

What ADHD Taught me about the Coronavirus

By Charles Lee

Life is always about the good, the bad, and the ugly. People think everything has to be perfect and good to be a success, or for them to be happy. That's a lie. No one escapes without a story, or a dozen, to tell as we go through our lives. If people are honest, most stories will have something dark, or bad. That's what makes them interesting. But most of us just hope to be heard, not get famous. Besides... a story is only good when it's bad.

Life is bad right now, so I think this story will be good — eventually. If I don't die. While life is throwing all it can at us if we want to come out on top we have to learn how to fight adversity, not just endure it. Yeah. I'm talking about COVID-19. Who isn't? It's one good example of life's latest "good, bad, and ugly" stories. People are dying. People are afraid of dying. Dying is bad, but I think maybe worrying about dying is worse. Over the past few months, people have become more isolated and scared — especially teenagers. Especially me.

We're leaving that protective shell of quarantine, but that fear is still present. I thought it would disappear, like all the restrictions. It hasn't. Now that people have seen friends, family, and neighbors dying, and spent months quarantined, the rates of depression and anxiety have skyrocketed. The mental health fallout from covid will be astronomical. But as someone who has endured a personal mental health struggle, I can tell you there's a good side to Covid. It gets better. It has a powerful lesson if you're open to seeing the good in the bad. I keep reminding myself of that because, well, it's true.

Seeing the good in the bad is something I learned to do before Covid. I learned it when everyone else was getting on with their lives. I know what bad is. Ever since I was a young kid, I always enjoyed the casual jump on the bed. For me, it was more like throwing everything off the bed and cannonballing onto the hard, blanket and pillow covered floor. I ended up hitting the floor — hard. I would cry, and cry some more, then I would get right back up on the bed and do it maybe 10 more times again, repeating the whole process; jump, laugh, cry, repeat. It seemed as though I always had a 24-hour energy jetpack strapped to me and there was nothing to do to get it off no matter how I tried. Trust me. I tried. But I didn't know that my energy actually had a deeper meaning. Everyone in this world has struggles in their life, and my struggle was fighting ADHD. To all the NON-ADHD people out there, ADHD is an attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. It is a medical condition. A person with ADHD has differences in brain development and brain activity that affect attention, the ability to sit still, and to control themselves.

If you have ADHD, you can't sit still for more than a minute at a time, and you don't realize how distracting that is because you're the one distracting people with your fidgeting. Recovering from ADHD wasn't easy, but I can tell you that all you can do is take it one day at a time, continuously trying to better yourself and fight through it. To the people feeling scared and isolated coming out of this quarantine, this advice can really help you.

My struggle started as a child, and not with a global pandemic. I guess that's good. I wasn't competing with everyone else to maintain normal or understand what was going on. I didn't have to guess. Adults told me what was happening. Unlike Covid, ADHD was something they knew about.

I was always a very social kid. I loved *making* friends but *keeping* friends was always hard because I would always take things too far, too fast. I was very hyperactive and in some cases my friends would get hurt because they were not used to playing as rough as I did. My parents would get calls from other parents telling them that "it would be best if I stopped playing with their child." Sometimes, I would overhear my teacher and my parents talking and I would always hear the same things, "He's a very bright kid but he needs to keep his hands to himself." It was true, I could never sit still. Was there something wrong about having a lot of energy? I thought it was normal, I thought my *parents* were crazy. I never realized that this was a serious thing and that I needed to talk to someone.

Just like me, there are people in quarantine right now who are struggling, not even realizing what they are going through. They don't realize that they need to talk, or smile, or even go outside. That's why reaching out for help is so important. Not reaching out to anyone affected how I lived my early years, and it was a constant struggle dealing with it. When I would be at school, I didn't know about things like boundaries and personal space. Because of these impulses, my parents took me to this place in Palisades Park where counselors specialized in this "kind of thing." As I walked in the door with my dad, I thought immediately that this was a bad idea. I hated everything about the place. Imagine quarantine before there was a virus. At least I got to leave.

Okay. So it wasn't all bad. The one thing I did like was the waiting room. There was this huge couch that maybe took up a quarter of the room that no one ever sat in, so it technically, over time, became "my spot." Every Saturday I would go to this place and meet with this lady named Margaret. She was the kindest, caring, most loving person that I have ever met til this day. She was in her late 40's and she always reminded me of my grandma. She was always smiling, and trying to fix everyone's problems. Margaret made me feel at ease in this strange office. We would sit for about an hour talking about how I was feeling and how my week had been while I was making something out of Playdough. But the funny thing that I always noticed was that she listened. It didn't matter what I talked about. She listened. And she listened for hours over weeks and months. It wasn't pills or doctors, or anything special. It was being heard. My stories had a place to go. I had a place to go. It made all the difference.

Finding someone who would listen to me really helped me overcome my ADHD. It calmed the storm inside me. It slowed me down. It made me relax. It made me feel safe. I was heard. My stories meant something. It didn't matter that they weren't world events. It mattered they were mine.

I think about that when I watch the news or go online and read about what the world is going through. Everyone talks about what drug is better, should we wear a mask. Should

we social distance? I think none of that is as important as listening to each other. As the world emerges from quarantine, people may not want to talk about their experiences. They may not want to share their grief over lost loved ones, or their fears that this may happen again. No one wants to feel vulnerable, or frightened, or alone. But it's the real cure for Covid. It touches us inside, and heals us no matter what has happened because being heard tells us that life does matter, that we can survive.

I assure you, there are people who are willing to listen. Throughout my life, besides my parents, no-one has ever helped me more in overcoming my ADHD than Margaret. She would listen to me no matter what. When I was with her, everything difficult for me went away. The urge to get up and move around, the urge to fidget in my chair was gone. She taught me to take things, anything one day at a time. After going there for what seemed like forever, my ADHD started to gradually become better. I would fidget less and move around less in my chair at school. For once I was starting to feel normal. As time went on, my ADHD did not affect me as much anymore. Learning to cope with my ADHD took some trial and error. I had bad days and good days. I had to experiment with various tools, including some medication, before I could find a path that worked for me. I started to gain more friends and as time went on, I noticed that instead of drifting away, my friendships would become stronger. I finally figured out what I was missing out on. I figured out how to playfully fight with friends without hurting them. As days, months, and years went on, I never once missed a meeting and never once dreaded going. It took time, and work, and lots of talking, but I got through it.

I'm not writing this story to get sympathy, I just want to share what it was like for me. All people are different in their own unique way. You never know exactly what is going on in someone's mind, but I know like it or not, we ALL, at one point in our life, have had our own mountains to overcome. Many of us have faced, or will face, difficult times during and after this pandemic. For people suffering from depression, anxiety, or even just plain loneliness, I urge you to reach out to someone to talk, even if you don't feel like you're struggling that badly. Take it from me, talking to someone goes a long way down the road to dealing with what you're feeling. But in the end, the difficult experiences will always be a part of you, and you move on in life knowing that you climbed and conquered it.

And don't just find someone to talk with. Be someone others can talk to. With all the experts on medicine, and viruses, and lockdowns and quarantines the one thing we've all seemed to forget is that the simplest thing, the cheapest thing, the thing we all have is the same thing Margaret had — the ability to listen to someone else without judgment, or expectation. You can do it. I can do it. It works. I guarantee it. And there doesn't have to be a virus to do it. You don't have to be a professional or anything. You just have to listen and to care. When all the lockdowns go away, and people are back at the beach, or back at work, it's important to remember talking and listening are still the best answers to the good, the bad, and the ugly in life. And if you do it, like me, you'll find out it works.