

## ADASE Testimonial

I have suffered from panic attacks for the past 20 years, since I was 14 years of age. I have suffered huge traumas in my life as I lived overseas in a war torn country with my parents. I was evacuated out of Cambodia twice and was there during a coupe and had bombs dropping on the city for two days. I experienced a close friend being shot just so they could steal his motorbike and I suffered more when my sister was caught in a Khmer Rouge ambush with shooting for 45 minutes. Due to this I suffered post-traumatic stress.

I lived in fear every day for my life and the lives of my family and friends. I grew up in 5 different countries. All the moving around took its toll on me. Every time I had to leave close friends behind it was like a death to me. I hated goodbyes. At 16 years of age I was sent to Australia for boarding school. This was a huge shock for me and I went through culture-shock as I'd never lived in Australia although my mum was Australian. I had to say goodbye to my family and I felt all alone.

On top of all this I began to get flash backs from when I was a young child and was abused by my grandfather. I became withdrawn and lost interest in everything I'd loved. I used to be immersed in gymnastics and swimming, but I soon lost all interest in the things I loved. I went into a downward spiral and became very sick and depressed. For 5 years I was sick and continued to get worse. I went to doctor after doctor with no answers. I was put on medication for depression and was told I had chronic fatigue. I got to the point where I'd put on 17 kg, had bruises all over me, my skin and hair became very thin, I was tired all the time and in a huge amount of pain. I was to the point of suicide. I was in so much pain I wanted relief and wanted to end my life.

Amazingly at this time, I met my now husband. He fell in love with me and this gave me something to live for. I couldn't do away with myself because I'd hurt him. I wondered how he could love me when I hated myself so much. Three months after we got married, my sister (who was studying medicine at the time) rang me. She said she'd been to a lecture on Cushings Disease and said she thought I had this disease. After scans and doctors appointments, they found I had a tumor on my pituitary gland and it was poisoning my body with cortisone. I was told that after 5 years, 50% of cases are dead with cushings disease. I was lucky to be alive! So I had the tumor removed, the weight fell off, I was a completely different person! I had my energy back and my love for life returned. My husband said I was a different person to the one he married – much better!! I was told I may not be able to have kids and I'd be on medication the rest of my life.

I had to be careful with my health because, if I couldn't take my medication orally it could be life threatening. I'd often have to go to hospital and be on a drip. This happened at least once a year. I'd catch a vomiting bug and end up in hospital. Often I was on holiday and was not at my usual hospital, so the doctors did not understand my condition. I was sometimes left for hours with no medication and this affected me quite adversely. I became very fearful of getting sick and of doctors and hospitals. It created much anxiety for me. It took a few years to get my medication under control and amazingly I found myself pregnant.

The first birth of my daughter was very traumatic. She had the cord round her neck twice and the doctors hadn't picked this fact up. We nearly lost her and I was rushed into emergency. In three minutes they had my daughter out. She was very pale with blue lips. I definitely believe she is a miracle baby! My body took a long time to recover as I adjusted to my medication levels again. It was about this time that my parents divorced. This caused a huge stress on me. My world fell apart once more. I lost my security and my family. On top of this I moved interstate with my husband. We had no family support and I had a young child. I felt alone and depressed again.

I found I was pregnant again and this time I was sick the whole nine months. I became very depressed being sick all day long and having to look after an active toddler. I ended up in hospital a few times. Fortunately I had a fantastic obstetrician who gave me medication that is normally given to cancer patients for nausea. It cost \$95 a tablet and I needed two a day! She was able to give them to me for free! This was a real blessing. I couldn't have survived without them.

My son's birth was also traumatic and I ended up with another caesarean. My body took awhile to adjust to my medications again. My son was very sickly. He threw up every 10 minutes all day long and was very clingy. The doctors said nothing was wrong. After a year, we found out my son was lactose intolerant. After we put him on solids we noticed other foods set him off. He was very hyperactive and was always into mischief. He would scream at night in pain and his bottom and legs would be red and raw. We found that eggs, dairy, soy, tomatoes and citrus all affected him. This took over a year to slowly eliminate. We've just found out he possibly has celiac disease. These food issues became a big stress for me. I lost interest in cooking food, which I used to love doing. His behaviour also was a constant stress for me. I became run down again. After going to the doctors I found out my thyroid was now over active. I kept losing weight and was tired and depressed all the time. For two years I struggled with my thyroid and was on medication.

We moved house again and I changed jobs 3 times. I was tired of making new friends, of moving and having to try new things. These things all took their toll on me. We had a very stressful situation with landlords and housing situations. This caused huge anxiety and stress for me. I couldn't sleep or eat. I'd gotten myself into such a state I couldn't function properly.

It was at this time that I met a friend who was involved with ADASE. She told me briefly that it was a program for those who suffered from depression and anxiety. I thought to myself, I've tried many doctors, gone to counselors over the years, and nothing has worked. All they do is put me on medication or tell me what I already know. They just reflect back what I'm saying and I get nowhere. I'll give it a go, I can't lose anything!

So I went to the course. I was nervous at first, wondering if we'd have to share our stories. I was pleasantly relieved to find that it was a general course and we didn't have to bare our souls. Also, it was run by someone who understood, someone who was a sufferer herself. This made me very relieved. It was great to be in a group situation and we soon became great friends. The bond and the security of the group

was amazing. I looked forward each week to the group meetings, even though it was late at night and I'm not a night person.

I found that the course hit the nail on the head for me! It gave me the skills that I'd been looking for. It gave me knowledge to understand my past, and has helped give me skills to know how to deal with my future. It may seem simple but it's profound, it works and it's made a huge difference to my life! Thank you! - HD