



Hope's Story

Hindsight is 20/20. I did so many things wrong. I didn't understand mental illness, and never thought it would affect my family. As I look back, I am grateful for two things: my brother is still in my life and the path we took together bettered us both as people.

How could Bill, a happy and productive person, not get out of bed? Days turned into weeks and then months. I knew many people were feeling anxious and depressed with the isolation from the pandemic, but this seemed extreme. He finally agreed to visit his doctor.

I felt good because we had a plan! We met with a wonderful woman who diagnosed him with depression. She prescribed medication with a follow up appointment. What a relief, we both left there hopeful. It may take a couple of weeks she said, but he would soon be himself. As we walked through the waiting room, we picked up a pamphlet from a non-profit agency who helps people with mental illness, and I suggested Bill call.

He never did.

After a couple of weeks on the medication, nothing improved. Why was the medication not working? Was he taking it correctly? Surely, he should be better. I started to yell at him, he started to cry. He did not know. He asked me what was happening to him? My heart broke. At that moment, I realized that if my brother had been diagnosed with a disease as extreme as cancer, I would support him. This was no different, my brother needed help, and I needed to educate myself about mental illness.

Over the next six months things got really bad. There were some good days but many more bad days. There were lots of disappointments and roadblocks. During this time he lost everything; his job, his savings, his apartment and his confidence. He was living with me. My funny, smart, educated brother was homeless. How does that happen? I am now all he has in this world and my husband wants him out of our house.

I am so lost, all my hope has faded, and I don't know where to start. I cannot do this alone. I need help, guidance, and support. I do not want to abandon Bill, but I am drowning too. I don't know who else to call or what else to do.

As I was paying my bills one night, I found the pamphlet from the doctor's office from so many months ago. It was for that mental health agency Employment Options. Bill never called, I will try.

I called, and a warm and compassionate person answered the phone. The process immediately began. Bill became a member of The Employment Options Clubhouse, which came with a lot of support. Although Bill couldn't go there as intended, there were lots of virtual support and phone calls. EO was the very best thing that has happened to Bill in a long time. It did take time, but Bill is working part time at the local grocery store. It is still rocky at times, but it is comforting to know I have a resource.

Employment Options helped me in more ways than I can count. They taught me that recovery is possible and those with mental health conditions should receive the same compassion as those with any other illness. Mental health recovery is a perilous journey that requires bravery and courage, and when these individuals emerge, we regard them as heroes. I may not fly or have superhuman strength, but my actions are just as powerful, bringing optimism, courage and perseverance to my brother. My brother is not alone, Now more than ever, people are suffering from anxiety and depression brought on by isolation, illness & loss of jobs. It is critical to join forces to bring mental health to the forefront and reach all those in need of services.

What is the most heroic thing you can do?

Thank you,

Hope

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