

It was nearly three years ago now. I made a desperate call to an unknown organization (to me) called the National Alliance on Mental Illness [NAMI] from a mental hospital in Toledo, Ohio. Last night, I accepted the appointment of President of the Board of Directors for the very NAMI Affiliate that I had called and proudly looked across the room to see the most wonderful woman that not only accepted my call, but fought for me tooth and nail and showed me what advocacy, support and determination was all about.

I am not writing this column as a pat on the back to me. There is no pat on the back for me because far too many people are in similar, if not a worse position than I was eight years ago. There is nothing to celebrate. What there is, however, is a reason to see the light at the end of the tunnel. I am not anything special, I am a dime a dozen - many just don't know it. In fact, I am looking forward to appointing the next President of the NAMI Van Wert, Mercer and Paulding County affiliate – and maybe, just maybe, it will be a person that has looked their illness and all the stigma attached to it straight in its face and said, “No, this is my life and I will take my experiences with this illness and use it to advocate, educate and support! It!”

Was it an honor to be appointed president of this affiliate? Absolutely! I am not sure anyone could possibly realize my determination. I don't need a manic episode to get things done and I don't need a manic episode to release myself from fear of stigma and judgment. Oh no, those things do not even phase me. I was near death – many ARE near death – I am determined.

Dorothy was the name of the wonderful woman that answered the telephone that desperate day from the hospital. Last night, every time I heard her voice and looked across the room and saw her face – I could not help to take myself back to those days and months that lasted all too long. I wasn't thinking about myself – there I was, dressed to the nine's, feeling great, presenting a meeting and knowing that I was going home to my beautiful home with my beautiful and supportive family. What I was thinking of was the “call”. Who doesn't know who to call? How many are out there, right now, not know who to call? How many people are completely alone? How many people have no recourse, no strategy, no home, food, or friendship – because their illness has taken it all away? How many are dying or are going to be dead without anyone knowing? Unfortunately... I know the answer, far too many.

These are the events that constantly replay in my mind. I have met hundreds of these people. I do not have guilt for my life, the way it is now. I just don't believe in wasting energy that way. I don't deserve anything, but I also don't have to apologize or be ashamed of having a nice life either. However, I could never live with myself if I did not do something about something I know and experienced. When I see a homeless person on the street – I identify. When I see a person with a blank gaze in their eyes – I identify. When I see someone strapped to a restraint chair – I identify and when I see someone hauled off to prison – I identify. When I see someone that is mentally ill going through any of these experiences, I not only identify – I engage.

I engage in one thought pattern – “How can I help”. I already know it is happening. I already know why it is happening and already know, especially in a rural area, that it will be done without any accountability or support. Therefore I ask, “How can I help.”

The mental health component of Ohio’s budget has taken a hit like no other. The department itself could be considered, “in crisis”. But we haven’t seen anything yet. With absolutely no proactive approach to mental illness in the immediate term – we are going to see a long-term effect like we have never seen before. Do we honestly believe that we can simply shuttle everyone that is mentally ill into the prison system? Take out the human aspect of this tragic thought process – an inmate in the Ohio Department of Corrections costs 32 thousands per year – a mentally ill inmate can easily double that cost. I won’t even get started on the actual reality of placing a non-violent mentally ill person in prison. Let’s just say it is a great entertainment and even a gift to those that actually live and belong in prison!

“How can I help?”

Here’s how – The National Alliance on Mental Illness has a voice. NAMI has programs that are there and waiting for any and all communities throughout the United States. These programs are provided for free to consumers and families. NAMI has programs to work WITH the justice system and to work WITH local law enforcement to promote the overall recovery of the consumer. NAMI can offset the loss to the budget cuts experienced by the Department of Mental Health by providing direct education and programs to the people dealing with mental illness and their families.

Last month (January 2010) – 17,232 people hit this website. You are from around the world and I thank you so very much. Most of you are located in the United States.

Do your part – please. Become a member of NAMI. Your responsibility is only your membership fee of \$35.00 unless you would like to do more or donate your time and energy to help us in this cause. The affiliate that I am directly connected with is the NAMI Van Wert, Mercer and Paulding Counties of Ohio; however ALL of the affiliates throughout the United States needs your help.

It is not a matter of “it is time to take matter into our own hands”. It is “We must take matters into our own hands!” I am a financially analytical person and I assure you that the cost of the direction that we are going is devastating. The programs and education that NAMI provides can make a difference in a huge way. Communities taking care of communities!

I have had an incredible life, simply incredible. I have realized all of my dreams - I really did. But there is one left and that dream is that this group of people that I love so dearly, the mentally il - reach theirs! Given the fact that I reach my dreams in the past - I have no doubt I can realize this one as well.

To Join NAMI - [Click Here](#) Thank You.