

Anxiety, The Invisible Disability

Julio Álava

BEFORE YOU READ: What is an invisible disability? What are some examples?

What Was My Disability?

I am convinced that I was born with my disability. But it took 39 years to figure out what it was. A disability is anything that prevents us from growing and moving forward. So, what was mine?

Since I was a child, I had problems expressing my thoughts and emotions. Of course, in the 1980s in Ecuador, it was very difficult for doctors to diagnose an emotional problem. At the time, they diagnosed my disability as a heart problem, because I had heart palpitations and chest pain. These episodes started when I was five years old, and they usually happened before school.

From Invisible to Visible

Finally, when I was 39 years old, I had a mental crisis. I was living in Panama at this time, and

my therapist helped me to understand that my disability had a name. It was anxiety and panic attacks. Anxiety is a real disability, and it is the only real illness that I've ever had. The panic that anxiety produces can be absolutely paralyzing.

Learning to Control My Anxiety

The good news is that I have learned there are many ways to control my anxiety. For example, therapy helped me to understand myself and my history. I now recognize the wounds from my childhood. Meditation also helps me.

As part of my healing plan, I set some goals for myself. I wanted to go back to school to continue my personal education, and I wanted to write my first book. Today, I have a master's degree in theology. I graduated with a 4.0 GPA. Now, I am finishing my PhD. A few months ago, I published my first book. I am achieving more and more of my goals every day. I have learned to use my disability as a platform for my personal growth and development.

Anxiety and Panic Attacks

Learn more! Watch this [TED-Ed](#) video about what causes panic attacks and how you can prevent them.



AFTER YOU READ:

1. In your own words, describe the author's journey with his disability.
2. See the next page for links to other *Change Agent* articles about invisible disabilities and anxiety.

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