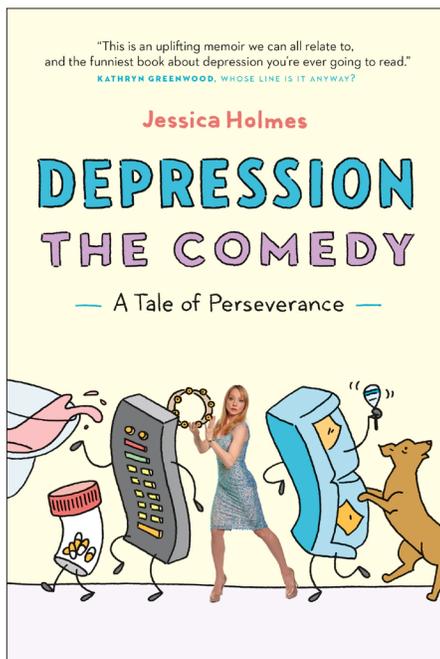


# Depression The Comedy

## A Tale of Perseverance

A wildly inventive, laugh-out-loud account of depression and comedy, as told by acclaimed comedian and *Royal Canadian Air Farce* star, Jessica Holmes.



### DEPRESSION THE COMEDY

By Jessica Holmes  
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Celebrated comedian, actress and author, Jessica Holmes, has always applied humour as healing balm for life's scrapes and bruises. Since childhood, Holmes has kept a "funny journal," recording bizarre moments that remind her life is, most often, more comedy than tragedy. In this imaginative memoir, Holmes infuses deep reflections on mental health with her trademark wit, offering a relatable, unofficial guide to acknowledging one's inner demons in an ongoing search for the silver lining.

Holmes first entered thousands of Canadian households when she starred in her own comedy on CTV: *The Holmes Show*. When she was the first new cast member added to *Royal Canadian Air Farce*, her career skyrocketed. She started booking high profile gigs such as opening for Jerry Seinfeld and Ellen DeGeneres. Her loving husband and two beautiful children were nothing but supportive of her newfound fame. From the outside, it seemed like Holmes had it all.

But on the inside, she was suffering in silence: after recovering from post-partum depression years earlier, Holmes entered a familiar slump. When she wasn't glued to her couch surrounded by junk food, she was avoiding her agent and yawning through gigs—even when emceeding for one of her idols, Oprah Winfrey.

*Depression The Comedy* describes how Holmes eventually got diagnosed and dealt with depression: "the cold sore of the mind." Writing with self-deprecating insight and emotional vibrancy, she speaks candidly about her condition, musing on everything from sex and marriage counseling to the bittersweet reactions of her kids to the funny (and scary) side-effects of medication.

Holmes also offers a thought-provoking perspective on the relationship between comedy and depression. Holmes asks: *Which came first, the chicken or the egg? Is everything funny ... eventually?* Above all, she urges communities to de-stigmatize mental health, and offers a healing message for all: when we acknowledge the inherent humour of our human condition, we can begin to accept ourselves for who we truly are—jokes, junk-food and all.

For further information or to arrange an interview, contact:

# Depression The Comedy: *About the Author*



**JESSICA HOLMES** is a Canadian comedian, actress, and improviser best known for her work on the *Royal Canadian Air Farce*. She has opened for comedians Jerry Seinfeld, Leslie Nielsen, Ellen DeGeneres, and Russell Peters, as well as an event with Oprah Winfrey. After taping her comedy special *Holmes Alone* in 2001, she was offered her own sketch series on CTV: *The Holmes Show*. Her previously published book, *I Love Your Laugh: Finding the Light in My Screwball Life*, was published by McClelland & Stewart in 2011.

After battling depression and post-partum depression, Holmes became a Life and Career Coach, and now tours regularly on motivational speaking circuits in addition to her work as an in-demand comedian. In the spring of 2018 she became an ambassador for the #BellLetsTalk campaign for mental health.

Holmes currently lives in Toronto with her husband and two kids.

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# Depression The Comedy: *Author Q&A*

## **Tell us about *Depression The Comedy*. Why did you decide to write the book?**

It's in my nature to turn negatives into jokes. Being depressed for two years would feel like a waste if I couldn't find the humour in it, and use it to validate others. I couched the book in comedy and kittens and screwball anecdotes to soften the subject. I have to sheepishly add that a defensive part of me wanted to write this book to enlighten the people who don't believe in depression, who think "quit feeling sorry for yourself" as though it's just a case of the lazies that a quick trip to the forest will cure.

## **In the book, you write candidly about the challenges of managing an impressive TV career while also battling depression. What was it like to be viewed as a successful comedian and actress in public, while struggling with mental illness in private?**

It was surreal. I remember being on stage one night at a private event, and as the crowd was laughing at my jokes, I thought, "What must that be like? To just feel carefree enough to sit there, laughing? I wish I was them." I was on autopilot, doing the exact same jokes I had memorized years earlier. I'd shine for an hour, then pay for it the next day by feeling like I was buried in cement. Since I could still function in a pinch, I didn't recognize the depression. When I spent days on the sofa, instead of seeking help, I'd think: "I just need more iron," or "This is just part of being an artist."

## **You write about emceeding an Oprah Winfrey event during this time. What was that experience like?**

I was so down at the time that I never mentioned to anyone (except my husband) that I'd been chosen to open for my idol. I figured, "This will fall through and I'll be embarrassed when it does," so I kept mum about it. Thank goodness for adrenaline because, on the day of the show, I was able to feel carefree on stage. It was the first time in six months that I wasn't drowning in my anxiety (or binging on crackers and daytime television). Depression is different for everyone, but for me a lack of goals and stimulation is one of my triggers, so I find I'm at my best when someone's given me tasks and deadlines. The pressure forces me out of my head.

## **As *Depression The Comedy* tells, you struggled with post-partum depression at one time. From your perspective, what is the biggest misperception the public has about post-partum depression?**

I'd only ever heard about post-partum depression as it related to Marie Osmond. I thought, "That's when you do a full 180 and drive off in a car abandoning your twenty kids." But PPD can be anything from drawn out "baby blues," to anxiety, to psychosis. My experience was feeling terrified of my own children—that I'd fail them—and the anxiety knocked me off my feet.

My children were four-months-old and two-years-old at the time, respectively, and one morning I just couldn't get out of bed because the thought of being responsible for them paralyzed me with fear. I called my mother, who said, "Go see your doctor and don't leave the office without a prescription." Perhaps because it was such a quick downward spiral it was easier for me to recognize, and get treated. Years later, when I went through a run-of-the-mill, garden-variety depression, it was such a slow decent that it took me years to catch on.

## **Ever since childhood, you have kept a "joke journal," recording bizarre and funny moments from your everyday life. How does this practice support your mental health?**

There's that universal principle, "What you pay attention to grows," and so I look for the funny in all situations. Usually it means I'm laughing at inappropriate moments, but then I get to sit with my kids and recount the funny stuff we've seen over the years, as though it was a photo album. It frames life as a win-win: when things are good, they're great, and when things are bad, I'm laughing about them, anyway. Even recently, my daughter had a health scare and (she's fine now) we were all so tense. The doctor came in to the room and asked me, seriously, "are you and your husband related *other* than by marriage?" My daughter started laughing at the implication that Scott and I are cousins, and it broke the tension. "There's the funny" I thought, and put it in the journal.

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# Depression The Comedy: *Author Q&A*

**It's amazing how candid you are about your marriage in the book. Was Scott on board?**

Yes. He's just that nice a guy that he said "if you think it will help people, go ahead." Depression is so taxing on your closest relationships, and I knew that anyone going through depression, or who loves someone going through depression, would relate. A spouse bears the brunt of your irrational frustrations. I blamed my sadness on him: on his height and his popularity and his giant shoes cluttering up the foyer (not my finest hour!) but he still stood by me. So when I recovered I proposed to him and we renewed our vows on the cheap by sneaking into someone else's wedding gazebo and holding a quickie ceremony (which I also officiated).

**When did you begin to feel comfortable speaking about your own struggles with depression? What changed—and what motivates you to do so?**

I was so relieved to have a name and a course of treatment for my misery that three minutes after my diagnosis, I started calling friends to tell them, "Here's what's been wrong with me." The consequence of that is having to politely smile through people's well-meaning but over-simplified reactions, which range from "You just need fresh air," to "My cousin cut out gluten and his depression went away, so you should just cut out gluten and, ta-da!" It's completely worth it, though. My goal is to make talking about depression as stigma-free as talking about brushing your teeth.

**You are a certified Life and Career coach. What are three pieces of advice you would offer to individuals who are struggling with a lack of motivation or with self-esteem issues?**

I have to clarify that lack of motivation and self-esteem issues are not the same as being depressed. But they are still big ol' pains in the arse so I'm happy to address them. For me, exercise, reaching out to friends for validation, exercise, working toward creative goals, and exercise worked well (can you tell exercise is my greatest pick-me-up?). My other favourite is a Cognitive Behaviour Therapy exercise where you ask yourself: when was the last time I felt really energized? Connected? Fulfilled? And whatever your three answers are (dancing alone while I pretend to be Beyonce's backup dancers/being a screwball with my friends/reading a Malcolm Gladwell book, etc), you go out and do those things right away! It's the principle that what worked for you in the past will work for you today (usually).

I also advocate spending less time on social media. Social media is like a mean time machine: you go on it for five minutes and suddenly it's an hour later and you feel like everyone's life looks better than yours. When it comes to treating depression, though, professional help is best. There's no quick fix for depression as of yet, but my book does explain the many approaches and therapies and activities I tried and re-tried until, finally, I started improving. Spoiler alert: the book has a happy ending.

**From Sarah Silverman to Spike Jones, dozens of big-name comedians have spoken recently about their mental illnesses. Can you speak to the connection between depression and comedy—both from the perspective of a comedian, and as someone who enjoys experiencing comedy (as a member of the public)?**

The late comedian Mike MacDonald says, "There are two types of comedians: depressed and undiagnosed." I interviewed him for my chapter on depression and comedy, because it's such a big subject. In a nutshell, you have to be an internalizer and a deep-thinker to be in comedy in the first place; you have to grow up analyzing the world. And that can be a tricky mindset. Then you get into a career that's a roller coaster: taking you from gratifying, glorious fulfillment, to unemployment, and back and forth, again and again. One month you're buying a car, the next month you're selling old clothes on eBay. I had to learn to make my life steadier, so that when my career ebbs and flows, my lifestyle stays stimulating and steady.

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# Depression The Comedy: *Fact Sheet*

## Depression in Canada:

1. Nearly half (49%) of Canadians who feel they have suffered from depression or anxiety have **never sought help from a doctor**. (Canadian Mental Health Association)
2. **Half of all Canadians current live with—or experienced at one time—a mental illness** by the time they reach age 40. (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health)
3. Mental illness can reduce one's life expectancy by **10 to 20 years**. (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health)
4. Approximately 8% of adult Canadians will experience **major depression** at some time in their lives. (Canadian Mental Health Association)

## Women & Depression

5. Nearly two million Canadians reported a mood disorder to a professional in 2009. **Almost two-thirds of those diagnosed were women**. (Statistics Canada)
6. **Women are uniquely susceptible to gender-specific mood disorders, such as post-partum depression, premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD), and depression brought on by menopause**. (National Institute of Health)
7. Socio-economic status is strongly linked to mental health. Education and income profoundly affect how women perceive their own health. Among women aged 45 to 64 reporting low income, **only 55% described their mental health as “very good” or “excellent.”** (Statistics Canada)
8. Women are more likely than men to seek professional help when they feel something is wrong in general. But according to a 2009 study, **only 17% of women** with fair or poor mental health sought a psychologist. (Statistics Canada)
9. **Women are almost twice as likely to have a mood disorder** among people aged 25 to 44. (Statistics Canada)
10. Between 2009 and 2013, the percentage of 10- to 13-year-old girls hospitalized due to intentional self-harm **more than doubled** (from 9% to 21%). (Statistics Canada)
11. On average, women seek medical help for mood disorders six months earlier than men. (Institute for Clinical Evaluative Science)
12. Because women are more frequently exposed to environmental stress factors than men, they develop better resiliency, coping mechanisms and resistance to the long-term negative effects of depression than men. (University of Michigan)

Sources: [Statistics Canada](#) (2009), [Statistics Canada](#) (2016), [Canadian Mental Health Association](#), [National Institute of Health](#), [Institute for Clinical Evaluative Science](#), [University of Michigan](#), and the [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health](#).

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