

**“Measure your success by how much you gave up for it.”
– The Dali Lama**

This past week has been a rough one. A little depression and aggravation seemed to sneak up on me when I wasn't looking. This is a reminder of the ability of Mental Illness. Even when you are doing everything right and taking great measures to insure your stability, you can be caught off guard by a shift in moods. This is also why I did not write this week, on the website.

Last night it came to me what a mistake that has been, not writing, because I am in an episode. It would not be fair to constantly portray myself as having symptoms of Mental Illness only in the past. Mental Illness does not come and go whether the symptoms are there or not.

Being reminded that you have a Mental Illness when you are doing everything right can be very disturbing. My symptoms started simple enough. A little less energy and a feeling of exhaustion started to set in. I was aware after the second day that things weren't right and attempted to counteract the attack (sounds dramatic, but when you have been suicidal, attack is fitting) with every coping skill I had readily available. Since I have been concentrating on formatting my book for editing, I knew that I could dive into that project to deter the negative domino effect that was about to come. It was then that I found myself pacing a lot and not effectively working on the manuscript... my mind was getting cloudy and I couldn't focus on anything, let alone Harrison's Story. I looked forward to

night – when the world would shut down and then I would not appear to be moving so slowly.

I analyze myself a lot, maybe too much. But the analyzing had begun... Every element of my life is moving congruently to where it needs to be, yet I didn't feel "right". There are many factors that play into depression. You have the chemical element that can be very subtle and then the environmental elements that not only draw from the present, but the past.

Many with Mental Illness, especially at my age, have many negative elements for depression to attach to and thereby attack you. This was certainly the case over the past week or so. "Who do I think I am?" "What are you doing?" "You are the same person that was sitting in that prison 10 years ago and then again a year ago!" "Do you honestly believe you have the talent, the skill and the heart to be a part of change in a field that is bigger than you even know?" "You are 'Crazy' and 'Loony Tune', you take 'skittles' and are a pathetic excuse for a man, 'we ought to kill ya all rather than feed ya your pills'! The voices of the past, memories that will haunt me for undoubtedly the rest of my life start flooding in. This is the food of depression, the mega vitamin, if you will. It cascades into a flood of emotions and memories. A reality that after all is not just a nightmare... A life that has been nothing close to normal... and a life that has been nothing remotely close to pleasant. Lonely, distraught, and abandoned were those days. Those emotions just as those with rape and hunger are so finely implanted on the top my skin that even a slight reminder takes me back via the movie in my mind. You might be able to understand how it is so difficult to pull yourself through such an episode.

So, what did carry me through? What brought back the light? Last night I laid in bed with these visions and voices – I listened intently with no other sound in the room for several hours. One thing was said that is the wrong thing to say to me... “You can’t change anything, you can’t make a difference in anyone’s life, your story will be an embarrassment to you, and you can’t do a thing about anything!”

Certain words and phrases are a part of my arsenal to defend people, voices and hallucinations and one of those words is “CAN’T”! I loathe that word. SO – when the phrase, “you can’t do a thing about anything!” came across the radar, the light bulb went off and my response aloud was, “The hell I can’t!”

You see my mission has not ever been about “saving the world”, it is about helping to empower those that I ‘CAN’. I have no delusion of wiping out the entire stigma of Mental Illness throughout the world. I do however know without doubt that I can give hope to those who have none. There is no illness nor person nor voice nor hallucination that I will allow to stand in the way of doing just that.

When I saw the quote that came across my desk this morning... “Measure your success by how much you gave up for it!” by the Dali Lama and pondered for a bit that idea. A success that I once based on titles, money and popularity has been transformed into a non-ego based success and for that I have given everything. I have given everything I am for the cause of the Mentally Ill – I have lived their experiences, their hardships, their hunger, their rape, their aloneness, their heartache, their

fear and the hate that they felt through their lives. No book, no amount of money, no public adoration will ever overcome the price... what I gave up for my cause, my success.

The voices can continue and they will, the negative views and opinion of others can and will continue, the challenges will go on, the memories will always be an existing movie in my mind, and I don't have the power to make this disease cease to exist. But you see, I am already successful beyond my wildest dreams. I shook the hands of others like me, I cried to sleep in hope not fear for them, I have met them personally, I have looked into their eyes and I have spoke and I have existed and I have proved that they can maintain, they can stabilize and that regardless of what I look like, I am just as they are, we are one and we are successful.

I have been to the mountain top. I've lived better than most could even possibly imagine. I have also lived worse than most could possibly imagine. That is why it is success, because I find joy in being with those who need to be empowered to go on and share all the tremendous gifts that they to share with us all.

Today, well... I feel pretty good. And today, I realized that I have a **HECK OF A LOT OF WORK TO DO! HA!**