



Paul F. Tompkins, stand-up comedian, actor in the film *There Will Be Blood* and on the Netflix series *BoJack Horseman*

Paul F. Tompkins learned about comedy from t-v shows. One of his favorites was *The Carol Burnett Show*.

“They seemed to have a real affection for each other. I came from a family where there was a lot of discord. My mother and father did not like each other. They slept in separate bedrooms. They stayed married even though their marriage was effectively over. So to see shows like *The Carol Burnett Show* or *Match Game*, where there were these cool, fun people who were all having a great time together, that was a window into adulthood that I yearned to join.”

He said he first became aware of depression when he was a kid. It was winter and he was living in Philadelphia.

“I remember being on a train and seeing people’s backyards. There was no snow. You see that dead, yellow grass and I remember a profound bleakness. To me that was just life.”

“When I was a kid, it was easier to deal with. I didn’t yet know the way of the world. I had my friends that I played with and I had numerous distractions. My life at home had so much tension. There was so much tension between my parents. My older brother and I fought all the time. He was so much bigger than I was that he could easily overpower me. A feeling of helplessness permeated everything.”

There is a genetic component to depression. The environment you grow up in can also have a huge influence on the course of your mental health. In Paul’s case, it was an atmosphere of acrimony and distance and bitterness.

“My mother actively disliked my father and would talk about it. My mother died first and it wasn’t until my father died that the specter of their marriage was truly lifted from the lives of me and my siblings. It was a massive relief.”

“My mother was an unhappy person who lived with unhappiness for a long time. But you could make her laugh. You could see her enjoy things. She was big movie buff. So she wasn’t

completely joyless, but she had so much anger and sadness in her life. It's really a shame that she was never able to do something about it."

Sadness and anger is something you never see in Paul. He is unlike his parents.

"I started standup when I was 17. I wish my parents could have been supportive of it, at least after I became successful. But they never could be. In their minds, they think 'You're never going to be Tom Cruise.' But when you try to explain, 'I'm making a living. This is great. I'm supporting myself doing what I love to do.' My mother couldn't hear that. At the end of her life she was asking me if I had figured out what I want to do with the rest of my life."

"I went to therapy for the first time in 2002. It was the result of a terrible falling out I had with a close female friend. I was devastated and was depressed for about a half of a year. I felt there was something wrong with me, with who I am that I made this happen."

"I went through clinical depression three years ago. It felt like that period with the female friend, but a thousand times worse. I felt despair and hopelessness. I tried to shake them off, but it didn't work. That's what I wish people would understand. They don't understand that the person wants to feel better. It felt like some kind of blanket that was over me that I couldn't remove. I would look at my life on paper and say 'I have a good life, why am I feeling this way? Why does everything feel so hopeless to me?' That's when I realized I had clinical depression."

"I was lucky that I had friend who was down this road, years before me. He demystified the experience for me. The idea of anti-depressants was scary to me. I thought 'Oh my God, medication that changes your brain. Am I not going to be me anymore?' My friend explained that you still feel like yourself, it just gets you to a better place. There are different medications, different doses. You find the thing that works for you. You look at it as a practical thing that will make life better. There's nothing weird about that."