

## **Mental illness is not a personal illness it affects everyone close to that person**

by Louise in Nevada

I was in high school when I first remember thinking that killing myself would solve my problems. Back then, I had never heard of depression or even knew mental illness was anything other than what was shown in the movies.

I was in a 14 year abusive marriage. When he left without warning, I didn't know what to do. I was in my second year of teaching and was left with two young children. In the process of taking my kids through counseling, I was diagnosed with major depression. My insurance allowed me 20 visits with a therapist a year and medical management once a month with a psychiatrist. Since I was attending counseling to help my children, I didn't have many visits allowed to help me with my illness. I made my first suicide attempt that year when I finally convinced myself that I was a terrible mother and would never get better. Over the next 17 years, I struggled with the insurance limitations and lack of care. ECT provided some relief the first two times but the third time, it created more problems and my doctor doesn't know why.

Last year, I was hospitalized 4 times. My doctor told me he didn't know how to help me but my insurance won't cover going to a real hospital with a proven treatment program. (The one my insurance allows and is available in my area provides stabilization services, med management, social services, and some group therapy.) I finally had to take disability retirement because I lost my confidence to be with the kids, couldn't remember simple things, and was so anxious that little things could almost immobilize me. I could no longer hide what was happening inside of me. My current therapist noticed that I was a totally different person when I had my dog with me. I am in the process of training her as a psychiatric service dog and because of her I don't stay in bed all day. She has worked better for me than ECT or medication, but this is still not fixing the problem. I am not sure what will happen in the future. I am 51 years old and I've spent most of my life wishing that it was over.

I watched my kids and now watch my grandkids wondering what it would feel like to be able to relax and completely enjoy being with them. I miss teaching my students. I used to enjoy quilting and crafting but I seldom find pleasure in either. I have to force myself to meet friends. I have many periods when doing simple things like cooking a meal seems overwhelming. I taught for 19 years and hold a Master's Degree plus over 80 additional post graduate credits. Now I can't concentrate long enough to read a book without having to reread pages so that I know what is happening.

I hope that someday people will understand that depression and anxiety do not just go away. I wish that health care was available to everyone and that mental health care was as easily accessible as any other health care. I am angry when I read that more research dollars are spent researching tooth decay than depression each year. I am saddened when I see the huge homeless population in my city and hear the statistics that most of them have some form of mental illness yet know they are not getting the care they need. I feel traumatized when I read about the effects of suicide on the survivors. Mental illness is not a personal illness but affects everyone close to that person. Someday I hope it becomes an illness of the past.