

## Why can't i?

Just got off the treadmill after working on the site for a few hours this morning and trying to gather some new and empowering things to share. Yes, I will admit – I feel GREAT after the treadmill! I bet you didn't think you would hear me say that anytime soon, did you?

While on the treadmill, instead of threatening it and trying to figure out where the autopilot was – I was listening to a speech I wrote that I will share with you after Wednesday. Why Wednesday? Let me tell you about my week.

On Monday I was off with my colleague and friend to Columbus. First stop the NAMI Ohio office where we sat down with the Executive Director and discussed how I could help NAMI Ohio do several things throughout our state to better represent our mission and give our affiliates the tools they need to raise the bar of our advocacy, support, education and awareness.

Next stop... the Ohio Supreme Court! I had been invited to join in on the Advisory Committee on Mental Illness and the Court [ACMIC], chaired by Justice Evelyn Stratton. Yes, ME at the Ohio Supreme Court. I was pretty excited. The meeting lasted just a little over 2 hours and representation from all over the different departments of the state of Ohio were present. Including, the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections and Department of Youth Services that I paid special attention to, obviously.

I met with Justice Statton after the meeting and I have to say, I am most impressed by her passion and her devotion to our common cause. Justice Stratton, Chief Justice Eric Brown and I are all presenters Wednesday evening at the NAMI annual dinner.

No worries, nothing goes to my ego. I walked out of the Supreme Court and had to catch myself from tearing up. I thought to myself, "Thank GOD – change is possible and help for the mentally ill is being taken seriously."

We also traveled to several NAMI Affiliates, including Cincinnati and Butler County and it was great to have the time to learn more about these affiliates and their needs.

The above, is why I haven't written a column this week. I miss it when I don't have the time to write, but this week I was busy making good memories to overlay the bad – making a difference rather than reveling in the past. – THAT felt good!

Throughout the years I have had a lot of people tell me, "you can't do that" or maybe even believe, by their actions that because of my past... I have no significance to the present and the future. I will steal a line from Coach Merrill... "REALLY"!

16 months ago I walked out the gates of a prison – on Monday, I walked into the Ohio Supreme Court and took part in an Advisory Committee on Mental Illness and the Courts. On Wednesday, I am presenting with two Ohio Supreme Court Justices. I repeat this for one

reason... Don't ever discount the mentally ill. For that matter, don't ever discount anyone. It is pretty amazing what God does with passion, purpose and determination.

I would never have the strength to do what I am doing without divine intervention. I assure you of that.

I want people living with mental illness and families of, to realize that they must never give up hope. Relieve yourself of any expectations that don't have anything to do with anything but your mental health. From only a stable mind, a balanced mind can anything come. You must take care of yourself in order to reach your goals and your dreams. And yes, you are allowed dreams and you are allowed to make them come true! Don't let mental illness define YOU – YOU define mental illness. Don't let people define you – YOU define who is in your life and who isn't. There are 6.5 billion people on this earth – if someone is degrading you, move on to the next – there are plenty of people on this earth that have compassion, understanding the wherewithal to know that you are NOT your illness.

Is it easy? OH NO! Not easy at all. Remember my journey into the abyss started 11 years ago. Remember all the experiences that I had gone through – remember all the times that I did give up, to only be brought up by my faith. No, it isn't easy – it isn't easy at all – especially when stigma, prejudice and judgment are still SO prevalent in our society.

The next time some stigmatizes you... the next time they look down on you or judge you... I urge you to go to the home page and look through the collage of people that have contributed so much to this world and ask yourself about the person that is judging YOU, "What have THEY contributed?" I would be willing to guess, if judgmental – they haven't contributed much!

There are many subjects that I want to approach throughout the month of May. I want to hit on many of the serious issues facing the mentally ill. I also want to introduce you to success stories, stories of inspiration and empowerment. This month is Mental Health Awareness month. May we all be aware and compassionate enough to educate ourselves on the issues that those with mental illness face and not just in May, but throughout our lives.

Cory