

As I said in my previous column, people that I met over the weekend truly inspired me and empowered me. I sat back and listened to their stories and couldn't help remembering different times in my own life. Times like that of a guy actually nearly spitting on me in the streets and laughing when I never even said anything to him. Times that people looked at me as if I were a disease itself. The various stigmatic names that I have been defined as by various people through the years. The comments like, "he will never do anything with his life" or "he is just what his is and that isn't much". This list could go on and on.

What I was concentrating on however, was not the disappointment in all that had been said and done. None of those people ever hurt me any more than I allowed them too. People that I thought knew me and turned their backs however might as well have been saying all that the others were – because that is how it all translated to me. Those that remained indifferent and never reached out validated everything that those above had defined me as. That is just what it is and that can't change now. What can change is this.

There are so many people. From children to adults that are only looking for that helping hand. That hand of encouragement and those words that say, "You are worth more than this!" No one needs anyone to "change their lives" for them – but when battling mental illness – one does need someone to say, "you are not your illness, you are so much more!" Empowering someone is not a difficult thing. It really is not difficult at all. That is what makes it so much more frustrating, that people would CHOOSE to degrade others for a choice they never had!

People, like me that have taken their experiences and moved forth in advocacy and support have had that helping hand. NO ONE did it for them! Their battle, their fight and their perseverance is something unmatched. I won't even research the statistics behind how many have lost their lives, live on the streets and are in prison because they don't have a hand of hope to grab on to. I don't even want to know the numbers.

The other aspect of it all is the fact that I met no one that wanted admiration for their fight. They were simply saying, "How can I translate my experiences into a format that can HELP people like me!" People discussing stories of their lives that society in general spit on... just to help another person like me.

Once again – just think what you could do!