

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single "bold" step

by Senokafe in Tennessee

My mental illness has affected every aspect of my life. I am bipolar, so the constant array of mood swings has caused me to re-evaluate my friendships and my relationship with my family. I am constantly up or down, so I feel as if I am in an eternal struggle or tug of war. I love my family and friends dearly, but for the spectator (them) and me (the participant in this tug of war) the perspectives are different. Although people don't really understand me, they can appreciate my struggle because I remind them of it. I am a self-advocate in a way, correcting the stigma imposed on me by others and the stigma I impose on myself.

I am on disability, so I don't work. I used to work, but I didn't quite have the tools to deal with my illness, which I was diagnosed with in my early twenties. I am 31, so I would say that I am an old soldier. I know the tricks of the trade, all the self-help jargon and the language of mental illness. I go to a psycho-social program, Aspire, where I learn about mental illnesses and life skills such as computers and other job training. I am hoping to get another job soon and wean myself off of disability.

If there was one thing I would change about the way people view mental illnesses, it would be the label associated with them. We are, for the most part, humble individuals who have challenged the status quo by being productive citizens and are not a bunch of paranoid, psychotic individuals who indulge in revelry and crime. We have lives and families, are actors, athletes, and even some of us hold public offices throughout this great nation. In essence, I am proud of my accomplishments, and look forward to accomplishing much more before I kick the bucket. The journey of a thousand miles, the great philosopher Lao Tzu says, begins with one single step. I am taking this bold step, and wherever fate takes me, I will gladly follow.