

My life with PTSD

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A glimpse into my life with
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
and overstimulation

Sophia Wilhelmina

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1. Welcome

The moment I write this it is January 4, 2021

I'd like to thank you for buying my book. I'd like to tell you first why I wanted to write this book. It's a book with my true story that I want to share with you. Hopefully you recognize things, or I can explain things like why you react the way you react, but also that your reaction is very normal. That gave me support, I hope I can be that support for you.

My story is not light, and lighthearted, but one of an uphill battle you have to fight every day to survive. My story is about my PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), depression, and overstimulation . No, that's certainly not easy to read. Despite that, I hope it gives you support, and hope. Better times are coming, although that is now incredibly difficult to believe. I've been to that point several times. Still, I'd like to help you by telling my story about my daily life at this incredibly difficult time. I hope it's a bright spot in the darkness.

It's getting better, I just can't tell you when that is. It seems so easy to say, it's getting better, but at some point it seems so far away, the hope that one day things will get better is as small as a star in the sky. I remember that period well. The most important thing I want to give you, how impossible it is to believe that one day things will get better. That day is really coming. You don't have to believe that day is coming, because that day is really coming, whether you believe in it or not. I hope it gives you a little peace.

My mother kept the hope that one day I would be better. Now 4 years after the PTSD, depression, and overstimulation started, I can finally say that I'm really doing better. I hope it doesn't take you years, and find the right help that works for you faster. Even if I can only help one person by sharing my story, it has already been more than worth writing this book.

I hope this book will help your family, and friends to understand what you're going through. It will help them to support you. In this day, and age you can use a lot of support. I notice by myself that family, and friends find it annoying what I have experienced, and what causes the PTSD. But really understanding what's going on, no they don't really understand that. Some of them couldn't deal with it either, those friendships broke down as a result. Unfortunately, that's unavoidable, but it does help you to know who your real friends are. They remain friends, and try to help, and support you as best they can. That's the kind of friend I want you to be. Think of me as an unknown friend who wants to help you through this incredibly difficult time. I've noticed that reading someone's story about their PTSD helps. It gives support, and a lot of recognition.

You're not crazy even though you'll definitely think so at some point. It is the world that cannot deal with us, because they cannot or do not want to understand this disease. Because we are different, and react differently than they expect. I often react very alternately, and sometimes when I hear a loud bang, I scare myself, and make me very small! The other time, it just scares me. For example, there are still countless things, but remember, for you with this very more difficult disease called PTSD, they are very normal reactions. The world just doesn't understand why that's a normal reaction for you. That makes it so much harder because you're not understood. I have encountered this so many times myself, that is almost impossible to imagine. But there really comes a day when things really get better. I also tell you about therapies that might help you, and of course tips on what you could try in certain situations. I started this book because I wanted to put everything that had happened on paper, but now that it's almost done, I notice that it has also helped to give everything a place.

1.1 Writer's foreword

How did I come up with the idea of writing this book? Since January 2017 I have PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), depression, and overstimulation . That's a very difficult combination, you don't know what's going on with you. You don't know how to get rid of it.

The road to healing is long, because there is no ready-made answer or treatment that can help anyone with this condition(s).

One day, a friend emailed me a link to an article. In that article, a few people had shared their story about PTSD. That was intense, and at the same time so recognizable, it was just scary. There was an article in it that was pretty much my story, which caused the PTSD to develop. That was very intense. I e-mailed that friend a lot that day. He had forwarded the article maybe it would give me support. He was right about that. It was very recognizable to what I read. It made me realize I'm not crazy. Or very strange to react to situations, but are very normal reactions for someone who needs to learn to deal with PTSD. That article, and the support of my family, and friends, inspired me to write down my story with all the ups, and downs.

I wrote the book not only for myself, but also to help others. By sharing my story, I can help others. I hope that in this way I can do my bit to gain a better understanding of the people who are affected by this.

Also, to support those where PTSD is the daily reality. But also to support the family, and friends of them with tips, and insight into what PTSD is like, for someone who has to live with it.

A lot of strength in this very difficult period of your life. After this chapter come all small chapters with information with tips, and therapies that I have come across over the years. I hope there's

something in there that can help you get back on your way to recovery.

I wrote this book not by the rules of how to write a book. I just grabbed a Word document, and started writing it all down. That's how this book came into being. I'm trying to get as many spelling mistakes out of it as possible, but I'm sure there'll be some more in there. That's okay, the book doesn't have to be completely perfect for me either. As long as it's written from my heart. I want to write the book like a friend told me what happened to him.

The point is there will be a book that can help people with PTSD, by reading someone else's experiences. By giving tips on what to try when overstimulated or what kind of therapies there are, in addition to the usual GP route. That sort of thing, I would liked to read that somewhere when the PTSD started with me. That's why I'm writing it down in a book to get you started. I wrote this book while I'm still recovering. The book is not perfect, and does not have to be. Strength, and success.

1.2 Short version

Welcome to the short version of the book. I can imagine that reading the whole book for now is not achievable. That's why I made a short version.

My book on PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), depression, and overstimulation , and everything that comes with it. In this book I want to share my experiences.

A friend once came across an article in the paper, which was about PTSD. In it, they had shared their experience. That gave me so much support, and made so many things clear to me that I didn't understand before then. That's why I want to share my experiences through this book, so that I can help others. In this book I also tell you what helps me to get a grip on my life again. I hope it can help you, too.

The road to recovery is long, I have now moved on 4 years since the first symptoms came. Of which it took three quarters of a year for a suspected diagnosis to be made. I couldn't have imagined it would be such a long road. To this day it is not over, in phases I suffer more, and then things get a little better. But it's still hard.

But because it took so long, it didn't stick to the PTSD. There were also depressive symptoms, and to finish the whole thing also overstimulation . That's my daily reality in early 2017. Not easy to hear at age 29.

My path to recovery is also covered in this book, as are my experiences with care. I also made a list of possible therapies that might help you on page 185.

I came across this therapy forming during my search for the therapy that could help me. Maybe it can help you, too. That's what this book is all about, to support people who also have PTSD, and their loved ones like family, and friends. So that they can better understand what is going on, and therefore better support you. But also to let it be known that certain reactions are very normal reactions, while others do not. But for someone with PTSD, that's a very normal reaction.

I've only been in touch with some really wonderful friends for a while, the other one I left mostly on the left. If she sent a message, I won't answer for a while, if I felt like responding at all. My mother, and my best friends have helped me through the first few months. Which I'm very grateful for. She was trying to help me understand things, which wasn't exactly easy. Not just for them because they had to explain it in different ways before I understood. But also for me, the many frustrations because I didn't understand. Normally, I understand things quickly, but since the PTSD, things have been harder to understand.

I was lucky to have a friend who could explain things to me. If I didn't understand why my head reacted the way it reacts. They were certainly not nice conversations, and the emotions often bounced back, and forth. But it often made me understand the situation better. You wish such a friend to everyone who had to deal with PTSD. It's already so hard to find your way into a therapy form that suits you, let alone if you don't understand what's going on in the meantime. And no one can explain it to you.

For example, I can be quite frightening by unexpected loud noises, which makes me very afraid. Also, sounds can suddenly come in so loudly that suddenly they are an abundance of sounds. That you don't really know where to look to calm all those sounds a little bit. Think of a supermarket, you hear the shopping carts, the other

customers, the staff. But also the radio, the cash registers, the refrigerators of the freezers or in the dairy department. That kind of noise put together isn't exactly fun when you're trying to run errands. There are many other things you can run into. I also tell you what I do at times like that, maybe it can help you, too. Whether it can also help you, I don't know, for everyone PTSD is different, everyone also has other sounds that you can suffer from very much. But also the triggers (things that evoke certain memories) are different for everyone, for me, it has to do with hospitals, and medical, among other things. But even small children can be a trigger, especially at first that was very difficult. What the triggers are, and how can you best deal with them? That's what this book is about.

For me, the PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), depressive symptoms, and overstimulation started at the end of January 2017. I was pregnant with my first child, and it resulted in surgery. The conversation with the gynecologist that showed it was an operation, because it was an ectopic pregnancy, didn't exactly help to understand it all properly at the time. That doctor wasn't clear, and found it difficult for me because I had questions about the surgery, and how that affects my child's wishes. Those were important questions for me to get answers before I would give permission for the operation. Those answers didn't come, but the surgery was done, and I could go home the same day. The recovery from the operation was a long road, and to this day I am still working on it. The pain symptoms remained much longer, and much more severe than according to the A4 that I had received with information. Several extra checks at the gynecologist to find out where the pain came from.

At the 6-week check it really went wrong. I was already sleeping badly, suffering from nightmares, re-experiences, flashbacks, very

quickly tired, a lot of pain to the scars that I needed the maximum dose of painkillers, to get through the day.

In that check, I expected to get answers to my questions, including where the pain comes from, and what can be done about it. That pain was brushed aside, and that was in my head, so I had to go to the psychologist. The scars from the operation looked good, so the pain was not physical, I was informed.

Once outside again in 10 minutes it went so drastically wrong in my head, which is hard to describe. Everything that's bothered me since the surgery wasn't taken seriously at all. That was the drop that caused a big crash in my head. And the emotions shot in all directions. That went so wrong that I suddenly understood why someone is capable of committing suicide. I never understood that, but that was so obvious now, because I almost did it.

Once my emotions were a little under control, I grabbed the car key, and went for a drive. I had to calm my head down to figure out what to do next. That was a long drive, but it did mean that I had to call the GP at home immediately for an appointment. Because this didn't go well, and I didn't understand what was going on. I called home immediately for an appointment. The two GPs were on holiday, and didn't have a place for another two weeks. That took too long, and an appointment made with a practice support (Nikki). Luckily, I was able to get there in a few days. Tells me what was going on, and he immediately referred me to the mental health practitioner (Naomi). That appointment was a few days later.

I visited the practice assistants weekly for months, while I also came to the gynecologist to have that constant pain examined. In addition, the appointments of the throat, nose, and ear doctor, because of all the emotions, and crying. Had my tubes, and ears started to play up again. In the meantime, I had gone from unemployment benefit to sickness benefit.

Because it also regularly called you, and the associated obligations that come with the sickness benefit.

In June 2017, something of interest started to come back, and I tried to look to the future again. I had gone to see for the training driving instructor, and because I was working on it because I was all figuring it out, it was also a bit better in my head. In hindsight, distractions seem to help me, but once the distraction is gone, the head gets much worse. Because things were getting a little better, I had stopped at the practice supporters.

In July 2017 I was expelled from the sickness law, because the doctor felt that physical pain did not exist. Objected to this, and let the unemployment benefit continue. That turned out not to be possible after a while, and it became a welfare application. With all the duties, and conversations that come with it. That was even more stress, more agreements, and obligations, and a lot of uncertainty.

That had so much impact on my head that I had become so shaky that I collapsed a few times a week. It is best to think of it as a short circuit in your head, while then a lot of emotions play up at the same time. And tears that don't seem to end. That's anything but pleasant, and is so overwhelming that you have to recover from that for a few days, until the next time you collapse again. That was so bad at one point, one collapse had just been pulled away a little bit, and I collapsed again. Which allowed me to start over. That wasn't a couple of weeks, no, that was month after month. In addition, the nightmares, flashbacks, re-experiences, changing emotions, noises, and the stress surrounding the benefit, and the obligations were added. That was a lot, a lot at the same time. That's why I regularly went to relaxation physiotherapy.

2nd major crash

In September 2017, I was spending a day with a friend (Thomas), and that was just fun. We were in the garden, and he showed all sorts of things he had done in, and around the house. It was just fun, and a breath pause of everything that was wrong in my head.

When I went home at night, things went wrong there, but it wasn't collapsing like I'd had so much by now. No, this was something else, but the bottom line was I couldn't drive home because I couldn't keep this up for an hour. Even with multiple breaks in between, that was not possible. In retrospect, it was, among other things, the overstimulation that played, in combination with a pleasant day. That was all too much in a day, and the overstimulation caused by the lampposts, and the lights of the cars was too much. Then I turned around, and drove back to him.

I would have kept myself as good as I could, but once I sat on the couch with him inside, it really went wrong. The emotions, and tears were unstoppable, and I was completely upset, and my breathing was far from normal. He supported me as best he could, and eventually me down.

I couldn't drive home anymore, so we decided I was staying with him. That was a night with little sleep, even though I had turned on quiet music on my phone. The next morning I was so tired, I fell asleep on the couch, really embarrassing. Apparently, the sound of the washing machine was recognizable enough that made me fall asleep. Less than an hour later I woke up, but still had little energy, let alone to drive home safely. He took me home with my car, and he took the train back home. It took me days to really remember things from those two days. To this day, I don't know exactly what happened, but we got through it.

Still made another appointment with the practice support (Nikki), and he immediately sent me back to the mental health practitioner (Naomi). She said she had a suspicion of PTSD before, but now she was sure. But that PTSD has also caused overstimulation, and depressive symptoms. That was tough to hear. Suspecting PTSD is different from hearing it's the suspected diagnosis. I came back to the practitioners weekly, and I had to find out which psychologist I could go to, because these could not treat the practitioners properly. But because of everything that was going on, the path to the psychologist was not feasible. That's why I stayed with the practitioners.

Over time, there had been a lot of conversations around welfare benefits, and also a conversation because of the objection I had filed with the Sickness Act. That was a lot at the same time, causing me to collapse an average of 3 times a week. Not very useful if you also have to do 3 applications per week.

At the end of November, I loosed my bunny (Pimmetje). She was 5 years old, and was suddenly ill. I went to the vet, and went back a few more times. And finally have to put to sleep 5 days later. My bunny had a brain disease that suddenly picked up, what's fatal. I was devastated that I had to put my bunny to sleep.

Two weeks later, another call for welfare benefits. And had to see the insurance doctor the following week from welfare. That was even more stressful.

By now I was so bothered by the overstimulation that sounds around me were soon too many sounds, that caused panic attacks. I always made sure I had a phone with earbuds in my bag so I could always put on, some quiet music when the overstimulation played up again.

The conversation with the insurance doctor went well, telling us what was going on. He said he knew what was going on with the scar pain, which is a nerve twig that was damaged by the operation. You rarely hear it, but he had seen such a situation once, and those complaints matched my complaints. After three quarters of a year, it's finally clear where the scar pain came from. But was also told that you can never get rid of that pain again, just keeping it greasy helps a little. In summer, and winter, this will cause extra pain due to the heat, and cold. It was discussed what the next step was, and that is the psychologist with emdr. In the meantime, the assistance must leave me alone so that I can focus on recovery. Because the struggle with the gynecologist where that pain comes from, everything around the benefit with all obligations, and agreements, that had completely exhausted me. In addition to the daily struggle in my head to get through the day, and the lack of sleep due to the nightmares/flashbacks, and re-experiences.

This past year I had to explain to 22 different people a large part of what had happened, all because of the PTSD I got.

It was about:

5 different gynecologists

7 UWV employees

6 people in connection with welfare benefits

4 different people at the general practice.

That was pretty tough to have to explain a part every time. And every time with the flashbacks/ real-life re-experiences that came back worse, and worse, now that was certainly no fun.

In January 2018 I went looking for a psychologist, and 8 weeks later was an appointment. There are waiting lists before there is a spot available, which is on average between 8 weeks, and 12 months. It