

## **If something is weighing you down, build a bridge to help you get over it**

by Rayelle in Minnesota

My mental illness has affected my life since I was around five years old. I grew up in a very violent and abusive home in Minnesota, as have a lot of my mentally ill friends. I have five siblings who grew up there with me and we all suffered the wrath of alcoholic parents who used us as punching bags. I was beaten regularly and even have memories of a sibling that was murdered in our kitchen, but no one ever talks about it or acknowledges it even happened. That caused a lot of anger and rage towards most of my direct family members, and I have cut most of them completely out of my life. That, I believe, was the healthiest thing I have ever done.

I have been diagnosed with several disorders, the most prevalent being social anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder and PTSD. I am in a doctor's care and I see a therapist, but I feel that if you are unwilling to work through the crap you have been dealt in life you will wallow in your own self-pity and destruction, as I did for many years. I finally hit rock bottom in 2000 and went to prison where I was introduced to a program called cognitive restructuring. With their help I was able to confront and deal with the behavior that had come about as a result of my own self-medicating, and I was able to finally grow up and become the person I am today.

I am a productive member of society on the correct meds for my mental health and receiving regular therapy to deal with my past, present and future.

I have a saying I have come to live by: If something is weighing you down, build a bridge to help you get over it. You have to have a team of support to build anything and we all can learn a valuable lesson from that.

I am now raising my youngest daughter because I had to choose to give my two eldest daughters up for adoption to help ensure their success, as I knew I could not provide all they needed. I hurt every day because I had to make this decision, but I did it because I loved them. Imagine if more of us had parents who could give a gift like that to us. We would have less damaged people in our world. People can be cruel and mean when they find out you are mentally ill, but you have to realize that it's not what you are...it's only a part of who you are. I really hope that my story can help one person out there to keep them from giving up. I nearly did and I don't wish that feeling on anyone.