

“Strong”

Many look at me and see someone that must be “strong”. Someone that has gone through and overcome challenges and obstacles that most would never want to be faced with.

I am not “strong” however. A dear friend of mine calls it tenacity, others call it determination and some call it simply competitive. I am great at hiding my weakness. In my corporate days, I was often nicknamed the “silver sword tongue”. I wasn’t quite sure what that meant, so I asked one day. A colleague said, “Are you kidding? You can cut someone in half with words!” I guess you could say I am not real proud of that nickname; I don’t like to cut people down. When I look back, I guess the fact was and still may be with some, which if I feel threatened – that words would be my weapon. I believe we all have different weapons against our insecurities and our search within ourselves and to our higher power often finds us realizing why we do what we do.

But “strong”? No, I don’t think I can use that word to describe myself. When faced in the past with symptoms of my illness, I never had the strength to resist them for long. If I have any strength at all, it comes from two places... “Knowing who are good people and good for me” and “knowing God”. I have said in the past that I am not fond of “believing”. Beliefs are fallible and can change for any number of reasons. What I know, I know and these two things, I know.

While enveloped by depression, paranoia and all that goes with it – one tends to (at least I do) get trapped in a vicious circle of regret and loss of friends and family of the past. This morning is a beautiful spring morning with the birds chirping and I sat down to my computer to look back on the emails that I have received over the past week. “Strong?” NOW THAT IS STRONG! I don’t like to consider myself a “needy” or “high maintenance” person either, but I am certain I can be! ☺ However, I don’t think someone going through chemotherapy is considered high maintenance, just their illness – so I have changed that paradigm in my own mind as well. I would do anything for someone in need – I am not high maintenance but my illness certainly can be, at times.

I have often said, “A person with mental illness most likely cannot maintain the life you would want him to, alone.” I feel even more deeply about that this Saturday morning. I felt a great sense of safety in the emails that I reread this morning. I don’t let things go to my ego; I simply thank God for compliments and encouragement. What I do take from the outreach that I received, is safety. I am safe because I know that I can be honest and say, “I don’t feel well and I am not sure I can take on that task” and not get a negative response or consequence. I feel safety in the fact that if friends and my parents are watching me, that I can allow myself to dive into my feelings and deal with them rather than ignore them and know that if I don’t recover in a couple of days... things will go to a different level of recovery.

If you don’t have that in your life... you’re fighting a battle that is certainly beyond anything I have ever won.

The reason I wanted to explain this today was not for me, but for those out there that are dealing with mental illness and to somehow, to the best of my ability, explain exactly what it means to have “support” and what it means to be “strong”.

At times, you (as family and friends) are the chemo and the strength to endure. As I have said over and over, it isn't what you say – it is knowing where it comes from, Love, that is the most important medicine to administer.

I have since retired the “silver sword tongue” and rather than cut people down to size, choose to build them up with words. Combatting insecurities with the exact opposite of instinct can be a very powerful thing.