dawn of a new one.

Flash forward to March of this year, when I conducted an interview for Sabat Magazine with School of Witchery and November Sage founder Juliet Diaz. Due to necessary brevity, some of the Q&A segments were shortened or eliminated altogether. One in particular I will share with you here, as it was the other half of the inspiration for this piece:

E.L.: *What personal items (if you wish to disclose) are your most valued in your work, and why?*

J.D.: *Honestly, my broken. My heartache, my past traumas and failures, my falls and my scars, my tears and spilled blood, my shadows and ghosts. They are my most valued. Without them, I would not have known what I was capable of, would not have known my true strength and perseverance, would not have learned to keep going, even if it meant to crawl until I learned to get back up again. I've learned to love my shattered reflection, and that has given me a new perspective and gratitude for all that I'm blessed with now.*

And so it goes with the Witch.

May, as you probably know, is Mental Health Awareness Month. I've purposely saved this piece for the last days of it, to read the accounts of others and reflect on my own. All that I've shared so far is no different from what most have been or will go through in their lives: the passing of loved ones, failed relationships, regrets that cut deep, and unanticipated events that alter one irrevocably. But if you grapple with mental illness, be it genetically inherited and/or acquired through trauma, you no doubt feel as though you've been armed with a faulty set of tools with which to take on life's slings and arrows.

I was officially diagnosed with major depressive disorder (MDD) in my early 20's, having struggled with it since puberty. Anxiety and PTSD would eventually round out the dream team. I have attempted suicide twice in the past, the first borne of an apathetic delirium, the latter a soberly conducted near-fatality. I'm candid about these things. Don't get me wrong, they don't receive top billing in my life, nor do I employ them as attention grabbers; I consciously avoid wielding them for the sake of leverage or manipulation. I certainly don't allow them to precede my other strengths and talents. But I'm open about them, and refuse to cower under the stigma society continues to plant on mental illness. As Juliet expressed with her own fire and generosity, I've earned my scars, and woe to the soul who bids me to cover them up.

If you're reading this, I suspect you too bear the scars of this life, to varying degrees of depth and severity. And from my own corner of the world in which I pen this, I want to tell you that I truly believe this is where your real Magick resides. Magick is survival. It's defying the unfathomable and transforming it into something stronger, kinder, otherworldly. Magick is taking your own wrecked vessel and reassembling the pieces with what you've learned, sealing the cracks in the spirit of Kintsukuroi. Magick is daring to take to the waters again; it's not being afraid to dive under and help those still trapped below. Magick is as earned as it is inherent.

I gave up my Magick for many years—my studies, my writing, my values, my meditations, the very instincts and talents gifted at birth. In hurting myself, I hurt others. In forgetting what I was capable of, I conditioned myself to be so much less. Desperation, fear, grief, and recklessness were the tentacles of my unresolved madness. I only retrieved what I had abandoned after it became impossible to carry on otherwise. That's how Magick works, I think. It can only lie dormant for so long. And whatever Magick means to you—and truly, it's different for each and every one of us—don't ever doubt your right to reclaim it.

The month for acknowledging mental health may be coming to a close, but that doesn't mark the end of it for you and me. It's a lifelong process and, let's be honest, a life sentence when things get really dark. Part of my own ongoing work is allowing myself to feel what I feel in a moment, but also understand that what I feel may not actually be what IS. Every day is equal parts practical + intuitive effort to maintain a kind of balance and integrity, into which my own Magickal practices factor. They have helped me to heal and better understand myself, but also be better to and for others. They're not my only weapons against depression, anxiety, and PTSD, but they certainly take up a substantial and well-earned compartment in my arsenal.

If you live with mental illness but still make the effort to show up as a friend, parent, partner, or colleague, then you're not just functioning, you're winning. If you are still able to embrace the rich and strange, the *what if?*, and oft-shunned, then you are proof in the flesh that Magick still exists in this world. And if you're brave enough, or just plain fed up enough, to stare down your demons—the ones you've wrought as well as the ones set upon you—then you're as much a warrior as I (supposedly) am, if not more. And I think that's worth celebrating year-round.

My late grandmother used to say that kindness is the ultimate wisdom. I'm inclined to think it's also the ultimate Magick.

Author: *Emily Linstrom*

Image: *The Self-Crucified by Clarence John Laughlin, 1940*



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BY



EMILY LINSTROM

Emily Linstrom is an American writer, artist, and Witchery faculty member residing in Italy. Her work has been featured in a number of publications including Three Rooms Press, Nailed Magazine, A Women's Thing, The Wisdom Daily, and Carve Magazine. She was the first prize recipient of Pulp Literature Press's 2015 The Raven short story contest, and is a regular contributor for Sabat Magazine, The Outsider, and Quail Bell Magazine. You can view her work at: www.emilylinstrom.com and follow her adventures on Instagram at [betterlatethan_em](#)

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3 THOUGHTS ON “MAGICK, MENTAL HEALTH, AND THE RELUCTANT WARRIOR”



Lee Harral

May 31, 2018 Reply

Brilliantly written and deeply moving. Emily, you are an inspiration.

★ Liked by [1 person](#)



Pam

May 31, 2018 Reply

This left a lump in my chest and throat for various reasons. I saw myself in this. As a woman who was awakened by trauma (breast cancer), I realized that I squelched my magick for so long. As I read I saw my scars and the depression. I suppressed a wail and blinked back the tears (even now as I type) when I read. Failed relationships, a reluctance to embrace new breasts, scars that I try to hide, all a part of who I am and a part of the strength that was always inside. When I read “They know you can take it. You have always been a warrior, even in your reluctance. Every life. They’re saying it now: She can handle it.” I heard it in my spirit. It was like the deity was talking to me.

★ Liked by [1 person](#)



Amanda H (@sillywinks)

June 5, 2018 Reply

Live well and merrily 😊 Thank you for sharing this wonderful piece of written art.

★ Liked by [1 person](#)

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