



Shoot the Damn Dog: A Memoir of Depression

Sally Brampton

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A successful magazine editor and prize-winning journalist, Sally Brampton launched *Elle* magazine in the UK in 1985. But behind the successful, glamorous career was a story that many of her friends and colleagues knew nothing about—her ongoing struggle with severe depression and alcoholism. Brampton's is a candid, tremendously honest telling of how she was finally able to "address the elephant in the room," and of a culture that sends the overriding message that people who suffer from depression are somehow responsible for their own illness. She offers readers a unique perspective of depression from the inside that is at times wrenching, but ultimately inspirational, as it charts her own coming back to life. Beyond her personal story, Brampton offers practical advice to all those affected by this illness. This book will resonate with any person whose life has been haunted by depression, at the same time offering help and understanding to those whose loved ones suffer from this debilitating condition.

Shoot the Damn Dog: A Memoir of Depression Details

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From Reader Review Shoot the Damn Dog: A Memoir of Depression for online ebook

Nick Davies says

In terms of what this was - an extremely frank and honest memoir of one person's experiences of severe depression and subsequent alcoholism - this was excellent. Thought-provoking and compelling reading, Brampton writes with intelligence and wit, giving advice relating to her life and that if those she met. It's certainly a very powerful book which a great many people would benefit from reading, a lot of understanding to be gained from it.

As a personal journey, it did at times make me aware that this couldn't be the authority on ALL people's experiences of depression, and in addition I did find at times the book posed more questions to my scientific mind (why did that work? why do people's experiences differ? were X and Y really the causes, or is that just something therapy has encouraged you to blame?) but I was also mindful that what does it matter what the answers to these questions are if it helps people recover from depression and other disorders. Aspects relating to spirituality and twelve step programs didn't interest me as much as other parts, but that's no fault of the book, really.

So yes, very interesting and sad that the author - several years after the book was published - ultimately lost her battle with depression.

Paul says

Deeply scary stuff.

My wife has depression and until I read this book I could not understand the illness at all. Now, I'm not making excuses for my wife but since reading this book I have a much better handle on why my wife is the way she is, her mind-state generally, her lack of motivation in almost all things...

I'd recommend this book for anyone who has a husband, wife, partner or loved one with depression. I honestly think it will help you understand.

Dawn says

I picked this book only for the title and the cover art. I needed a book with a curse word in the title for the book challenge. So I Googled and scrolled lists and this seemed interesting. Well 326 pages later, I am grateful that this book found me. Although somewhat frantically written, it is beautiful in its honesty and delivery. This memoir of the author's battle with severe clinical depression was difficult to read at times. The author does an excellent job at intimately walking you through her life as a depressive; how she was crippled with it physically and emotionally, how she was slowly dying from it and how she eventually learned to live with it and heal. The book is full of great take aways for living your best life. It was a good read overall. HERE'S THE BAD NEWS. I was so invested in the author while reading that I decided to Google her and see what other books she may have written. Turns out she had written more but also that she committed

suicide in 2016 at the age of 60 by walking into the ocean. That unsettled me but also reinforced the idea in the book that her severe depression was indeed an illness that she had to work at and seek treatment to manage to stay alive. It is an interesting book, especially in the shadow of her suicide.

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Andrew Voysey says

Wow. This book was recommended to me on a Mental Health First Aid course and I could not recommend it more highly for literally everyone. Sally Brompton suffered from severe depression that was treatment resistant (ie no drugs - and she tried them all - made any difference, other than to make her worse). With her skills as a very successful writer, this is a brutally honest, captivating description of her journey through depression. With 1 in 4 UK adults suffering from some sort of depression in any one year - and the amount of stigma still attached to the illness - I think it is so important that people read this book. It is educational (I have learned so much about how to spot signs of depression in friends and loved ones), inspiring (if Sally can get through this, including a number of suicide attempts, then there is hope for everyone) and has quite literally changed my life in the sense that I now feel much more empowered to help those close to me, including myself!, with any sort of mental health issues. Read it. Now.

Booksdingle says

Initially I found this to be good but lost interest later on - was comforting to read about someone having depression who wasn't stereotypical....this author was a high flyer - so made me feel as if it is the kind of illness that can strike anyone down - but I don't think I gained any personal insight into depression from reading this book

Sue Young says

A book about depression that sometimes makes you chuckle out loud with recognition even while you ARE depressed has got to be worth recommending!

Having suffered plenty of depression over the years, although not as debilitating as Sally's, this book was a good companion - a little recognition that we're not alone, that others suffer and struggle through life and manage to keep going, sometimes despite even worse attacks, and that laughter can often pierce the darkness, even if just for a moment.

I find Sally to be very sane and very brave, full of sensible tips that might help others, but never patronising, cajoling or judgmental.

A woman who lets you be who you are and where you are, but never misses an opportunity to say, don't give up - it can get better.

Her "agony" column in the Sunday Times is full of her compassionate wisdom too.

DubaiReader says

An excellent memoir.

I was really impressed with this book. It was brutally honest about the desperate condition known as depression, yet it also gave hope for sufferers and practical tips to direct those who can see no way out. Written from first hand experience by a sufferer who does not respond to anti-depression medication (30% of all depressives), and who reached the depths of despair that were hard to read about, let alone live through, it still managed an upbeat note towards the end.

Sally Brampton was a driven, highly motivated woman. She was editor of two well known magazines, Elle and Red, and a journalist for many major newspapers. Then her marriage collapsed and her ability to cope seemed to crumble. Soon after that she was sacked from Red and sank into major depression. This was not an inability to be cheerful and see the bright side of life, this was a total, devastating inability to function on any level - a highly literate woman found herself unable even to read. Only her young daughter, Molly, kept her alive, though she did make a couple of attempts at suicide.

It took several years and a bout of alcoholism, before Sally managed to drag herself back into the land of the living. But the important fact is that she did. And having done so, she wrote this excellent memoir to help other sufferers see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Not everything will work for everyone, but the author gained great benefit from group therapy, private therapy (with an empathetic therapist), yoga and meditation.

My copy is littered with stick-it notes marking the parts I found inspiring and I am hoping that the depressive close to me can be persuaded to read this and benefit from it.

Kristen says

There is something to be said for a book's ability to touch you.

When I first read this memoir, I was in the middle of a depressive relapse around the New Year of 2015. At that stage, I was undiagnosed with MDD and struggling with yet another relapse into my condition, and – after recently finishing university and moving away from my friends of the past four years and back into a home where my parents had little to no idea of my troubles with my mental health – I was feeling alone. For many years, I'd turned over the idea of me having clinical depression, alternating between believing that I might have a minor form of the illness and rejecting it completely out of hand. As such, I wasn't getting the help I needed, and was further isolating myself from friends, family and those around me.

This book, to be brief, made me feel less alone, and that what I was experiencing was in fact valid. That the term I used to describe my mental health not only applied to me, but could explain the changes in moods beyond what I had often called being lazy and too sensitive. For an illness like depression, where you feel as if you're separated from the world by walls too high to climb, to read a memoir where you find your own experiences and emotions reflected back to you is like finding a friend and a tenuous connection to another person.

As a book, and as a memoir, *Shoot The Damn Dog* is not always the most enjoyable read. At multiple times, I was brought close to tears, merely from just reading sentiments that I had thought and felt in the darkest periods of my life. At multiple times, I wanted to reach through the pages and shake Brampton and ask why she was doing things that would only make her condition worse - a thought I think often enough when I look back at my own episode of relapse. It delves into hard to stomach places, and there is no denying that Brampton's experience with depression will differ greatly from other peoples. It is, simply, an individual experience of depression and the effects it has on one person, and between that and Brampton's background, it is more than likely that some of the potential readers may not be able to connect with the story told. I did, because Brampton's depression in many ways mirrored mine, and Brampton had an ability to articulate thoughts and new perspectives on depression that I could not. It remains one of the books I read when I am in a depressive state, and wish to be reminded that many of my symptoms are not simply moral flaws that I should condemn myself for, but signs of a deeprooted chemical imbalance in my brain. It is also one of the books I wish my family would read, if only to better understand the thoughts that might go about my mind when I relapse.

Verna says

This book nails the experience of depression squarely on its head. Sally Brampton draws you into her world of darkness and pain and you find it hard to leave. To those of us who suffer from depression whether now or in the past, "Shoot the Damn Dog," puts words on it without a doubt. It is like you get inside Sally's brain and feel her emotions as your own. I never knew that depression could be so interesting and absorbing in its own right. She tries every avenue to cure her illness from the newest antidepressants to talk therapy without much success. She even tries self-medicating herself with alcohol only to end up with an addiction that she has to kick. With no relief from her black moods she succumbs to the lure of suicide, barely surviving her last attempt. Finally, after years of suffering and misery her depression seems to burn itself out. Brampton feels that connecting to her fellow human beings is the ultimate antidote to depression. It is also her goal to destigmatize depression as a mental illness in general. Excellent book.

Kirsten says

This is a biting, sarcastic, and incredibly honest portrayal of depression. Brampton refuses to pull any punches or give herself any slack. She describes how she was openly hostile toward treatment (with sometimes hilarious results -- as someone who's been tempted to derail Cognitive Behavioral Therapy out of sheer cussedness, I couldn't stop laughing about her stubbornness in group therapy), was frequently a dangerously noncompliant patient, and very nearly derailed everything by developing a massive drinking problem along with her depression. She also really gets at the *physical* feelings that accompany depression; the way that it feels as though not only one's mind, but one's body is rebelling.

Other reviews have mentioned that the author behaved selfishly, foolishly, and was incredibly self-absorbed. Yes, yes, and yes. This is one of the reasons I loved this book. It really gets at the simultaneous self-loathing and self-centeredness that characterizes severe depression, and I applaud Sally Brampton for having the guts to portray herself as thoroughly unpleasant.

The only real flaw in the writing is that this book could probably have stood a little more organization; Brampton occasionally jumps around in time, making it a little difficult to discern which hospitalization she's

talking about, or how long many of her issues persisted. It's not nearly as bad in this regard as Teri Cheney's *Manic*, but it could still stand some tightening up.

My only other issue is that she describes her depression as medication-resistant -- which definitely happens - but doesn't really make a strong connection between the meds not working and the fact that she was drinking enormous amounts of alcohol at the same time. I have to wonder if, now that she is sober, she might have more success with antidepressants. On the other hand, she has found other effective ways of coping with and controlling her depression, so I can't really blame her for not wanting to get on the meds-go-round again.

Oh, one last comment -- this is really random, but I *loved* that she pointed out that meditation, while very effective for doing mental housecleaning once one is in recovery, can actually be detrimental if one is in the throes of a deep depression. A great number of people have suggested meditation to me as a means to heal my depression, not realizing that someone who is deeply depressed is not particularly adept at clearing their mind and thinking calming thoughts, etc., and it may actually just offer an opportunity for uninterrupted destructive thinking.

David Pope says

I distinctly remember reading about Sally Brampton's tragic suicide in the paper and being so moved by it, that I felt compelled to buy the book. One of the main messages in "Shoot the damn dog" is to find and develop coping mechanisms for depression, as it is rare that depression simply "goes away". Ironically, reading this book was a great escape for me and certainly took me away from my own negative thinking. The more I relate to someone's story, the more I am hooked. There is so much honesty from the author here and it takes a lot to wear your heart on your sleeve like that. She was obviously in so much emotional and physical pain, yet had the courage to face it head on and share her struggles with the world. That took incredible guts and determination. Sally uses rich and colourful language: "Viburnum flinging out its cloying pink and white scent", whilst at the same time conveying the harrowing effects of depression: "I wrap my arms around myself, to stop the pain, to stop the tears". She loved gardening and nature and with good reason. There are so many analogies and life lessons when it comes to gardening, particularly when you are digging up the weeds. Weeds in a garden are like the negative thoughts in one's head, or a combination of all the rubbish in your life and unless you get to the root and dig them up, they will always return. That's what therapy is all about I suppose, getting to the root of the problems. And like a garden, we need to look after ourselves on a daily basis, whether it's eating right, or socialising with friends, reading a good book, or exercising etc. A garden can be aesthetically beautiful, as long as you put the effort in to maintain it and similarly depression can be controlled as long as you use the coping strategies. Tragically, depression ultimately beat Sally, but she gave the dog a damn good fight.

Sandra says

ms bramptons experience of depression involves a lot of cashmere and gardeners and booking herself in to hospital ...

it didn't speak to me at all .

Sam says

I do not read many memoirs, so it took some time for me to adjust to the style of Brampton's writing. My first impression was that this woman is completely self-absorbed. And then i came to two realizations. Firstly, oh yes, this is a memoir, a woman's story about herself; and second, oh yes, this is a memoir about depression, a condition that traps the writer in her own personal prison, unable to relate to or communicate meaningfully with others.

At times, the writing can suffer from seemingly endless repetition, though perhaps the author's intent is to pull the reader into experiencing the seemingly endless agony of her condition. The majority of this story is a downer, frankly, and a bit thin on solutions, lending the reader a glimpse of Brampton's seemingly hopeless condition.

That is, until the end. Brampton ends her story on a high, if somewhat cautiously optimistic, note, as she shares some practices that have helped her maintain a life with depression in remission. The wisdom she has found is heartening, not only for depressives, but for anyone seeking happiness in this confusing thing we call life.

Rehan Abd Jamil says

Thank you Sally Brampton for this magnificent book!

Stephanie says

How odd that so many of the people reading/have read this are named Stephanie.

I admit, it was the title that got me - and I was really thinking about the amazingly annoying Jack Russell that lives next door and barks her little head off 24/7 when she is left alone.

But this refers to the black dog of depression (a term with which I was not familiar, despite my years of dealing with depression). I found the author annoying (not as much as a barking Jack Russell, but still...) but I loved what she said about being compelled to write this in order to do her part to try to lessen the stigma of depression. I still have some of my closest friends who don't know my situation in this regard (hmmm perhaps they aren't really such close friends?)and co-workers? I would NEVER discuss this with most of them, having experienced the possible result when I was in private industry, as opposed to feeding from the public trough where one is supposedly freer to be flawed.

Anyhow, I did get some good stuff out of this book, and although much of it was painful to read, it reminded me of going through est training back in the 70s: you get locked in that room with 249 other people and within an hour you are thinking "holy crap, at least I am better off than THAT person" - then you either turn into an esthole, or take what you want and leave the rest, or go kill yourself, which is what the author of this book wanted to do more than anything...or so she says but clearly that isn't the case, or the book never would have been written.

Whatever, I am on no sleep and too much adrenalin from being at the beach in the rain.
