

When was the last time you were happy? Ten years ago someone asked me that question, and I had no answer.

It was the darkest time of my life. I was alone, unemployed, homeless, and had lost everything I owned. My suicide was planned to the tiniest detail. The only reason I can tell this story is because a food stamp worker noticed something about me. He had me committed and it was the kindest thing anyone has ever have done for me. It set a chain of events in motion that turned life into the wondrous, magical adventure it was supposed to be!

It took me from the hospital to Redwood House, where I began learning how to deal with the darkness and find that smallest pinprick of light to focus on. That pinprick of light turned out to be the College of San Mateo (CSM), where there are programs geared toward students like me. CSM gave me the personal support I needed.

I began work on my A.A. in Human Services. It was not the smoothest road. There were obstacles to say the least. I did not take Mental Health *Days*, I took *Semesters*. Making myself get out of bed each morning was hard, but I did it, and I did it with a determination I did not know I possessed.

My education became my lifeline. I learned more about myself and the disorders I had been labeled with. Each disorder/illness became a badge of honor (depression, anxiety, borderline personality, PTSD). To my surprise, I gained one thing I had never had... a voice! This voice was more than willing to speak out about the disorders, obstacles, and stigma that accompanies each diagnosis. Now, I hope that my stories might help someone else find hope.

After I received my degree, I felt happiness, silliness, joy, peace, and love for the very first time. This is the first of many degrees that I intend to earn.

**- Kathleen, Menlo Park**



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