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Humor Helps Author Overcome Depression, Fight Stigma Associated with Mental Illness

A Man's Got to Take a Lot of Punishment to Write a Really Funny Book.
– Ernest Hemingway

John Shuchart has taken more than his fair share of punishment in his 65 years. A successful entrepreneur Shuchart has survived a staggering number of traumatic incidents that began when he was just an infant, continued through adulthood, and led to his long battle with depression. Shuchart chronicles the “punishment” and his recovery from depression in his new book, *“You are not the brightest of my four sons” ... and other depressing things that have been said to me.*

Here’s a short list of the kinds of ill treatment and manipulation that Shuchart endured in the first half of his life:

* Raised in an emotionally abusive home, Shuchart was five years old when he had to undergo an emergency appendectomy. As John was about to be pushed through the double doors into the operating room, his father leaned over his hospital gurney and stated matter-of-factly, “They’re going to cut you open like a *chicken*.” Needless to say, young Johnny had to be restrained.

*At the age of eleven, John was sent across the country to spend the summer in a program designed to “fix” a so-called *right brain/left brain problem* that had been diagnosed by his mother. The program consisted of John being prohibited from using his right hand for *anything* for weeks, and it reinforced the idea that there was something “wrong” with him.

*An average student, and a year younger than his academically brilliant older brother, John was routinely referred to as “stupid” by his parents, even though he became fluent in Russian during high school. The book’s title is actually a comment made by John’s mother.

*Shuchart’s father, on two separate occasions, demanded that John give him a huge sum of money (\$30,000 and later \$50,000) or he would commit suicide. In another incident, John went to his uncle and grandfather to collect funds to reimburse an insurance company from whom his father had been embezzling money.

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In addition to the emotional abuse heaped on John by his parents, Shuchart suffered two life-threatening accidents that exacerbated his depression. The first happened when his twelve-year-old son, Scott, was cutting their rain-slicked back yard on the family's riding lawnmower. John watched as Scott steered the mower under the swing set. Alarming, one of the swings became attached to the mower's clippings receptacle and caused the mower to jerk back like a horse rearing up. Fearing the mower would fall backward onto his son, Shuchart sprinted across the lawn, slipped on the wet grass, and slid under the mower as Scott jumped off. The front of the mower descended, bouncing off of John's leg, onto his midsection, and then toward his head – with the blade spinning. Shuchart managed to throw up his arms and somehow flip the mower onto its side, preventing further injury... or worse. The wounds required more than 300 stitches, and Shuchart was lucky to be alive, but rather than feel fortunate, he ruminated on the experience as an embarrassing, humiliating event.

The other accident occurred 15 years ago. Shuchart endured a near-fatal motor vehicle accident that led to a deeper, more sustained depression. A truck carrying concrete blocks t-boned him at an intersection. The impact exploded every window in Shuchart's SUV, broke his seatbelt, and slammed him into the passenger side of the vehicle. Miraculously, Shuchart walked away.

Unfortunately, the physical trauma from the accident began to surface months later and led to Shuchart undergoing 15 different surgeries to relieve pain and restore function in his wrists and shoulder. His continuous battle with pain led to an addiction to prescription medications, a deep depression and ultimately a planned suicide before Shuchart sought treatment and discovered that he could effectively use humor to reframe traumatic events from his past and “un-stick” the negative, depressing emotions tied to them. He shares his approach in *“You are not the brightest of my four sons,”* a story that is touching, funny, and ultimately uplifting.

Shuchart continues to work on his recovery from depression. He also has become a champion in the fight against the stigma associated with mental illness. Shuchart is a board member for the Kansas state chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Kansas, an active supporter of the Greater Kansas City Mental Health Coalition, and he has formed The Shuchart Group, an organization dedicated to ending the stigma attached to mental illness.

For Shuchart, publishing his book is the first step in his crusade to fight the stigma. He is marketing the book as a fundraising opportunity for non-profits that provide support for people with mental illness. Nonprofits will earn \$5 for each book they sell. Individuals interested in the book can go to the book website (www.notthebrightest.com) and designate a nonprofit group to receive the \$5 donation generated from their book purchase.

Additionally, Shuchart and his team are developing unique, fun workshops for therapists and social workers, teaching them how to work with their patients by using humor in their struggles with mental illness. The entertaining workshops qualify for continuing education units (CEU's) for industry professionals.

For a man who has taken so much punishment from life, Shuchart is standing strong. He will carry his crusade to end the stigma to nonprofit groups across the country, booking speaking engagements (free of charge) to expand the fight against the mental illness stigma and helping these important organizations raise funds.

“These nonprofits have a greater financial need than national booksellers,” Shuchart said, “and we are committed to this unique marketing arrangement. Nonprofits keep about 30% of the total cost of the book which is a healthy sum when there’s no risk involved on their part.”

“I have to lead by example,” Shuchart said. “By writing this book, by creating the workshop, by speaking to groups, I’m standing out front, saying to everyone and anyone who will listen, ‘I have a mental illness. I have owned six businesses. I wrote a book. I have great friends and family, and I’m okay!’”

To learn more about John Shuchart and his book “*You are not the brightest of my four sons*”... and other depressing things that have been said to me, or to schedule him to speak with your group, go to www.notthebrightest.com.

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