

This is a transcript of the T/TAC William and Mary podcast *Emily's Story-Diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder* (2011).

[MUSIC: T/TAC William and Mary Podcast Intro]

Fritz: The following was recorded at the spring 2011 Say Yes to College Conference. The student talks about how she balances the demands of college with the challenges of her mental health condition.

Emily: Okay, so I'm Emily. We've said this many times, so hopefully you remember my name by now. Basically I was one of those kids growing up that just was nervous about everything. Ha. And I was an overachiever, but to the point where I would like make myself sick because I was so nervous about stuff. And so we realized in middle school - well I didn't want to realize it because like I said I just didn't want to admit there was a problem because like no one really does, right? So my mom had me go see a psychiatrist. I was like, I don't want to go see a psychiatrist because I'm not crazy. Well, turns out I was. I'm just kidding. Ha. Umm, I was just special, and I have obsessive compulsive disorder and basically generalized anxiety it's turned into with a lot obsessive compulsive traits, and that's really confusing, but it's fine. Just, yeah. So I just want to say before we continue about OCD because I know there are a lot of misconceptions about what OCD is. Umm, so actually - who here knows what OCD is? Yes.

Audience member: Obsessive compulsive disorder.

Emily: Right. What do you think of when you think of OCD?

Audience members: [inaudible]

Emily: Okay, so making sure everything is clean.

Audience member: [inaudible]

Emily: Perfect, okay. Yes.

Audience member: Umm, making sure that a routine is set and washing hands repeatedly.

Emily: Yes, perfection. Okay, so it's true. So a lot of times - have you guys seen the TV show Monk? Yeah, funny show. Not really what OCD is like, at least not for me. Umm, which is fine. They're respectful about it. It's just not at all what my life is like, and so it's hard when people assume that that's what my life is like. Mine is called purely obsessional OCD. It's like all in my head, so that's fun. Umm, so basically one of my favorite scientists in like the world of favorite scientists is Albert Einstein. And he said "out of clutter find simplicity, out of discord find harmony, in the middle of difficulties life

opportunity". That's one of my favorite quotes because it makes me think of my life feeling very cluttered, but I just need to find the simplicity in the clutter and I need to find the harmony in the discord. So that's one of my favorite quotes and I think that that is really important for anyone, not just people that have obsessive compulsive disorder. So, sorry that was just the intro since it's kind of misperceived in a lot of ways. Umm, so fast-forward my life up to going through high school and finding where I want to go to college. I got into UVA and I was really proud of myself because I had no self-esteem at the time and so I was like oh they want me. That felt really good, so when you guys apply to colleges and you get in because you will, if you want to, it's a really good feeling. And so I decided to go to UVA. I got to UVA fall of 2019. I call it UVA round one. Ha. So umm, I got there. I was really excited. I met my roommate. Umm, she was not going to be my best friend I could tell, but that's okay. But within about two weeks, I was sicker than I had ever been before. Sicker mentally, sicker physically - it was literally hell. So basically I went through. I didn't get enough sleep and that was a big thing because it set me off. So I didn't get enough sleep because my roommate was up all night, and then I was not able to study because it would take me like eight hours to study one piece of paper which is not conducive to college when you have a lot of things to study. And so basically, I felt like rock bottom when I took my first chemistry exam. And so I'm coming into UVA with straight A's. I've never like gotten a bad grade in my life. I get into this chemistry exam and I had about five minutes to take the test when my brain would actually let me take the test. Otherwise, I was like off in OCD la la land. So, umm, needless to say, I couldn't finish the test and at the time I didn't have any accommodations because I usually don't need extra time. And my professor - I told my professor I have obsessive compulsive disorder and I cannot finish this test. Can I have extra time? And he said no. He said, "Do you have accommodations through Learning Needs?" And I said, "No what's that?" "Well then I can't help you." And I held back the tears and walked out, and knew I was turning in an F because I hadn't even finished the test. So basically I just got worse and worse, and I promise this gets better. Ha. So then the week in October, so I was in school for about a month. It was my birthday weekend. I came home and my uncle just had overdosed and I was like - I don't, I can't do it, I can't. So my dad was like "well then don't go back". And I was like, "but that's failing". And, I then had to come to terms with the fact that dropping out of school, withdrawing for medical reasons from school wasn't failing. It was just taking a little bit more of a [inaudible] route to get where I want to go. And it took me like nine months to come to that conclusion. Umm, so basically I came home and that was good because I was so scared of UVA. I didn't want to go back. But then I came home and I had no school to go to. I had no job to go to. I had no friends home because everyone in my area that I was friends with were at school. I had my brother, my mom, and my dad. So I didn't want to be around because I felt like they thought I had failed them. And so, it was a great situation. And so I had a long time of like trying to come to terms with

everything and trying to figure out what I want to do with my life and trying to like - I didn't think I could go back to UVA, although I knew I could. And so, I finally at one point in the spring I was like I need to listen to the little voice that was the old me that wanted to go to UVA. Even though I was so scared of it that I never wanted to go there again. So, I kind of just marched myself to my dean and said I want to do it again, even though I didn't want to do it again. And so that was kind of a self-determining thing, fighting myself to be determined still. So I also took some classes at George Mason at the time in the spring, which was hard because I was like mentally not good. So I went back in the fall, this past fall in 2010, and probably the hardest semester at UVA I'll ever have, but it was also the most rewarding and then I finished the semester - yay! [applause] And umm, yes, sorry I'm taking up a lot of time. It's a long story and I could talk about it forever. So yeah I finished the semester and then I went back in the spring and finished another semester. I'm actually, because of AP credits and because of George Mason, I'm going to still graduate with my class. Umm, so basically - last year, even though it was the worst year ever for me, it didn't impact me like I thought it would. So, even if you have to stop, even if you have to wait, you can still do it. [applause]