

Finding Joy in Life - Excerpt from Harrison's Story

Harrison Remy's life was not simply full of distress and tribulation. It was just as much, if not more filled with joy and beauty.

Mason: Harrison, you seem to appreciate life on a level that extends above the norm, why is that?

Harrison: Well Mason, it is because I appreciate my life. I am grateful for my life and I look at my life as a gift in itself. Many people throw quotes around with nonchalant comfort, but they don't know what they say. They may believe it, but they do not know it. Believing is quite different than knowing. When I say that I know my life is a gift, I know it as well as I know that my eyes are blue. When I was younger, I believed life was a gift – but beliefs are fallible and therefore I did not live consistently with what I said.

I have seen life wasted. I have seen my own life wasted. Time and health deteriorated in front of me. I came to the conclusion that I no longer wanted to deteriorate. Now understand that this was not me simply saying, "Life isn't going to be this way". This is years of trial and error and the absolute love and support of my parents and several friends. This would not have happened otherwise. I would have simply crumbled into nothingness. I have seen so many do this, crumble that is. It is simply horrifying. It is incomprehensible that people are allowed to go through life with no one or nothing simply because of the ignorance and lack of compassion and understanding of the others.

My life was blessed and has been. I have good genes, you might say. It was not until my parents and the outreach coordinator of NAMI reached into the abyss and pulled me out until I took a breath. Even then it took quite some time of breathing in order to gain a sense of life. It was at this time that I faced the very two people that sent me to prison and they were bound and determined to do it again – and DID! Things were different though – I had stability around me and I had a sense of do or die that was from my beliefs turning into what I knew. This time, when I turned around in the courtroom, I saw more support and said to myself, "I will do this!" I turned my back on the judge and looked at my family and moved on with my life.

It is nice to "believe" something. But I choose to "KNOW". If I don't "KNOW" it – I don't discuss it. Once I came out of a very sick time in my life, the juices started to flow again. I started coming into my own in a way that seemed very surprising to me. Life was all different because of what I knew rather than believed.

My personality started to compliment who I was to the core. My confidence became stronger than anything I had ever experienced simply because I knew what it was that I had to do and was doing. There was no question to anything. Nothing seemed to be a mystery. I liked who I like and I didn't associate with who I didn't like and I made no apologies or concessions to anyone. I referred often to quotes that I had always believed –but never was able to know and started realizing the power that I had from within. Quotes like: "Sometimes I wonder what it would take to be good enough, and then I realized that it would cost me who I am!" one of my own quotes! It is strange to read your own writings and realize, "wow – that was me?"

I remember people making comments like, "he finally got his shit together". I immediately banded those people from my life. It had nothing to do with "getting it together". And I took great insult from comments or attitudes that suggested that. I guess you could say it defined the person as so many things do when people open their mouths. One once told me that I needed to "forgive". Well, I forgave who needed to be forgiven but there were many that didn't require any forgiveness – I mourned the loss of them in my life and then became indifferent. I simply didn't care what their position was. Why would I? All they would ever be to me was a negative influence just as their absence in my life was. I gave myself permission to let go of that baggage. Blood is not thicker than water when theoretically speaking, at least in my book and history doesn't necessary mean a future.

My life Mason was and is beautiful. I have so many wonderful experiences and people in my life. I see the result of what I do each day. I see the work of advocacy progress and awareness and education extend. I could ask for nothing more. Then on top of all of that, I have incredible parents and incredible friends. Frankly, Mason – I would challenge anyone to live the life I had and be the person that I am. I am proud of my life and what I give to life. It is my purpose, it is my dream and it is my destination – the protection of the mentally ill – the rehabilitation of the mentally ill and the empowerment that is given to those with mental illness that can change lives!

I have my bad days – this is true and the ONLY thing I fear in my life is backsliding into the darkness of my illness.... Well, and snakes – I don't like snakes! Other than those two elements, I don't have fear – I don't see fear and I have very little doubt in my life – doubt and fear have been a serious waste of time for me.

Another thing that enables me to find joy in my life is this... I have, so very close to me the heartache, so very clear to me the heartache of others – the pain is only a permission away to tap and I tap into that when necessary to give me the outlook that I must always have. Because I feel joy and am at peace – does not negate the pain, the memory and the difficult past that I experienced – it is always there. A scar on my arm will remind me easily of the days I chose to cut myself so that pain could become physical and so many other memories that trigger deep emotions within. I chose to take those times, those experiences and those memories and do something with them. No matter how difficult it may have been – I could do nothing less.