



***The Upside of Down:
A Personal Journey and Toolkit to
Overcome Depression***

by Tamra Mercieca
Griffin Press Australia, 2009, 270 pages, \$29.99
ISBN: 9780646516660

Reviewed by Wendy Champagne

One of the West's most depressed modern thinkers, Albert Camus, once admitted that in the depths of winter he finally learned there was in him an invincible summer. In *The Upside of Down* it is clear author Tamra Mercieca has had that same awakening.

Mercieca, an Australian radio news personality, suffered from severe depression—clinical, seasonal, eating disorders, the lot—since she was a teenager. Her doctor advised her to accept that she would suffer from the illness for the rest of her life, but she was unwilling to take on the life-sentence and instead chose to make depression her teacher, eventually beating it and coming to view it as a gift.

Mental illness is literally shadowing more and more people like Mercieca every year. By 2020 the World Health Organization predicts that depression will be the second leading contributor to the burden of illness, after heart disease.

And while there is no magic bullet to battle depression, Mercieca's personal observations during the dark years of her illness helped her to draft the comprehensive holistic—mind, body, soul—alternative to a life on antidepressants she reveals in *The Upside of Down*.

What resonates with readers is the hands-on approach Mercieca has taken to her illness. In order to become “depression-free” she used trial and error to find what eased her symptoms, favouring “mood foods”, omega-3s and mindfulness techniques over antidepressants.

Yet exercise has by far been her greatest ally. She says she traded in her pharmaceuticals for a gym membership

and then a pole (as in pole-dancing), which she says forces the mind to focus on something other than negative brain fog.

Mercieca is a determined optimist, yet the strategies she offers in *The Upside of Down*—anything from getting regular sleep and avoiding shift work to positive thinking exercises—are completely down to earth; at core all they require is a commitment to change.

Perhaps Mercieca's most controversial opinion is that depression is a mindset. In the chapter titled “Losing the Label” she is passionate: You can take the doctor's diagnosis and run with it or you can refuse to let the illness run your life. “Do not accept that you will have depression for life,” she asserts. “The mind is the strongest muscle; train it!” **a**

Wendy Champagne is an author, documentary filmmaker and psychologist. Her research interests span countries and cultures, but the primary focus of her writing is women's issues, wellness and spirituality.