Herschel: What would happen if everybody read the same book at the same time? And when I say everybody, I do mean faculty, staff and students. Many campuses run a similar program and so now it's our turn to show them how it's done properly.

Liesel: Welcome to the Magic Mountie podcast. This is a podcast that's dedicated to helping faculty and other college employees as they try and navigate the challenging fabric of serving students, especially at Mt. San Antonio College, but everyone's welcome.

Christina: It's Christina and I'm super happy to introduce today's episode because it features a performance by one of Mount SAC's national winners from the forensics team. Shannon Ustades performs an expert from "Hyperbole and a Half", the text that was selected for the One Book, One Campus program. We've introduced this topic of One Book, One Campus in a previous podcast episode, number 35, so if you tuned in, you may be familiar with the program. The book "Hyperbole and a Half" by Allie Brosh is a first person honest telling of what it feels like to have depression. We believe this experience is not only important, but statistically more relatable than you may think. That's why we're diving a little deeper by doing a three part mini series created from what we captured on Spring Flex Day, including this live performance by Shannon. As an alumni myself who was also on the forensics team with Liesel Reinhart as my coach, I wanted to introduce this series with a little storytelling because it is my belief that nothing replaces the connection we feel when we hear someone's truth conveyed in a story, particularly an award winning performance.

Christina: So sit back and enjoy this amazing young lady's prose and see if it touches you as much as it did those who watched it live.

Shannon: Hi, my name is Shannon Ustades, and I'm a former Mt. SAC student on the forensics team.

Speaker 1: So what inspired you to perform this specific book?

Shannon: I was searching for literature for my performances and I had read this book and I just loved the way the author created a sort of graphic novel that portrays depression and like the two sides of it. And also that she portrays it in a comical way to show that not everybody experiences depression the same way, but that there is a silver lining and things will eventually get better.

Speaker 1: Have you ever had any personal experiences with depression?

Shannon: Yes. I have bipolar disorder, so on multiple occasions I do experience major depression and I have been hospitalized a few times, so I am very well versed on depression. Yeah.

Shannon: Some people have a legitimate reason to feel depressed, but not me. I just woke up one day feeling arbitrarily sad and helpless. I try to force myself not to be sad. "Hey, stop it. Stop being sad! Stop it right now." But that didn't work. And when I couldn't will myself not to be sad. I turned to shame as a sort of motivational tool. "Hey, are you crying? Why are you crying? Did you know that there are people out there that have pets that are dead and there are babies that have tumors? Why are you sad?" And that just made me feel even more sad and oddly abusive.

Shannon: "Hey, do you want to play a game? The game is called "The Stand in the Corner and Look Stupid" game. Ready? You win!" "Wow. Hey, are you going into the kitchen? Cool, cool. Go f-- yourself." And so on and so forth until the only way to adequately express my feelings was too crawl very slowly across the floor.

Shannon: According to the American Psychological Association of October 8th, 2016, depression affects more than 350 million people worldwide, which means chances are you know someone with some form of the disorder. But for those individuals that experience this form of mental illness as part of their very existence, living with depression is incredibly difficult. The following prose explores one woman's unique experience with depression, reminding us that there is no one way to overcome that overwhelming sadness, but there is hope. "Hyperbole and a Half" by Allie Brosh. A humorous way to cope.

Shannon: I spent days locked in my house, surfing the internet, sitting on top of a pile of my own dirty laundry, which I sat on the couch for just a second on my way to the washer when I experienced a sudden wave of apathy and just couldn't continue. "But who cares? It wasn't like you were showering regularly!" So it didn't matter. Just like everything else.

Shannon: If my life was a movie, the turning point of my depression would have been meaningful or inspiring. It wasn't. Instead, the turning point of my depression mostly hinged around the fact that I rented some movies and didn't return them for too long. I considered just keeping the movies and never going back to the video store again. But then I remembered I might want to watch "Jumanji" again. So I put on some clothes, put the movies in my backpack and biked to the video store.

Shannon: It was the slowest, most resentful bike ride ever! And when I got to the video store, I found out they didn't even have "Jumanji" in. Just as I was deciding whether I should pick a movie that wasn't "Jumanji" or go home and stare at the wall in abject silence, I noticed this woman staring at me from a couple rows over. She was probably looking at me cause I looked really, really depressed. "No, stupid. She was looking at you because you are dressed as a homeless Eskimo!"

Shannon: In that moment I found myself wishing that nobody cared about me so I wouldn't feel obligated to keep existing. It's a strange moment when you find out you don't want to be alive anymore. If I had feelings, I'm sure I would've felt surprised. I didn't really know what to do. I decided it was time to go ask for help. But this, this is the most frustrating thing about depression. People don't seem to understand it's not something you can fight back against. It's nothing. And you can't fight back nothing. It would be like having a bunch of dead fish, but no one around you will acknowledge that your fish are dead. Instead, they'll try and help you find your fish. "Hey, what's wrong?" "My fish are dead." "That's okay. I'll help you find them. Do you have any ideas as to where they went?" "No, my fish, they're not lost, they're dead." "That's okay. Let's keep looking. I'm sure they'll turn up somewhere."

Shannon: That's the solution to a different problem. And maybe you're just looking for someone to say, "Wow, those fish are super dead." Or, "Hey, I'm sorry about how dead your fish are. I still like you though."

Shannon: So I spent the next few weeks talking to doctors in hopes that they could prescribe me something that might make me feel again. I discovered crying first. I call this emotion crying and not sadness because that's really all it was, just crying for the sake of crying.

Shannon: At some point during this phase, I was crying pointlessly on the kitchen floor. As was common practice during bouts of floor crying, I spotted a tiny shriveled up piece of ... a piece of corn. Under the refrigerator. Now, I don't know why this happened. When I saw that piece of corn, something inside of me snapped and produced the most uncontrollable, debilitating form of laughter I have ever experienced in my life. It's a stupid piece of corn. It's the funniest thing in the world. My brain was like, "Oh, you want to be happy? You want to be happy? Fine! I'll make you happy to death!"

Shannon: If somebody were ever to ask me when was the exact moment when things started to feel slightly less sh--y, I'm gonna have to tell them about the piece of corn and that, "No, really, it was funny." But I'll always get the same confused look.

Speaker 1: So you won awards for this performance?

Shannon: Yes. Two years ago I went to Phi Rho Pi, which is the national competition for speech and debate on the two year community college level and I performed this prose and I won a gold medal in this event.

Speaker 1: Congratulations. What did it feel like to win that gold medal?

Shannon: It was very shocking because you don't expect to do so well, but then if you just perform it like you mean it and you care about it, then it just so happens that you do very well and people can actually relate to your piece. So it was a very heartwarming experience.

Liesel: Hey, thanks so much for joining us for the Magic Mountie podcast. We love your likes, we love your shares, and we love your comments, so please engage with our community, download from wherever you love to get your podcasts, iTunes, Google, Rate My Professor, we're there. And we want you to be back with us next week. Remember, any opinions that are expressed in this podcast do not necessarily represent Mount San Antonio College or any of its agents. We'll see you next time.