

Finding the meaning of hope

by Ellen in Massachusetts

My story is a story of others holding hope for me for a very long time until I could find hope for myself and find the meaning of hope. Basically, my story started the day I was conceived, but it came to fruition in 1981. I graduated from high school in 1981 and to a lot of people's surprise I applied for college. To my surprise, I received a scholarship from my school's booster club and off to college I went.

Throughout all these years, I worked part-time during the school year and full-time during the summer months. I thought college was going to be just what I needed. It was going to be a way to prove to myself and everyone else that I was going to be something in life. When I first enrolled in school, I elected computer science as my major. A couple weeks into school I ran to a friend that I had played ice hockey against who told me that she had been recruited as a goaltender for the women's ice hockey team and that tryouts were in a couple of days.

I had been involved in athletics my entire life. I didn't know what school was going to bring so decided that I would show up at hockey tryouts. Making the hockey team as a walk-on my freshman year and being a full-time student did not make my life any better or easier, except for being offered a dorm room so I wouldn't have to commute to hockey everyday for six months.

I progressively went down hill mentally. I hated everyone more and more as the days went on, and myself as well. I didn't know what was going on. I didn't know that I was sick. I was getting sicker and sicker. I barely finished my freshman year, flunking a majority of my courses because I couldn't understand or comprehend what was being taught. After my freshman year, I continued to work. I moved off campus and changed my major thinking things would be better. No chance.

I dropped out of school because I just couldn't do it anymore. I felt like I couldn't do anything. Confused, angry and lost is what I was. After several months of living off campus and working, I decided I was going to move back home. I started to think and ask myself what was going on with me. I decided on my own that maybe I needed some kind of help, but what would that be?

Things got worse and worse at home. I was up walking around all night and going to work in the morning. If I wasn't at home or at work, I was just driving around for hours on end in my car. Sitting in empty parking lots drinking diet soda, I decided on my own to open up the yellow pages and start calling local counseling centers. I just did it randomly. I didn't really know what I was getting into. I didn't tell anyone at all for fear that I would be judged and be looked at as just wanting to get attention from someone on the outside. I kept it a secret. I set up an appointment with a community counseling center and started going twice a week. I got worse and worse. One day I went to my counselor's office in danger so they would not let me leave. I was hospitalized for three months.

I grew more and more depressed and despondent. This was the first time in my life that I couldn't trust or take care of myself. After my hospitalization, I was transferred to a state hospital because my private insurance ran out. I was hospitalized over and over again. It was a revolving door. Nobody knew what to do or how to help me, and neither did I. I continued on this path for over 12 years. I was sent to a state hospital

and told that it would be my home. In all, I was hospitalized over 35 times in 12 years.

Between hospitalizations, I attended day treatment full-time. I made attempts on my life and hurt myself repeatedly. I couldn't put into words what hurt so bad. To be totally honest, I don't know if I truly knew then. Over the years I had several things that took place medically besides having a mental illness. The medical things did make things much easier, but I got through them.

After spending 12 years in and out of treatment, I decided to go back to work. Just maybe I could do it. I would go to work and enjoy it. I started missing day treatment and cutting down my hours there.

One day I picked up the phone and called my younger brother who had started his own company and asked if he needed any help in his office. I didn't know what he would say or what I could do.

I started at my brother's office working about 5-10 hours to week. Suddenly, I was a full-time employee. It was good for a while. Then it became a nightmare. I spent nine years there. I was responsible and reliable. I could pay my own bills and get my own apartment. I could get a loan without a co-signer. I am trusted and trustworthy. After nine years, I decided that I needed a change in jobs.

I didn't know what I would do, but I was laid off from my job because I was very unhappy there. After training a new employee, I left without another job in hand. I immediately started to look for a new job and signed up for unemployment. I was sending many resumes out and making many calls. I had an interview at one particular place and knew after the first interview that I wanted the job. I had a total of three interviews at this agency and I've been working there two years. I love it and am excited about going to work.

What does the future holds for me? I went through a lot of difficult times and am not minimizing them. I was on SSI and SSDI and got food stamps and had a mental health case manager. I lived in Section 8 housing and was hospitalized many, many times. I didn't like the life I was living, but it was what it was, and I can't change it.

I've had many people in my life care a great deal about my welfare and still care about me and have helped. If I hadn't decided to go back to work for my brother, I don't know where I would be sitting now. I worked hard and still do, and I think that has gotten me where I am today. I had and have many people in my life that held onto hope for me for a very long time. I needed to figure out that there was hope for me in this world. I hold hope in the palm of my hand each and every day. Sometimes I have to hold onto it harder than other days, but I know that there is hope out there for everyone.