



Healing the Heart Through the Creative Arts, Education & Advocacy

Hope, Healing & Help for Trauma, Abuse & Mental Health

“Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars.” - Kahlil Gibran

Hi Folks,

Greetings to all – May is Mental Health Awareness Month and one of the things that comes through front and center for me is how far we still need to go in eliminating the stigma and discrimination that comes up for those dealing with a mental health concern – I must be honest, I still have a hard time in using the words “mental illness” because they have caused me so much harm. Though diagnosed with complex post-traumatic stress and depression, I honestly don’t feel that I am “mentally ill”. Parts of society may think differently on this terminology and that’s okay. But what is not okay is how so many of us have been mistreated because of that label and all that is associated with it. I will be brief in this summary because I have also shared some words at the end of this newsletter that address some other important matters that need be talked about in regards to the awareness pertaining to what this month represents.

We have a lot of great resources to share and please take your time and when you can to visit many of these helpful healing websites. Some common themes that seem to resonate from so many of those who advocate are the isolation, persecution, estrangement and so much more because of their having to deal with a mental health concern. In a sense we are cut-off from society in so many ways, whether it is family, friends, co-workers, treatment providers and so many more – and how that hurts. It is certainly not conducive for healing to take place. Some of the ancient societies and cultures used banishment from the group as an extreme form of punishment – we live in the here and now and still so many of us have been banished from our respective communities by the actions and inactions of others. I hope and pray that someday that isolation and persecution ends.

"Many times breakdowns are break throughs, meltdowns are rebirth's and loosing your mind is how you will find your heart" – Author unknown

Here are a few articles that offer *Hope, Healing & Help* – Anchor Magazine 2009

<http://speakersbureau.survivingspirit.com/pdfs/articleanchorspring091.pdf>

I wrote this back in the fall of 2002 for Health Care Review and later reprinted by Mental Health World – “Changing the Stigma of Mental Illness”

<http://mskinnermusic.com/pdfs/MentalHealthWorld.pdf>

[1] Deb Damone who is a friend, mom, wife, advocate, author and founder of – **PIPER** [People Improving Peer Empowering Recovery] has published her second book “*The Ominous Betrayal*”

PIPER is associated with the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance [DBSA], a national mental health advocacy organization. Her website has a really good You Tube video [7:53 minutes] that touches upon the healing power of peer support and the manifestations of mental health concerns – she advocates - “*people first*”. This video can serve as a template for other grassroots groups, organizations and long running groups – because sometimes we can “*lose the forest from the trees*”

<http://www.piperli.org/Piper/index.html> DBSA- <http://www.dbsalliance.org>

[2] **Stress Management** – Elizabeth Scott, MS - <http://stress.about.com/>

Edward Infield one of our friends, “down under” [Australia] shared this helpful resource [Thanks Edward!!] This helpful website covers a lot of ground in regards to Stress Management, Causes, Effects and How To Manage. Just clicking on the Relationships tab along with the Traits and Attitudes That Increase Stress are well worth the visit. Information is also provided for receiving a free newsletter for Stress Management.

[3] **The Wellness Institute** *for Mind, Body & Spirit* sends out a really helpful and insightful newsletter - *Words of Wellness* that is edited by Jay Yudoff and Peggy Swarbrick. You can visit the website and download a copy via this link - <http://welltacc.org/newsletter/about-words-of-wellness.html>

Lots of good stuff on resiliency, job seeking tips, energy drinks and lots more, but please make sure you read the Book Review on pg. 4 – “*Not Crazy: You May Not Be Mentally Ill*” by Dr. Charles Whitfield – this review by Tony Giordano is a great read and gives you lots to think about.

[4] My reading of the above mentioned book review led me to Tony Giordano’s website to learn some more about him, his advocacy work and his book – “*It’s Not All in Your Head: Unearthing the Deep Roots of Depression*”

I think these paragraphs posted at his website sum it up best – “While struggling to identify the origin of a puzzling and overpowering depression that abruptly struck in mid-life, the author strives to navigate our antiquated mental healthcare system to get effective diagnosis and treatment. Along the way Tony learns some surprising lessons about this increasingly common but misunderstood illness, lessons which expose widespread misconceptions about depression and illuminate its pervasive stigma.”

“Unless they’ve personally had to endure the horrors of depression, most people cannot begin to understand its devastating power. Nor do they recognize that the roots of the illness often date back many years to destructive, traumatic circumstances. They should not feel weak or guilty or ashamed, but they’re often made to feel this way. That’s why I

wrote this book. Depression is not “all in your head.” It can involve crippling neurological and physical conditions, including brain damage. When I learned all this, I was able to begin healing.”

To learn more about Tony, his work and his book, please visit <http://itnotallinyourhead.com/>

“When we long for life without difficulties, remind us that oaks grow strong in contrary winds and diamonds are made under pressure.” Peter Marshall

[5] Trailer for "**OPEN DIALOGUE**," an alternative Finnish approach to healing psychosis - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aBjlvnRFja4>

This clip is only 3:10 minutes long – again, something to think about and reframe the possibilities of healing from “mental illness”.

"OPEN DIALOGUE," is a 74-minute documentary on the Western Lapland Open Dialogue Project, the program presently getting the best results in the developed world for first-break psychosis -- approximately 85% full recovery, a far majority off anti-psychotic medication. Filmed in Finland & directed by Daniel Mackler. <http://www.iraesoul.com/dvd3.html>

[6] Pat Risser, Mental Health Consultant is another “Surviving Spirit” who has an extensive history of advocacy and creating awareness around the issues of mental health and trauma. He’s outspoken and looking to shake up the status quo, but that’s okay, it needs some shaking. I’m also glad to know Pat on a personal level and think only the best of who he is and what he is trying to do in his efforts of helping others impacted by trauma, abuse and mental health concerns. <http://www.patrisser.com/>

[7] *“Coming Out of the cRaZy Closet”* - Lynda Lee

“Although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of the overcoming of it.” Helen Keller

How true and Lynda Lee’s story of *hope, healing & help* is one more shining example of the power of the human spirit in overcoming great adversity.

“In 1967, at the age of 14, I was diagnosed with schizophrenia ~ the catch-all psychiatric diagnosis of that era ~ and committed to a State Mental Institution, where I remained for 2 years. Although I've been told by numerous doctors over the years that I was badly misdiagnosed, I have been branded with the stigma of "mental illness" ever since. To this day I am treated like an embarrassment, and a social outcast, by the majority in my family of origin.”

Not until 2003, after a full battery of psychological tests did she finally learn what has affected her life for all of those years – Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

You can learn more about Lynda Lee and her upcoming book at -
<http://www.comingoutofthecrazycloset.blogspot.com/>

"We can't help everyone, but everyone can help someone." ~ Loretta Scott

[8] Some great news to share from my friend Judith Haire & the folks at **Chipmunka Publishing** from "across the pond" - 51 free E books from <http://www.chipmunkapublishing.co.uk> They are available to download for free by visiting the site, clicking E books and Specials

Chipmunka Publishing promotes mental health books that give a voice to writers with mental illness around the world. "We raise awareness of mental health and the stigma surrounding mental health problems encouraging society to listen. We are documenting mental health literature as a genre so history does not forget the survivors and careers of people with mental illness and disabilities."

[9] Judith also has two chapters in this just released book – "**Our Encounters with Madness**" - Edited by Alec Grant, Fran Biley and Hannah Walker

"A collection of user, carer and survivor narratives, this book is grouped under five themes: *On diagnosis; Stories of experience (of mental health problems); Experiencing the mental health system; On being a carer and Abuse and Survival.*

The book should be of great benefit to students of mental health, narrative enquiry, user and carers, and those interested in the pedagogy of suffering more generally. Unlike most other books in this genre, the narratives are unmediated. Written by experts by experience, there are no professional, biomedical or psychotherapeutic commentaries, which so often serve to capture, tame or sanitize such stories of direct experience."

<http://www.pccs-books.co.uk/product.php?xProd=569&xSec=1>

[10] Antidepressants May Not Improve All Symptoms of Depression, UT Southwestern Researchers Find - study funded by the National Institute of Mental Health.

"Even people who show a clear treatment response with antidepressant medications continue to experience symptoms like insomnia, sadness and decreased concentration, researchers have found after analyzing data from the largest study on the treatment of depression." <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/04/110421082524.htm>

[11] **2011 Grant Application Now Open**

Deadline for completed grant applications: June 8, 2011

The Creative Capital | Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant Program supports individual writers whose work addresses contemporary visual art through grants in the

following categories: articles, blogs, books, new and alternative media, and short-form writing. Grants range from \$3,000 to \$50,000 depending on the needs and scope of the project. <http://artswriters.org/index.php?action=home>

[12] Unveiling the Stigma

“Why is there such a stigma surrounding mental illness when in any given year almost 58 MILLION Americans suffer from this disorder?”

“We have sprung a far distance in the medical field, yet psychological ailments are still significantly taboo to most. If we are going to help the mentally ill in this country, and indeed the world at large, we need to expose and treat the relevant conditions. If we choose to bury them beneath the dusty carpet surely those who suffer will continue to live in denial, continue to live in pain, or feel the shame society projects. There is no shame to mental illness.

Unveiling the Stigma promotes the exposure of mental illness. We are advocates for suicide prevention. *Why? Because we have been there!* We walk the walks, and we talk the talk. We are Survivors of Suicide. We are Survivors of Suicide Attempts. We are Survivors of Drug Addiction. We are Survivors of Alcohol Addiction. We are Survivors of Abuse, and other Mental Ailments.” <http://www.unveilingthestigma.com/>

Finally, some words about another subject matter that raises a devastating impact upon all of us – Suicide. Today, May 15th would have been my brother David’s 56th birthday. This has been on my mind all week knowing that I had planned to put this newsletter together this weekend and wondering how best to do it. Realizing that this would be a little more difficult to tackle, I felt that a nice way to honor his memory and birthday would be by doing a piece of advocacy awareness that pertained to the issues of trauma, abuse and mental health. David was a *gentle spirit*, sadly he didn’t find the means and the ways to survive all that he had encountered in life – David and my other brother Danny who also took his life were military veterans, but their trauma, like so many others came from childhood. I have been hearing for some time now from those I respect of different studies and the knowledge by the military that 50 - 60 % of the soldiers diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD] had prior childhood traumas. Recently while in Washington, DC as part of a group addressing trauma in judicial settings, a judge remarked of a study [or studies] showing that upwards of 80% of the vets struggling with PTSD had prior childhood traumas. As a society, we need to stop ignoring this “*Elephant*” that sits in our living rooms. Other studies show that up to 90% of those in Public Mental Systems are dealing with trauma and most of it is going untreated and ignored. We must do better in addressing this to prevent any more loss of life or suffering.

*"Dare to reach your hand into the darkness to pull another hand into the light."
~ Norman Rice*

Please take some time to also visit the website that Ann Jennings has created in honor of her daughter who she lost to suicide.

The Anna Institute celebrates and honors the life of Anna Caroline Jennings, by using her artwork and life experience to educate others on the hidden epidemic of childhood, trauma and their horrific lifelong impacts on society, and paths to prevention and healing. <http://www.theannainstitute.org/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), a free, 24-hour hotline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. With Help Comes Hope <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention - 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
<http://www.afsp.org/>

Take care, Mike

ps. Please share this with your friends & if you have received this in error, please let me know.

*Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.
~Martin Luther King, Jr.*

A diagnosis is not a destiny.

www.survivingspirit.com – Healing the Heart Through the Creative Arts, Education & Advocacy

<http://speakersbureau.survivingspirit.com/> - Speakers' Bureau

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Surviving-Spirit/138180506227288> – Facebook – Surviving Spirit

www.mskinnermusic.com - Hope, Healing, & Help for Trauma, Abuse, & Mental Health through music, resources, & advocacy

www.new.facebook.com/profile.php?id=635415804%20 – Facebook - Michael Skinner
- Friends, Music & Advocacy

www.youtube.com/mcstrain - live performance of "Brush Away Your Tears" – a song written for those hurt as children

mikeskinner@comcast.net 603-625-2136 38 River Ledge Drive, Goffstown, NH 03045

"BE the change you want to see in the world." Mohandas Gandhi