

Adapted from my [Ignite Annapolis presentation](#) entitled “Ego Trip: Attacking depression one mushroom at a time” from September 2023.

It was four years ago in October that I sat alone at my kitchen table in the early hours of the morning and calmly decided to take my own life. Had my young son not stumbled into the kitchen at that exact moment to get a drink of water at that moment, I wouldn't be here today.

So, what brought me to that point? Like 8% of the country's population, I have clinical depression. I first noticed it ten years ago and thought it was just seasonal depression, but then suicidal thoughts began to pop into my head...every once in a while, at first...but then started to increase in frequency over time. And after about a year, they were relentless. I couldn't think about anything else. I was a ticking timebomb and I had to get help.

After a time, the suicidal impulses were nonstop; every waking moment. I tried everything...I got counseling, I exercised, changed my diet, meditated, journaled, I even did TMS, where you go into a clinic and get little shocks to your temple every ten seconds for an hour. I did that every day for three months. Nothing helped. Then I turned to medication. But not only were the side effects horrible, but it didn't even work particularly well. After a few months, I stopped.

Then I read Michael Pollan's book, “How to Change Your Mind,” which was on the New York Times Bestseller list. It was about the new science of psychedelics, specifically psilocybin mushrooms, and how they were completely upending every aspect of mental health. And all kinds of top-notch research facilities were in on it...NIH, UC Berkley, NYU, and, right in our own backyard, Johns Hopkins, which was leading the revolution. They found that psilocybin mushrooms are highly effective...not marginally effective, or moderately effective...but HIGHLY effective at treating depression, anxiety, OCD, PTSD, sexual trauma, addiction...the list goes on and on.

So, after searching high and low, I found some mushrooms at a dispensary in Washington D.C. I rented an AirBNB in town, checked in, ground the mushrooms up into a powder, made a tea out of them, and off I went. Forty-five minutes later, the walls started to breath in and out, the shadows were dancing, and the area rug was rippling like pond. Before the trip, there was a part of me that was terrified that, by the end of the night, I'd be running down Main Street naked and screaming. But I was in complete control and completely lucid the entire time. I lay on the couch, put headphones on, and listened to Simon and Garfunkel. The harmonies were the most beautiful thing I had ever heard in my life. They were ribbons of

euphoric light gently weaving in and out of the darkness while the musical notes cascaded over me like a trillion stars. I started crying. A little at first. And then I was sobbing. Now I'm an atheist, but I felt a presence in my head that I can only describe as an entity. And that entity embraced me and took all of the corrosive, rotting shit in my brain that I had accumulated over my life...self-loathing, guilt, fear, loneliness. I could spend the next ten hours telling you about the details of my trip that night, but when it was over, my mind was at peace for the first time in my life. The suicidal thoughts had vanished. They were completely gone.

Was my experience typical? According to Johns Hopkins, of all the people who have participated in psilocybin studies, over two thirds rated their experience among the top five events in their lives, including the birth of their child. And here's an interesting tidbit: among those for whom religion is an important part of their lives, nearly all reported that the psilocybin trip deepened their faith and brought them closer to God. Yet, psilocybin mushrooms are listed as a schedule one drug along with heroin, cocaine, and crystal meth. Right now, psilocybin mushrooms are legal in Oregon and Washington, decriminalized in twelve cities, and nine states have pending legislation to either legalize or decriminalize it. This has the potential to drastically improve the lives of tens of millions of people in this country.

I'm a regular middle-age, middle class professional and father of two. I don't go to concerts on mushrooms. I don't party it up on weekends with friends, giggling the night away. It's not another way to escape my everyday problems the way that drinking used to provide. I took mushrooms to treat my depression because nothing else worked for me and, again, I tried everything under the sun. I have no problem with pharmaceutical companies. Frankly, they do some great work. But they are not making progress fast enough in the realm of mental health. There are people reading this right now who are grappling with depression, anxiety, and maybe even addiction. You all know who you are and you know how good you are at hiding it. There is something that can help. Psilocybin mushrooms saved my life. It's made me a better father, a better husband, and a better person and it can do the same for everyone.