

Dealing with depression was much harder for me as a Haitian because the word was almost nonexistent in my community. Being depressed meant a weakness. What would other people think if they knew I was sick in my mind? What would they say? Would they call me crazy? I had never met a Haitian who believed mental illness was a true sickness. Anyone who didn't have it together one hundred percent was called "moun fou," meaning crazy person. I was not crazy, so I did not want to be called that. Being Haitian made it so much harder to get the help that I desperately needed because there was such a shame attached to mental illness. I could not tell my family what I was feeling because they would not care; they would not care because they could not understand it. Johnny understood, but he was young himself and could only lend me his ears to vent. People would tell me to pray harder, stop thinking about the negative, and focus on the positive. They would tell me that it was all in my head. But the pain was real. The sadness was real. The knot in my stomach was real. The tears were real. The hopelessness was real. The feeling of not wanting to be alive for another minute was overwhelming and very real.

Where would I find the money to see a therapist? My sister made about \$700 a month for the two of us to live on. We had to pay for rent, groceries, toiletries, and bus passes. I had no health insurance and I could not afford it either. At that point, I had no idea what was going on with my heart because I could not afford to see a cardiologist either. I was in survival mode.

I dialed 911 as he ran to the door to lock it. The phone rang, but no one picked up. He grabbed the phone from me and cut the cord. So I ran to the door, screaming, "Help me!" I thought the cops would soon come. Although no one picked up, they had to know that someone called and didn't get through.

He ran after me and pushed me on the floor, kicking me and screaming, "Get up!" I got up, and he kept telling me to get in there. I didn't know what he was up to, but I knew I was going to do whatever he said. He grabbed me from behind and started choking me. I pushed him away with rage, gasping for air, but he was too strong for me and got a hold of my arm. I kept on screaming for someone to help me. I wanted a neighbor to call the police, but no one did. It wasn't their business; it was me and this monster. So I tried to convince him that I loved him and that I was sorry for whatever I did. I promised to do what he said from that moment on, but he didn't care. By then, an hour must have passed; the police never came, and no neighbor knocked on the door. I was losing strength. I couldn't scream anymore. I started to lose my voice. I figured if he was going to kill me, so be it. There was no way I could stop him from doing whatever was already on his mind.

I stood on the bed with my back on the wall, shaking, begging for him to stop. I started to remind him of the good times we had had together. I thought maybe he was afraid of me leaving him. I let him believe that I would never leave, no matter what, and that he and I were made for each other. But his eyes were blank. I could see Satan in his eyes. Nothing I said was registering with him. He picked up a pillow and started walking toward me. He was going to end it right there.

"Where's the baby?" I asked. James was at her home and was holding her baby hostage; he wanted to exchange the baby for me.

I knocked on my neighbor's door, and thankfully, he answered. I told him I was afraid for my life and I needed his help. "Didn't you hear me scream the other day?" I asked.

"Yes, but I didn't think anything was wrong," he replied.

The cops drove me to Maria's house, where James was still inside with her baby boy. The police cars pulled up, and James was ordered to come outside and give the baby to his mother.

The officer spoke as if it was my fault that he tried to kill me! He never even took the time to ask James what his problem was and why he was hitting his girlfriend. I didn't understand the officer's question. I trusted them to protect me, but he was more interested in protecting the abuser. I guess, in a way, I allowed the abuse to continue because I could have left him earlier. I could have walked away before it got to that point. But I didn't have those answers at the time. I was trapped in that relationship and I hadn't known how to get out. But I did know how to get out that day.

The officer tried to convince me to press charges. I could get a restraining order, a piece of paper that would keep him from coming near me. Just a piece of paper, I said to myself. I could call them if he ever came near me and show the paper to the cops—the same cops who didn't show up the day I nearly died, the same ones who came forty-five minutes late the day he held my friend's baby hostage. Did those people think I was crazy? I couldn't trust them; they'd failed to protect me when I needed them the most. I wasn't going to jeopardize my life again by listening to them. The police didn't arrest James that day because I didn't press charges. I wish they could have arrested and punished him without my help.