

## When someone talks they are giving a window to their heart and their mind

by Karen in Missouri

This month marks the one year anniversary of my nervous breakdown. While the journey is certainly not over, I thought this would be a good time to send a message about it. There are several reasons for the message - one is to make one more attempt to convince the jerks that don't believe in mental diseases that IT IS REAL. Another is for awareness. Perhaps I will find the words to describe things that other sufferers like me have been trying to find all along. Perhaps, even if just for a moment, I will help someone else feel like they are not alone. At any rate, a year ago at this time I had hit rock bottom.

After years of battling depression, anxiety and unexplained emotions I finally said that enough was enough and it was time for me to make the grand exit. I had a plan. I knew what I was going to do and how I was going to do it. Why? Why would someone who has everything want to throw it all away? Spouse, kids, house, job, family, friends, education... Without going into the chain of events, I was stopped and on medical leave I went.

I was fortunate enough to be forced into the offices of a counselor and a psychiatrist who specialize in crisis situations. After begging not to be hospitalized, my real treatment began. I have climbed this uphill battle since I was a teen. I don't recall a time that I did not over-think a conversation or a situation. I don't remember the last time that I was not trying to figure out what other people were thinking about something that I did or said. And along with those years of self affliction comes the long list of doctors and counselors that I have worked with. Each time I thought "This is the one who is going to fix me!" That never happened. Fortunately, this time, the time that I really needed the right help, I got it!

I contacted my OB-GYN and they put me in contact with a women's crisis group who then found me Dr. R and Michelle (my counselor). I will never forget the first visit with Dr. R! We met for three hours! Three hours of questioning as though I was a criminal who just committed murder. He asked anything from "Have you ever had an abusive relationship?" to "What were you like in grade school?" to "How is your relationship with your kids?" and, the worst one of all, "Why do you want to kill yourself and how are you going to do it?"

It was tough. Not only were skeletons coming out of the closet but new ones were being discovered too. This man proceeded with his diagnosis of Chronic Depression, Anxiety Disorder (not a complete shocker there), ADD, OCD, and PMDD. WOW!

Not only did he state each of those but he had supporting evidence from the many questions that I answered for each one that dated back to my childhood! I was both astonished and amazed. The good news? Very little had to do with any dramatic event that occurred in my life. There were a few things that I wanted to keep in that closet but most of it was normal. So how is that good? Because that meant that all of these things were related to chemicals. Chemical imbalances were creating the symptoms that lead to the conditions listed. So, the first order of business was to keep me sedated until I was in a safer state of mind. The next few weeks were full of appointments with Dr. R and the counselor. Shelly confirmed that the chemicals were

the true culprit.

I was lucky enough to have this pair who worked well with one another and communicated after my visits. The weeks, and even months ahead were tough. Who am I kidding? Sometimes it is still tough! You know that things are bad when your husband has to hide your pill bottles from you and personally give you each pill. You know that they are bad when you can watch your child hit their head on a table and stare at them as they stand before you crying with tears rolling down their face. It is bad when your digestive system is so messed up because you hadn't eaten in days. It breaks my heart when I think about the fact that my oldest would look for mommy in the clothes closet before anywhere else when he came home after being gone for the day.

Finally, you know it is bad when you are so ashamed of the thoughts in your head that you just want to die. So what it is about mental diseases that it is frowned upon? We are all aware of cancers and STD's and others but why is it that when someone cries "Depression" it is overlooked? Why is it that it is easy for someone to say, "You are PMS'ing" but they don't understand depression and anxiety? How is one acceptable and the other is not? Both are very real! I used to think that people pleading to insanity in a courtroom was nothing more than a way out. I am sure that at times it is, but I am here to tell you that I have a different view on that now. It is real! By no means am I justifying for any person who has harmed their child or anyone else. What I am saying is that there were certainly some issues that were being ignored.

If I knew years ago what I know now, my life would be different. If I had truly listened to my own thoughts and recognized the distorted feelings that I have carried for so long I could have gotten help much sooner than I did. But, I didn't. Instead, I swallowed a lot of feelings and kept them to myself. I buried feelings so far into the pit of my stomach that I had repressed memories that I just didn't want to deal with. Sure, all of this is fine for a while. But, everyone knows what happens to a tea kettle that boils. Depending on how high the heat is turned up it will eventually boil over- and last year it did.

So, what about now? I am not giving up the fight. Every day is still a battle. I wish that it wasn't but it is. Some days are better than others. On an occasion, I can even figure out new things that help me through different situations.

Regardless of how each day goes, the fact of the matter is that I had that day. I am still here! I know that this is all far from over but I would like to ask one more thing of anyone who reads this. Please listen. That's it! Listen. Listen to your kids when they say they are sad. Never underestimate the importance of the topic. Remember that we are all unique individuals. What is important to you may not be important to them and visa versa. Listen to your spouse. Listen to your friends. Listen to your kid's friends. Listen to your co-workers. Listen. You don't have to agree with what they are saying and you don't have to relate to what they are saying. When someone talks they are giving you a window to their heart and their mind. Don't ever take that for granted. That is a gift that they are giving to you and the gift of knowing someone's thoughts and feelings cannot be traded for anything. Never pass up an opportunity to listen to someone. If I didn't have anyone to listen to me, no one would have ever heard my voice again.