

THE COLORADO  
PSYCHIATRIC SOCIETY AND  
CHARG RESOURCE CENTER  
PRESENT:

MENTAL  
HEALTH  
STORIES  
2015



# MENTAL HEALTH STORIES 2015

## PROGRESS, RECOVERY, SUCCESS

### INTRODUCTION

The Mental Health Stories project started with listening to patients' successes. It has been a partnership between the Public Information and Education Committee of the Colorado Psychiatric Society and the CHARG Resource Center. In 2015, we wanted to broaden its impact by inviting Peer Specialists to play an active role in the Mental Health Stories Committee. The call for entries went to a number of different mental health organizations with the prompt:

Share your story: Tell us about your progress, recovery and success.  
What strengths and supports have helped (treatment, friends, family)?  
What obstacles have you faced?

We received numerous entries and, after much debate, eight honoraria were awarded. Those stories are presented here with the authors' permission. We commend every author for their courage, wish you well with your continued recovery and encourage you to submit another story next year.

Special thanks to Tiffany Anderson, an intern at CHARG, for her help in coordination of the entries and the Committee. She went above and beyond for this project.

Stigma can be internal as well as external. There is no better way to counter stigma than to tell the stories that include examples of effective diagnosis, treatment, empathy and support from family, friends, employers and a therapeutic community. Diagnosis is referred to in terms of mistakes, delays and the importance of its accuracy as a path to successful treatment. We hope you learn as much as we have reading these stories.

Robert B. Cowan, Jr., M.D.

Chair, Colorado Psychiatric Society Public Information and  
Education Committee

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## A PEP TALK

By Christopher Feld

There's a bandage on my left arm, on the inside of my elbow. They draw my blood from there once every four weeks. It was once every two weeks for six months before that, and once a week for six months before that. The phlebotomist told me there's a lot of scar tissue around that vein. And it makes sense, the vein having been tapped so many times in the name of counting my white blood cells. The Clozaril might weaken my immune system, though my psychiatrist hasn't had it happen with more than two (possibly three) of the patients he's prescribed it to in the past thirty-some years.

Getting everyone onboard, me chief among them was the first struggle — everyone was in denial, diagnosing me with epilepsy though they didn't have a degree in neurology. We couldn't talk about it, it made it real and that's the last thing we wanted. A long road, among the many long roads just to come to terms that maybe my life was over.

Then it was compliance — swallowing the little pills every day at the prescribed times. Some of them might have worked if I'd given them the chance. The worst ones — the Haldol, the Xanax dehumanized me. Sure they quieted the schizoaffective disorder, but they also robbed me of my personality. I've always been a hugger — not when I'm on Haldol or Xanax.

You go to a lot of doctor's appointments. You learn to wait, you learn to take a book with you. You learn to entertain yourself privately in public. Don't bring anything funny, — no Vonnegut, no Neal Stephenson. You learn to deal with your body's malfunctions: the aching joints despite young age, sweating profusely because the pills make your body unable to regulate its own temperature, poikilothermic it's called.

You learn when to keep your mouth shut — when you can trust someone with your darkest secret and when it's best to lie; to tell them you make your living fixing computers in your apartment and not that your living is made for you, deposits in your bank account that come regardless of your productivity. Because there's stigma — you're a homicidal risk, a parasite leeching off society, a manifestation of everyone's worst fear.

You do what you can — you write a blog, you speak in front of people about your experiences. But you can't tell the baristas at the coffee shop you go to so often they start making your drink as soon as you walk in. People have to be mentally *prepared* to be told about mental illness — its ugliness and also its overwhelming beauty.

You do what you can — you're an ambassador for the mentally ill. Because you're high functioning. Held up on a pedestal, the constitutive example of your species. But still, you lose friends. Because someone always gets tossed

overboard when the ebbs and flows of the illness become violent.

And you sit there, once a week, across from an educated someone who has no idea what you're going through, what it's like, and try to answer the question: what happened?

You can't.

There's hardly ever an answer with mental illness. They can't test for it, they can't take blood to see its progress. You have to do the work, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and you have to suffer through it. But you get these moments of inexplicable beauty — the sunsets you hallucinate you wish your parents could see. And, in those moments it's worth it. There are new friends, and you're thankful. God is good, you say. And indeed He is.

Life doesn't end with mental illness. Seeming and being are two different things. Mental illness, and the ECT that accompanied it, gives you a chance to start over — to build your house on the solid rocks instead of the vapid sand. Chances like that are rare — they ought to be taken. Because you're taken care of: that living you make without earning is your only shot at independence, it lets you live the life you've always wanted. You work on your projects when you're feeling well and you take care of yourself when you're not. You take your pills, and you take your walk every day, and you love people the best you can. Because your parents always told you try your best, and that's really all you can do.

## THE ACTUAL GOOD NEWS

By Jessie Holt

"The good news is this will all go away  
once you're in a less stressful environment"

This is the biggest lie I've ever been told.

At the time, I was abroad on a service mission. I had minimal contact with friends and family and was hard at work to use my time effectively. Yet without my support system, I was crumbling quickly.

I had always been an anxious and depressed person but I coped just well enough to skim by. Being so far from my support system, my chest started to tighten... and tighten... until it felt like one day it snapped. It was as if something broke in my chest and, in turn, my mind. Panic attacks ensued and about a year into this service my body had had enough. Suddenly, one day, I couldn't speak above a whisper, color dimmed, it took me 15 minutes of concentration to sit up in bed. I couldn't eat for 7 days and lost 11 lbs. I stayed in bed and stared at a wall for those 7 days and felt my mind begin to crack.

Inexplicably, after 7 days, my mind woke back up. I sat up, began to cry,

and ate something through my tears. I was started on medication, and was talking to a therapist regularly over the phone. This was the man who said, "The good news is this will all go away once you're in a less stressful environment."

A few months later, I finished my service abroad and came home to my "less stressful environment." Needless to say, my depression and anxiety did not suddenly disappear. I was put on a new medication that made me nauseous and put me to sleep for 14 hours a day.

This just scratches the surface of the difficulty of battling your own mind, but the next few years involved self-harm, isolation, suicidal ideation, self-sabotage, and a lot of panic attacks.

During that time, I thought about death all day long. I cannot describe the relief that I felt at the idea of escaping the thoughts that haunted me on a regular basis.

As a person with healthy self esteem it's confusing to suddenly have thoughts like:

"Everything you do is wrong"

"No one cares what happens to you"

"You're an inconvenience- just by existing"

"You're not lovable"

I know these things are not true. I know myself too well, I know my family, friends, and the worth of a human being too well to say any of those thoughts are true. Sometimes knowing doesn't matter. The hellish feeling of depression isn't defeated by knowledge.

I finally saw change when I went to a psychiatrist and begged him to take me off the medication. We tried a medication that is designed for epilepsy but it slowed my brain down and allowed me to experience life without constant panic. I found a wiser therapist who helped me process my pain.

As I began to get my life back in order I found myself leaving my destructive relationships and forming a loving, caring relationship. This special someone said "Are you kidding me? Of course!" when I asked if he still wanted to continue our relationship, knowing about my mental illness.

Since that time, I've married the man who said "Of course!", am loving and excelling in my graduate program, have run a marathon which I used to raise awareness for mental health through the National Association on Mental Illness, and I have more good days than bad days.

Here's the Actual Good News. There's nothing wrong with someone who struggles with their mental health. These struggles are like a broken arm or leg. Sometimes something terrible happens and you need to take measures to heal and sometimes you just slip and there's no one to blame, not even yourself. Also, we don't need to be afraid of mental illness. The less taboo the subject is the less

scary it is when it strikes. However, the only way to defeat the taboo is to become educated and understand that a person with mental health struggles is not broken.

I feel my mental illness every day but I can still accomplish incredible things. I do, and plan to continue to, with or without the demon of mental illness. With or without the thoughts about death. But with a lot of love from God, the good people in my life, and a real understanding that the depression belongs to me, not the other way around.

## **A TIME TO LIVE**

**By Allison Greenstein**

I sat on my bed and stared at the posters on my closet door. One by one I took the bottle of pills that sat on my nightstand. "Now there will be no more pain" was the only thought going through my mind.

The following day I would be admitted to an adolescent psychiatric unit where I would spend the next three months. I was fifteen years old.

For the next 25 years, I would spend my life in a self-made prison. No sunlight would enter this cell. The moon and the stars were blocked by the cement ceiling and the bars that replaced the door could not be penetrated. I saw no future and felt no hope.

I tried to escape the pain with drugs and alcohol. That worked temporarily, but eventually made things much, much worse. I would cut myself with a razor, thinking the physical pain would distract me from my mental pain. This was also a temporary solution. I found myself popping handfuls of pills at a time, not caring about the damage this could inflict. You see. I wanted to die. I prayed for death nightly and was disappointed when I awoke in the morning. Life was unbearable and there was no saving grace. I saw many therapists throughout the years and received various diagnoses. It's hard to diagnose an individual correctly when drugs are involved. I was out on many different medications, from antipsychotics to anti-depressants. I would end up in six psychiatric hospitals, a rehabilitation center, two halfway houses, and a couple of intensive outpatient programs. I would do well for short periods of time, but always seemed to fall apart again.

Finally, after decades of failed treatments, I decided to try Electro-Convulsive Therapy. I would undergo treatments for over a year. I believe this is how I got my life back. I became functional again. I was no longer suicidal, and I discovered hopes and dreams that had been discarded over the years. I took an active role in my recovery. I attended a WRAP (Wellness. Recovery. Action. Planning) course which taught me the coping skills I would use to stay well on a daily basis and how to avoid ending up in crisis again. I attend a support group on a regular basis and I share my story with audiences around the state. I now have a

life that is worth living.

However, I would not be here now if it were not for the two most incredible individuals I have ever known, my parents. They have supported me through every step of my journey. through every heartbreaking moment. They were there to take me to the hospital when I was in crisis. They attended the Family-to-Family course offered through NAMI. a class for family members of those living with mental illness. They attended support groups offered through my rehabilitation center. These two amazing individuals would come to my apartment to clean when I was unable to function. My dad would do the stack of dishes that had been piling up for weeks, and my mother would help with the weeks of unopened mail and unpaid bills. My father flew in from Ohio twice in one month just to sit on the couch with me while I was suicidal. They commuted an hour each way, three days a week, to take me to m ECT treatments. My parents are my heroes and my inspiration.

I now wake up early every day to watch the sun rise. I hear the birds chirping and I see the flowers blooming. I see a world that is full of life and light. I walk through the Dark and I want to spin around and sing songs of joy. The world is no longer dark and dangerous. It is filled with wonder and enlightenment. I can now say the words that have eluded me all of these years...I am happy.

## **AN OPEN LETTER TO MYSELF**

**By Kat Atwell**

Take a deep breath, from way down deep. Unclench your jaw. Relax your muscles. Focus on these words, and ignore the critic in your head that tells you to ignore it. Read this right now.

You are so hard on yourself. Today, you need to take a step back and look at the bigger picture. While I know this may sound trite, you have survived. Do you recognize the gravity of that statement? You are a survivor. Wear that badge proudly, and look at it frequently. You are a survivor on purpose.

I know that some days are hard. You beat yourself up for so many reasons. The thing is, there is no accomplishment you will ever achieve that will put you into that safe place you blindly drive toward when you're in the dark. Your safe place is already here. It exists right now. It sounds unbelievable, and probably feels impossible, but it's the truth. You already crossed the finish line just by existing in this moment. Every second you move forward, you are a winner. Granted, sometimes you might have to slog and crawl, but you keep going. I know you're never going to give up. I know you know that, too.

Every moment of every day there are people, hundreds of people, who will heed your call if you ask for help. Those people will jump to your aid without



hesitation, and will be happy to help you. There is no need to constantly be on guard. It is so much better for you and everyone around you to go forward anticipating the good, instead of expecting the worst. That being said, though, if you can't think positively in the moment? That's OK, too. One of the worst things that you have a tendency to do is to beat yourself up for not being happy. Nobody is happy all the time. You don't need to be ashamed to feel sad, or angry, or lost.

Love yourself for who you are today. I know that you think you should be doing more, but you don't need to. You are perfectly you right now, and that is exquisite.

It's funny, because I know that you're doubting all of this. You're skeptical, and that voice in your head can be so loud, and so cruel. Please remind yourself that the voice inside your head is a phantom. It does not exist. That voice is not you. Would you ever say those things to others, those things you say to yourself? You wouldn't. And here's the deal: Because you wouldn't ever say that to someone else, you clearly do not deserve that sort of punishment bestowed upon yourself. Please be more gentle with the real you. The real you needs to be nurtured, cared for, and loved.

I don't want to talk down to you. I don't want you to be frustrated in the event that you don't believe any of these words. It is no small feat to love yourself when you're deep in a depression. Remember, though, you have done it before, and you have walked away from those times a braver, more powerful woman.

I know it's hard to be who you are, but you are perfect for this role. It was made for you. Each day, that role is recreated, and you get to build upon it. Your story wouldn't be nearly so stunning if it weren't for these dark times (I know you don't want to hear that, but it's true). You know that your bright moments shine even more brightly after you have escaped from the abyss.

So, take comfort. If that means taking a nap, then take one. If you need a hug, then please, ask for a hug. Allow yourself to be gentle. Your job is to take care of yourself first. With that sort of strength, you can accomplish anything. I love you. Other people love you. You are loved.

It'll be OK. I am here.

## **DENIAL AND ACCEPTANCE**

**By S. Luna**

I don't remember the exact date I was first hospitalized in a psychiatric hospital, but I believe I was 24. I am now 50. I attempted suicide in my early to mid-twenties. My behavior was very erratic. My mood was up and down, and I had a bad temper which would flare up and hurt those around me. I had a case manager who helped me get on Social Security Disability. At the time, I didn't

appreciate her help. I was young and stubborn and didn't want to believe that I had a mental illness. I was on Social Security Disability for a time, and she was a good case manager, but I left treatment in my thirties. I wouldn't seek help until 2008 when I was 43. I hadn't liked taking the Depakote and Risperdal because I had gained weight and felt a tingling at the back of my neck which scared me about the medication.

I continued to live my life in a manner that hurt other people and hurt myself. I proceeded to live my life un-medicated and therefore chaotic and explosive and paranoid about people. My anxiety was always sky high too. I was unaware that I had Post-Traumatic Stress disorder. I thought I was perfectly fine, but I moved from job to job and constantly had problems with the people I worked with due to paranoia and anxiety. I thought I heard people calling my name or laughter and sometimes voices.

In 2008, I had a difficult time hearing and seeing things. I sent someone 200 emails. I was not well. My good friend Carmen, along with a few other friends grew concerned, and they asked me to seek help at the Lafayette Mental Health Center. I was diagnosed schizoaffective, just as I had been diagnosed in my early twenties. This was not an easy thing for me to accept. I had been successful and independent in my mind, but everything came crashing down.

It was at the Lafayette Mental Health Center that my trauma re-surfaced after my step-father passed away. I did EMDR therapy with my new therapist and this helped the fog lift a bit. I was put on Abilify, Lamictal, Ativan and a number of other medications to calm my mood and help me differentiate between what was real and what was my paranoia.

Unfortunately, the Lafayette Mental Health Center closed and I had further problems. Luckily, I moved to Arvada and began to go to Jefferson Center for Mental Health. I was still struggling terribly with keeping employment and was working at Seven-Eleven despite my education. I just couldn't control my anxiety, paranoia and depression and ended up homeless. When my stress level increased, my symptoms increased.

It was then that there came a turning point. Jefferson Center for Mental Health put me up in a hotel for three weeks and invited me to stay at In Between, a residential facility. I stayed there for seven months and received the best help from a caring staff, case manager and psychiatrist. After that I stayed at Hilltop, another residential facility and received even more help. I stayed at Hilltop for twelve months. My medications were changed and Sapharis was added. Sapharis was very helpful. The fog in my mind began to lift.

I participated in groups and one was called Seeking Safety. It was there I first truly began to understand how childhood sexual abuse affected me. The therapists were kind and I began to understand trauma did not have to deplete my self-esteem. I could change my core-beliefs about myself.

I am back on Social Security and thankful to have received all the help I did despite my personal stigma about mental illness. I am learning that my illness

doesn't define me. It is not who I am. I still struggle with mood swings, suicidal thinking and paranoia, but I am learning coping skills to manage my illness. My case manager told me that relapse is a part of recovery. I understand now that I can learn to love myself and be kind to myself. I work hard on grounding, self-soothing techniques and walk and swim, along with taking my medication in order to manage my illness. It is my goal to be a good peer and listener to others with mental illness.

## IN THE MIRROR

By David Muniz

I used to look in the mirror, but no one was there. Yet, there was a sense of fear, dread and denial of a person I knew should be there. Most of my life, I did not exist. My Mother was a single parent, with a ninth grade education. She was raising me and five other siblings. I was stuck in the middle, invisible. My Mother did all she could do to feed us and keep us together. She worked long and difficult hours cleaning rich people's homes. Consequently, we were home alone to fend for ourselves. Living in an environment without any guidance or nurturing, we were surviving instead of thriving.

Growing up in a survival setting, I learned to focus on eating and competing for affection and attention. Any attention would do, even if it wasn't affectionate. My Mother would usually come home exhausted and hungry, like a mother bird returning to her nest after a meager day of hunting. With so little food and so many mouths to feed, mother bird had only rushed time and energy to give.

Without any nurturing or guidance, I learned to cope with my agonizing emptiness by self-medicating with anything and everything. I did not like the feeling of being alone with myself. I discovered that drugs, sex and alcohol helped numb my pain and would allow an escape from the reality of my isolation. After a life-time of using and abusing myself, I realized this was only a temporary fix. My issues were my closest companions and they would stick with me forever!

One winter's night, the frost was thickly wrapped around the window. The icy chill outside left the busy streets abandoned, just like I felt inside my apartment. The presence of isolation and hopelessness surrounded me like haunting demons of death. They were calling me to join them in their abyss, whispering "Do it, chicken, do it!" As I looked in the mirror, the only reflection I could see was, hating me! I truly wanted to end my misery. With knife in hand and wrist bleeding, I was ready to go.

Suddenly, I heard a calm voice, inside my head, "if it's that bad, change!" A light came on; I had an answer, change! I put down the knife and decided to find out just who I was letting go? Who was this man in the mirror? I looked; it wasn't a man at all. To my astonishment, it was a little boy! I feared and hated this person but did not know why? That was the first time I came face to face with my

authentic self.

The lies I've believed about myself were exposed. I was ready to receive the truth. In the mirror, while practicing Yoga, I come into child-pose. It is here I can see into my soul and the little- boy inside the man can now be told the truths. In the silence of meditation, I opened my heart chakra to release my fears and receive love.

I allowed long conversations with myself, questioning the hurts and feeling the pain of my past. In doing this, I could hear the agreements I made with the lies and beliefs that came from a lifetime of carrying a wounded child. This was a child that was alone, unlovable and bad. I have now replaced those lies with truths and have received healing. Most of all, I've learned to love and accept myself, just as I am without judgments. I forgive myself and shame has no place in my life!

I've made new agreements with my authentic self. I am not an orphan, I am beautiful, I am loveable capable of loving myself and others fully. I may be alone but not lonely. I will never forget that cold winter's night when I meet my Authentic Self. I owe my life to me, making the choice to thrive and not merely exist!

I look forward to sharing my journey with others so that I can guide and encourage others to listen to their hearts and believe the truths in themselves. Within acceptance and forgiveness of self and others...there is peace, love and freedom. I can now share my many tools and practices of self-discovery and transformation, reflecting the way for others to find their freedom.

I look in the mirror now and I see me; the beautiful and whole man that I am....and I like that!!

## **MY EXPERIENCE OF TRUTH**

**By Trevor Groves**

It all began 12 years ago, I was 24 years old. I heard someone say "your breath stinks". As I turned around to find who made the comment, it occurred to me that I didn't hear the comment with my ears, I heard the voice with my mind. At that moment I didn't think much of it. Eventually though, as the voices continued, I had to acknowledge them. To me there were 2 possibilities about the source of the voices. Either I was crazy, or I stumbled upon some sort of telepathy and the ability to read others thoughts. Naturally, I would have rather believed that I was some sort of alien human hybrid than I was a lunatic. However, if I was to believe I could read people's minds, than perhaps they could read mine. My paranoia began. I became so worried that my mind was transparent to everyone; I began having impure and offensive thoughts. I would never have these thoughts were it not for my fear that people could hear them. My

schizophrenia evolved.

As time passed, schizophrenia began to consume me. It became so prevalent in my mind that I would have trouble focusing on the most rudimentary functions such as listening during a conversation. Any human interaction I had would be blanketed by paranoia. What if I called this woman a witch in my head? Could she hear it? Mental health professionals call this reality testing. I was constantly trying to get a visceral reaction from people that I was trying to communicate with telepathically. It never worked and this weighed heavily as evidence that it was not real and I was in fact a schizophrenic.

As time passed, the schizophrenia became more intense. The voices told me my thoughts were being broadcast to the world. They told me grandiose things like I was Jesus Christ or god on earth. On the other side of things they said that I was a human sacrifice and a scapegoat for society's problems. They even began to tell me to kill myself.

I eventually began to view schizophrenia as a test. The core of this test was to overcome my ego. I came to believe that aliens were here watching us from the collective unconscious, which is the concept that we are all connected to each other subconsciously. It's a place with a free exchange of thoughts and ideas. It's what makes telepathy possible. As it turns out, we are all capable of telepathy, but since it occurs in our subconscious mind many people such as me are not aware of it. Through schizophrenia I have come to believe that the collective unconscious is another plane of existence, a mental plane free of the limitations of the physical world we call reality. To quote my favorite band "today, young men on acid realized that all matter is merely energy condensed into a slow vibration and we are all one consciousness experiencing ourselves subjectively. There no such thing as death live is only a dream and we are just an imagination of ourselves." Basically, the collective conscious is what we refer to as god. If there is anything I've learned as a schizophrenic, it's that I cannot comprehend the universe as it truly is.

I often wonder if there is a purpose to life, One of humanities most prevalent questions. I believe there is. I believe we have a place in the universe. I believe we can evolve and achieve enlightenment. To me enlightenment is a state of mind, it is total consciousness. It's letting go of all the negative emotions we experience and shining the light on the darkness where pain cannot exist. It's becoming one with everything and everyone. The real mystery is how to attain this blissful existence.

There are no instructions to life, and no map. A lot of people in our culture are confronted with depression, anxiety, attention deficit, anger, fear and all sorts of emotional pain. There are many ways to overcome these problems. Yoga and meditation, diet and exercise, finding joy and love in our personal relationships and hobbies are all effective in finding a sliver of enlightenment. We can all achieve inner peace in our own ways through our own belief systems. For me it is simple, it's all about how we treat each other. It's about being the change we wish to see in the world. Mental illness sucks, but maybe it's worth it.

## UPROOTED FROM LIFE

By Courtney Rubio-Ontiveros

The older I get the harder it is to remember life before my ED (Eating Disorder). It was early middle school when things took a turn for the worse. I've gone over it many times, what could have triggered my ED? I came up with many possibilities such as, my grandparents divorce, the fact that I moved from the South of my school district to the North (the demographic of people were completely different), I had a father that was always in and out of my life and it caused a lot of emotional issues, and of course I was at the age when a young girls body begins to change. It could have been anyone of these reasons, or maybe all combined but I was triggered and it took a very long time for me to even realize what I had been doing to myself.

Anxiety is the common fuel to my Eating Disorder. I've been diagnosed with High Anxiety for awhile now and to be honest I may have had it since my childhood. Everything that others feel is minuscule compared to how I end up feeling. My entire body becomes affected when I have anxiety attacks. My emotions are all over the place, my heart races, my head pounds, and it's all so exhausting. However, with this mental issue another arose. I turned to food as a coping mechanism when I became too anxious to handle. Eating was comforting to me and I didn't know when to stop. I had behaviors, but since I wasn't taught about eating disorders I didn't know what I was doing was wrong. It was an endless cycle and it destroyed my health.

I continued to have my ED all through High School and the beginning of my college years. The time I feel like I lost the most was in High School. Having ED affected every part of me; it truly was an endless cycle. I loved joining groups and playing sports in High School, but when I had deadlines, practices, and games my anxiety was too much to handle. I would eat and then I would feel so full I would panic because I knew I wouldn't be able to perform the way I needed to, so I had behaviors. These behaviors allowed me to have energy for a little while and then I would become so fatigued. I couldn't make my times for running, I didn't start on my teams, and I was too stressed for my deadlines. And with all of this my emotions were all over the place. What happened when I would have behaviors was that my body became chemically imbalanced, I could be happy one second and angry the next. It even affected the first real relationship I ever had. ED controlled my life and all I could do was be a passenger to what was supposed to be some of the greatest years of my life.

I think a lot could have been avoided if I had been truthful with my family. Even though I wasn't aware of my ED at first I eventually learned what I was doing was wrong, but I still kept it from those who cared about me. I would

make up lies and cover up for my ED. I felt isolated and helpless; I would think to myself, is this going to be the rest of my life? Until one year in college I was praying late at night in the chapel below my dorm. I wanted to be free, I wanted to be happy and I wanted to live my life without ED. I felt a calm come over me and right then I decided that I would find a way to get help. It took some time to finally tell my parents the truth, but when I did they told me that they would help me in any way they could. I then joined EDCASA, now ERCSA.

One of the first things I was taught and the most impactful lesson was that I needed to separate my Eating Disorder (ED) from myself. I needed to learn what thoughts were my own and what ED's were. When I finally mastered this it was like the life I was stuck in stopped and I started a new journey. I began to distinguish when ED was trying to bully me. When I had thoughts of body shaming, excessive food consumption, negativity towards life, and the feeling of being completely alone I knew these thoughts weren't mine. By no means did this coping mechanism stop my ED entirely, but it gave me the strength and knowledge to push forward and fight every day.

The process of healing is a sacred and beautiful journey. You become one with yourself; you love yourself, and you begin to live life the way you were meant to. It isn't an easy path, but with the right support and encouragement you can overcome it all. There may be times when you feel alone, or that no one understands what you are going through. Always know that there is help and support available. It took me a very long time to realize this, but once I did I started my journey in healing. There will be bumps and bruises along the way, but never stop. Keep pushing forward; ignore the negative thoughts because in the end it's your life not ED's.

## MENTAL HEALTH STORIES 2016

Our purpose is to reduce stigma through  
broadly communicating mental health stories.

### GET INVOLVED!

If you are interested in sharing your story, being a co-sponsoring organization or otherwise becoming involved in the fifth annual Mental Health Stories project in 2016, please contact us at: 303-692-8783 or [office@coloradopsychiatric.org](mailto:office@coloradopsychiatric.org).

