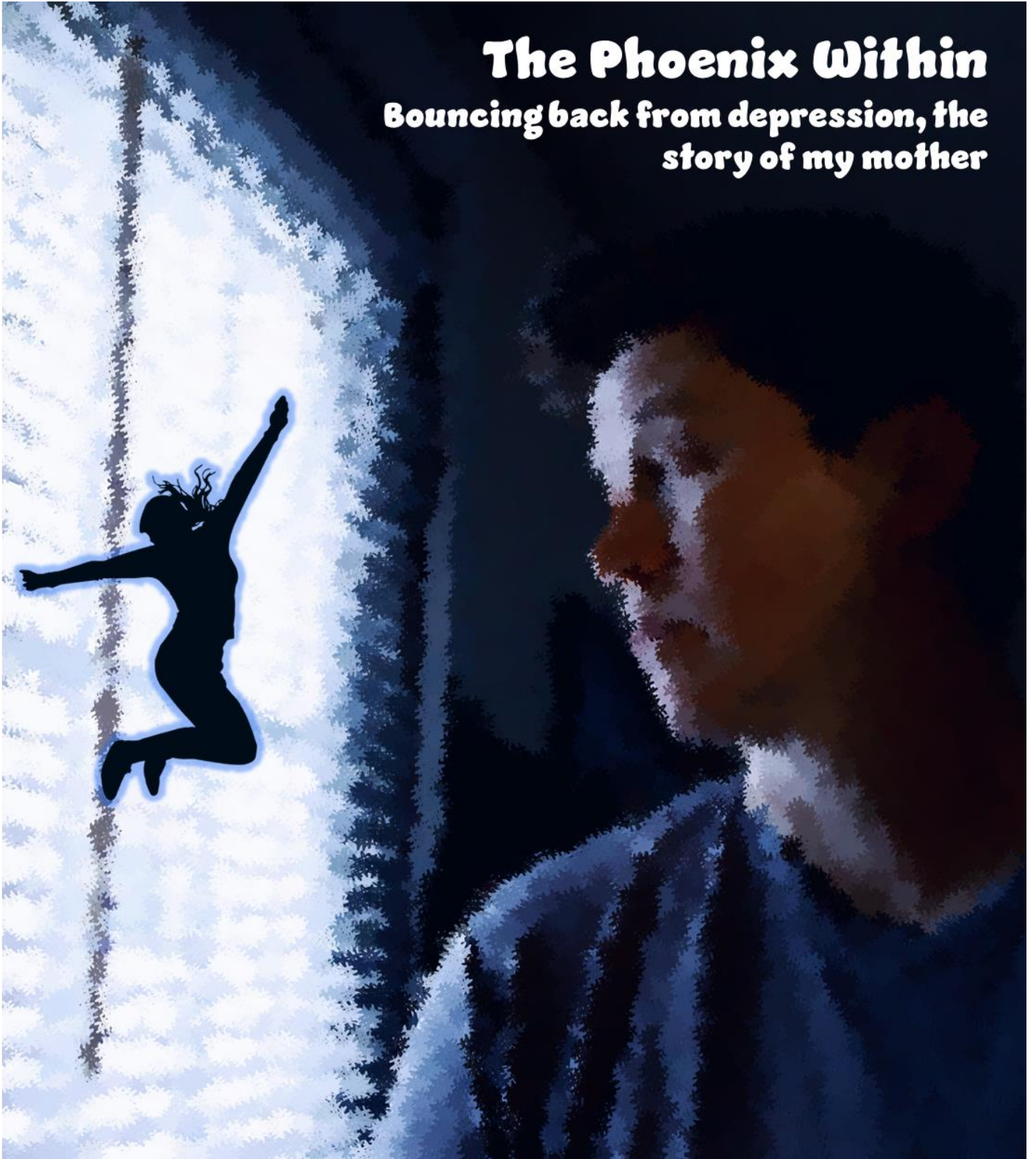


The Phoenix Within

**Bouncing back from depression, the
story of my mother**



I was 8 years old when I accidentally ventured into a room where my mother (hereafter referred to as 'Ma') was sitting by herself, and I saw her crying for the first time. I felt miserable because the world had not prepared me to deal with a complex emotional situation like this. All I had in my arsenal was a hug to soothe her, and the trick worked. With the passage of years, as I learnt about the human mind and concepts of mental wellbeing, I fathomed the concepts of obsessive-compulsive-disorder (OCD) and clinical depression, the battles that my mother was fighting and continues to do so till date. At a young and impressionable age, I learnt the difference between a psychologist and a psychiatrist, understood the concepts of meditation and mindfulness, learnt to manage timetables and medicines, and metaphorically adopted motherhood for my own mother. My father devoted his life to the service of the nation and was posted at the Indo-Pakistan border, leaving me behind with my mother and elder sister, designating me, an 8-year-old child, as the 'man of the house'. From thereon started the journey of my tryst with life and here is an account of the lessons that I learnt from my mother's journey to sound mental health.

Ma embarked on a deeply personal journey, traversing the treacherous terrain of setbacks, and rediscovered the fire within her to bounce back and rise victoriously. In hindsight I believe that subconsciously her actions followed the eternal wisdom of Peter Drucker. Through my lens, she is the epitome of *Managing Oneself*¹. She is the first entrepreneur I encountered and have had the privilege of knowing and deriving all my lifelong learnings from. She has been managing one of the most complicated businesses ever to exist – herself. Her key KPI is to manage the human mind and success of her endeavours is measured in terms of wellbeing. I see myself more as a Venture Builder or Evangelist in this ecosystem, tasked at getting Ma's startup to searing heights before making an exit. Having been a pillion rider on this journey with her, I have learnt that life is an unpredictable symphony of triumphs and setbacks, where the notes of success are often accompanied by the dissonance of failure. It is through these setbacks, these moments of intense challenge and adversity, that we have the opportunity to grow, adapt, and emerge stronger than ever before.

Chapter 1: The Prelude of Defeat

"It's not how far you fall but how high you bounce that counts. "

- Zig Ziglar

In the year 2005, due to unforeseen events Ma hit the depths of despair and her spirit succumbed to the relentless grip of depression. Each day was a battle against the shadows within, draining hope and vitality. From the darkest abyss, she could not find strength, seek help, or imagine a path of healing and resilience. The aftermath of this profound setback pressed upon her like a suffocating burden, shattering her confidence and leaving her adrift in a sea of uncertainty.

¹ *Managing Oneself* is a book by Peter F. Drucker, published in 1999

In the depths of her depression, the world around us became a desolate landscape, shrouded in an impenetrable gloom. The vibrant hues of life faded to muted tones, and even the sun cast a feeble glow. Laughter turned scarce, replaced by the heavy silence of her sorrow. Days blurred together, each one a hazy mix of tears and somber moments. As a child, I struggled to comprehend the weight she carried, the invisible chains that bound her spirit. It was as if a dense cloud hovered over our home, dampening any flicker of joy, and casting a perpetual shadow over our lives. This setback would transform my life and Ma's and would require valiant efforts to overcome.

Chapter 2: Cultivating Resilience

"Understanding our strengths, articulating our values, knowing where we belong - these are also essential to addressing one of the great challenges of organizations."

- Peter F. Drucker

In the face of my mother's debilitating depression, a flame of resilience ignited within me, fueled by an unwavering determination to bring light back into her world. Like a young sapling bending in the storm, I learned to adapt and grow amidst the darkness that enveloped us. With the boundless love and innocence of a child, I became her steadfast companion, providing a shoulder to lean on and a listening ear. I embraced every opportunity to infuse moments of joy into her days. We embarked on simple adventures together, exploring the beauty of nature or creating colorful artworks that breathed life into her weary spirit.

One of Drucker's teachings² that resonated deeply was the importance of self-awareness and understanding. By applying this principle, I learned to empathetically recognize and acknowledge my mother's struggle without judgment or expectation. Drucker emphasized the significance of truly comprehending one's own emotions and those of others, fostering a compassionate environment for growth. I held Ma's hand through the stormy nights, reminding her that she was not alone in this battle. We sought solace in therapy and support groups, unraveling the tangled threads of her thoughts and emotions. Through books and stories, we delved into the lives of resilient individuals who had triumphed over adversity. Their tales became beacons of hope, illuminating a path towards recovery. Together, we practiced mindfulness and self-care, nurturing her body and mind. We celebrated small victories, recognizing the strength it took to face each day.

In our journey, I witnessed the transformative power of love, compassion, and unwavering support. While the road was arduous, we never lost sight of the flicker of light at the end of the tunnel. With resilience as our guiding force, we forged ahead, inch by inch, until her spirit began to bloom once more. This experience stands as a testament to the resilience that resided within me. It reminded me that even in the darkest of times, with unwavering determination and unwavering support, I

² Managing Oneself is a book by Peter F. Drucker, published in 1999

could overcome any adversity, including freeing Ma from the grip of depression, and helping her emerge into the light of renewed hope and joy.

Chapter 3: The Symphony of Self-Reflection

"Follow effective action with quiet reflection. From the quiet reflection, will come even more effective action."

- Peter F. Drucker

I passionately believe in what Drucker said in the quotes above. It became the beacon for self-exploration as I addressed the quandary of this setback. Besides, in his words to *Manage Oneself*³ one needs to know about their own skillset, strengths, weaknesses, and other traits. In the depths of adversity, I embarked on an intense self-introspection. Through this journey of personal discovery, I unearthed three deep-rooted flaws that hindered my ability to effectively support Ma in her battle against depression. Firstly, I realized my impatience, where my eagerness for her progress inadvertently minimized her struggles and disregarded the pace of her healing. Secondly, I realized my avoidance of difficult conversations, which prevented us from addressing the root causes of her pain and finding constructive solutions together. Lastly, I uncovered my inclination to downplay her struggles, unintentionally invalidating her experiences and failing to provide the validation she needed.

Through this introspective journey, the newfound self-awareness empowered me to transform my approach, embracing active listening, initiating open dialogues, and offering unwavering validation to become a stronger source of support for my Ma's well-being.

Chapter 4: Unleashing the Phoenix Within

"Plans are only good intentions unless they immediately degenerate into hard work."

- Peter F. Drucker

Soon, following Drucker's advice from the quote above, we set to the task of setting our plans and learnings in motion. Our journey began with creating a safe and nurturing environment. I actively listened to her without judgment, allowing her to freely express her emotions and fears. Through open and heartfelt conversations, we unraveled the layers of her pain, providing solace and validation. Together, we developed strategies to address her triggers and cultivate healthy coping mechanisms. We explored the healing power of nature, embarking on serene walks amidst

³ <https://hbr.org/2005/01/managing-oneself> (HBR January 2005 edition)

breathtaking landscapes. The tranquility of nature became a balm for her troubled mind, reigniting her connection to the world and fostering a sense of peace within. Recognizing the importance of self-care, we embarked on a journey of holistic healing. We prioritized activities that nourished her mind, body, and soul. Drucker said that "Innovation is the specific instrument of entrepreneurship. The act that endows resources with a new capacity to create wealth⁴." Ma, the entrepreneur, deployed this. She innovated activities to keep her busy. From practicing mindfulness and meditation to engaging in creative pursuits like painting and writing, we discovered the therapeutic value of self-expression and personal growth. We sought professional support, collaborating closely with therapists who provided guidance and tailored interventions. Through therapy, Ma gained invaluable tools to navigate her emotions, develop resilience, and challenge negative thought patterns.

With each endeavor, Ma fueled the fire within, propelling herself closer to a triumphant resurgence. She emerged as a phoenix, rising from her ashes from the depths of darkness, hoping to embrace a future filled with renewed hope, joy, and the shared victory of overcoming adversity.

Throughout this journey, love served as our guiding force. I consistently reminded her of her inherent worth and strength, helping her build a positive self-image. We celebrated every small step forward, reinforcing her progress and instilling a sense of hope. Witnessing Ma's transformation was a profound testament to the power of love, understanding, and unwavering support. Her resilience and determination inspired me.

Chapter 5: The Crescendo of Triumph

"Whenever you see a successful business, someone once made a courageous decision."

- Peter F. Drucker

Battling depression is not a sprint or a marathon but an ultramarathon⁵. Unlike winning a sprint, in the euphoric aftermath of conquering an ultramarathon, a symphony of physical exhaustion, mental triumph, and the overwhelming surge of accomplishment intertwines, creating an indescribable tapestry of bliss that transcends the boundaries of ordinary joy and unveils the depths of human resilience and determination.

As Drucker tells "why predict a future when you can create it⁶" I initiated a proactive approach of supporting Ma in this journey and gradually transitioned from being an advisor and supporter, to a

⁴ <https://www.manifold.group/post/what-is-innovation#:~:text=Peter%20Drucker%20said%20%E2%80%9CInnovation%20is,like%20a%20particularly%20useful%20definition> (

⁵ <https://worldsmarathons.com/article/difference-between-marathon-and-ultramarathon> (12 Jan 2016)

⁶ Quote by Peter F Drucker picked from his interview (1991) (Drucker 2002) (Peter F Drucker 1997) (Drucker, <https://hbr.org/2005/01/managing-oneself> 2005)

spectator as Ma progressed into self-reliance. I still peep through the side rails as Ma journeys the travails of her startup, managing the hiccups and journeying onwards and upwards.

As my journey in life continues, setbacks continue to pepper my path. However, armed with resilience, self-reflection, and innovation, I refuse to be deterred. I seek out mentors and kinder spirits, individuals who had weathered their own storms and emerged stronger. Their guidance and support breathe life into my aspirations, providing me with the necessary tools to confront challenges head-on. And through the symphony of collective effort, perseverance, and unwavering belief in my abilities, the crescendo of triumph continues to grow louder. Drucker's teachings echo in my mind, reminding me that success lay not in avoiding obstacles but in embracing them as catalysts for growth.

Through the trials and tribulations, I have witnessed the transformative power of failure. It has become clear to me that setbacks are not indicative of personal inadequacy but steppingstones towards self-discovery. They fuel my hunger for improvement, push me to explore unexplored facets of my potential and help me push boundaries I once deemed unattainable.

Conclusion:

"If you want something new, you have to stop doing something old."

- Peter F. Drucker

Drucker once said that balancing change and continuity requires continuous work on information⁷. My mother discovered that setbacks were not indicators of failure but invitations to learn, adapt, and evolve. Through self-reflection, innovation, and a relentless pursuit of opportunities, I harnessed the power within me to overcome obstacles and embrace the flames of resilience.

As I look back on my journey, I am grateful for the setbacks that tested my mettle and allowed me to discover the depths of my potential. I carry with me the invaluable lessons learned, the unwavering belief in my ability to bounce back, and the knowledge that setbacks are not the end of the road but milestones of a brighter, stronger future. I wish to end this essay with my biggest takeaway from this experience with Ma.

"Success is not final, failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts."

- Winston Churchill

⁷ The Effective Executive (1967) by Peter F Drucker