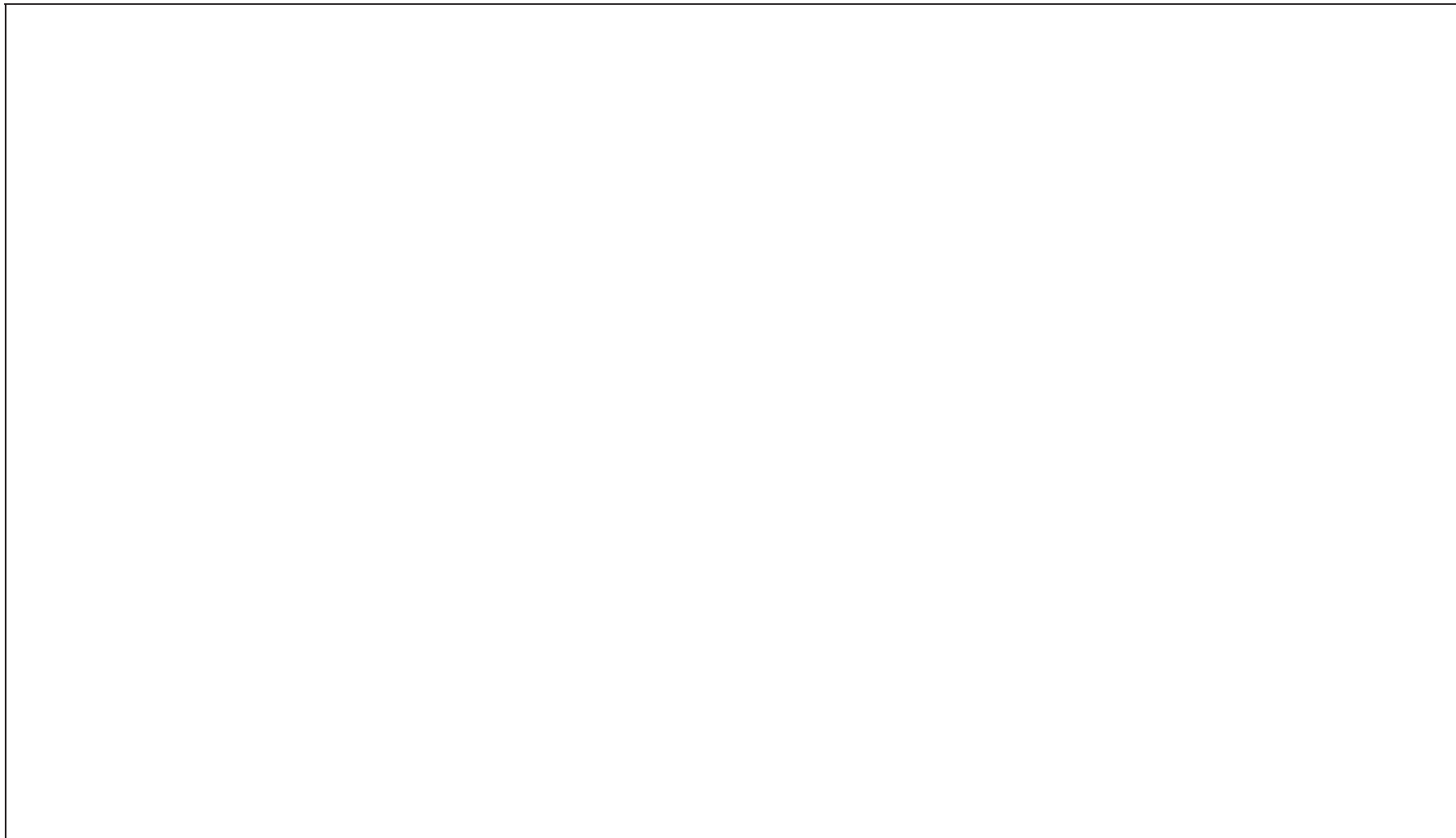


Seeking to overcome the stigma of depression, **LES ZIGOMANIS** has written a book which he hopes will help give assurance to sufferers.



Les Zigomanis is sharing his experience with depression and how to live with it.

Picture: JOSIE HAYDEN N42PT900

It's a mental battle

WHEN I was young, I felt like a leper. It was a feeling which grew progressively pronounced throughout high school.

Oh, I had friends and was liked, I did well in class and teachers respected me, but beneath the surface I was growing increasingly disconnected from the people around me. I didn't quite fit.

The reasons were beyond my understanding. I'd feel periods of extreme melancholy, anxiety in any social situation and, occasionally, I'd have a line of intrusive, disturbing thoughts which I didn't

learn until more than 20 years later was actually obsessive compulsive disorder. Who could I talk to that would understand?

I felt as if I was a freak, and that admitting my problems would see me ostracised.

As I got older, it was a concern over what friends and relatives would think, as if I'd bring shame on myself to admit being a depressive.

In retrospect, those attitudes really compounded what I was going through – problems which turned into anxiety disorder, depression, and OCD.

How completely abnormal must I be if I couldn't tell people?

People try to nobly struggle on in silence, self-medicate in self-destructive ways, or see no way out for themselves and suicide.

The truth is that this stuff isn't the end of the world, so much of it is treatable, and that sufferers shouldn't feel alone.

Throughout 2005, I wrote a book I grandiosely entitled, *Overload: An Account of Panic Attacks, Anxiety, Depression, OCD, and Other Neuroses*.

I thought an interpretation of my 25 years worth of experiences

could help give assurance to sufferers – something I really could've done with myself when I was going through the worst of my episodes. I thought it would offer friends and family an insight.

I thought it could help demythologise the stigma which surrounds these sorts of conditions.

I approached more than 40 publishers and agents, but met with no luck. One agent was kind enough to be brutally honest with me, writing:

"I can't agree with you more about the need for a book like this but the difficulty is persuading

publishers. They say (it) would need a high-profile personality to be the author to make it work."

This often seems the case. Illnesses – of any sort – only seem fashionable when the sufferer is a celebrity.

Then the world has to stop and coo in sympathy, overlooking the fact that these things happen every day to people just like you and me.

Does that make them any less valid?

■ Les Zigomanis is studying professional writing and editing at NMIT. Next week: Practical tips on tackling depression.

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PAGE: 8 COLOUR: CMYK