

"If we all did the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves."

**- Thomas Edison**

This quote came up today on my Daily Quotes. At first I laughed for some reason and then I actually started thinking about it. I was thinking about it in the realm of Advocacy. I admire anyone that advocates for a cause or purpose they believe in. This thought pattern always leads me to my own cause and the methods in which I take to advocate.

Originally, I became an advocate for the mentally ill as a person that had experienced some of the horrifying aspects of the illness and all that it can do. As the past 15 months have progressed and as I rewrite and edit my book – I see how this mission or purpose of advocacy has been altered and evolved out my research and education in the field of Mental Health Awareness.

An advocate's position is never easy. First, many don't want to hear the message so you must find a humanizing factor to build a conduit to all you reach out to. An advocate is also challenged often, so you must be prepared to not only defend your mission/purpose, but transcend the rhetoric with facts. Obviously this is something that I eat, breathe and sleep.

I sleep with a journal beside my bed designated simply for the purpose of writing down ideas that come to my mind throughout the night. I analyze how I cope with certain things to bring me back to balance and write them down. I think of perspectives of others that don't understand the importance of mental health awareness to use in columns and write them down. Lately, I wake up with rewrites for Harrison's Story, the book because it is just not all that I want it to be yet. Originally I thought it was my editors blocking me, but it isn't that at all – it is me. While the book is very good and has been judged so by professionals – it is not as raw as it needs to be and I am determined to find that perfect balance between pure realism and hope in such a complicated life. I never pegged myself for a perfectionist, however I have wanted to write all of my life and I have been given a tremendous opportunity to not only write but to advocate and it will be as perfect as it can possibly be.

"If we all did the things we were capable of" covers so much – it even covers simply being compassionate... something we are all capable of. Ten years ago, I could have never been an effective advocate. Mental Illness was about me, it was about my struggle. Anger and hurt fueled my life rather than purpose. I have often written about the day that transformed for me, sitting on the park bench and realizing, "I don't want anyone to every feel this way" versus "I don't want to feel this way". It was nearly three years before I would be at a point in my life that I could use my voice to advocate. While I had shifted my way of thinking, it simply was not the time to take on a cause – I had a great deal of healing and recovery to do. I have always said, there is a great difference between – 'my time' and 'God's time' and his is always right. All too often my wants and so called needs, even when generous and in good spirit, were pushed into effect by – 'my

time'. There is a certain level of selflessness that comes along with advocacy – because it cannot be about you – yet, often it is you that is attacked for your message or even worse – ignored. There is a balancing act for not taking that personally and regrouping and realizing a better course of action.

Advocacy for mental illness has certainly become my “calling” or “purpose”. Yet, I don't view advocating as simply getting a message out there and getting people to listen. Mental Health and Mental Illness affect all of us whether people want to realize that or not. The simplicity that people bring to mental illness is a very frustrating aspect of this whole cause. Advocacy is very much about educating. Educating not only the general public, but the mentally ill and their families as well. Through the years I have met countless people that cannot speak for themselves for a variety of reasons. It was the emotion of advocacy that entered my life far before the word did.

The general population “write off” people with mental illness, mental struggles, emotional battles and addiction with the definition of weakness and irresponsibility. We have seen this to the extremes with the recent Hollywood deaths. I simply cringe when I hear these news reports. I say this with confidence to those that simplify these lives and sit back and judge as compared to your life – “You couldn't do it! You could not live their emotional life!” So when you say, “What a waste of life – don't look at them, look at yourself and who YOU have sat back and judged and written off with your prejudice, your comparisons and your arrogance. Ask yourself the question... “Who would choose that life?” and answer it with “No one – if that had a choice!” We all handle tribulation differently and we are given certain tools to do so. We all have a purpose and we all have the ability to do all that we are capable of and sometimes, if not all the time – our biggest capability that we do not use is our compassion – and with that, you would astound yourself.