All of life’s trials, problems, heartaches, troubles, pains, relapses, sins, feelings, experiences, disappointments, sufferings, errors, mistakes, are turning us into a inner walls of the pearl of the world, tossing and turning, beautiful pearl.
Greetings from the Executive Director!

Welcome to the second edition of MHSOAC Expressions! Our first edition received an overwhelmingly positive response, and we hope you will enjoy this year’s edition just as much.

First of all, we at the MHSOAC would like to express our gratitude to everyone who took the time to submit their artwork, poetry, and personal stories to us. Thank you!

In response to some excellent suggestions we received last year, we asked contributors to choose how they wanted their names to appear.

In the section entitled “Wordscapes” you will find a selection of poetry that we particularly enjoyed. “A Picture’s Worth” is a collection of brilliant artwork from clients and family members. You may notice that this year’s “Road to Recovery” section is much larger than the last; we received so many insightful and inspiring personal stories that we had to expand the section!

We hope you will enjoy this edition of MHSOAC Expressions, and we welcome suggestions and comments for future issues!

Regards,

Sherri Gauger
Executive Director
Changes
The words flowed out of me.
They came in rushes and bunches.
The colors around me,
The impressions the people made on me
Were pressed into me like etchings drawn in acid
Or pebbles under foot.
The institutions meandering walkways and

Rolling hills surrounding
Salmon hued Spanish buildings
Are indelible in my mind.
The acrid foul smelling dayroom,
The fresh pine green aroma of the grounds
Still pierces my senses.

My language has changed from
chaotic and disorganized ramblings,
Into orderly whole thoughts.
There are many changes.
I don’t wonder about my identity.
My future is still finite,
But it’s not a frightening mystery.
The smells, sounds and images
That impress my senses are pleasant.
They are friendly.
They do not force me into withdrawal.
They encourage my presence.

Eyeglasses resting next to the phone,
A small ceramic piece with a candle nestled in it,
Sparky’s plush toys overflowing the basket—
All niceties of a home I made for myself.
How far I’ve come.

Lynne Stewart
Riverside County

My Life
Before I was well, I was teaching Pre-school
Until one day I began acting a fool.

I began to use drugs and alcohol
Even though I knew that wasn’t the protocol.

I began hearing voices
That stemmed from making all the wrong choices.

Then my world suddenly climbed up-hill
So the doctor prescribed me some psyche pills.

To calm my nerves and ease the shame
That I felt from failing. I was going insane.

Now I have learned on the path of recovery
To take my meds, and abstain from drugs, that’s my discovery.

One day soon, I will be completely back
And I’ll give my services to those who are lost and off track.

To them my message and testimony will be:
Just leave drugs alone, and take your meds, it’s easy as 1-2-3.

Just pick self up, and forgive yourself of past sin.
It’s the only way to truly live again.

Sandra Yvonne McNeal
Alameda County
Bipolar Disorder: My Story

I couldn’t take the battle in my mind
Like a broken music box that ceases to unwind
Life is the darkest and the future seems bleak
It’s like watching horror movies, run on TV every week.

It’s like going through a tunnel and there’s no way out
All I could do in my life was doubt
All I could do was sit and cry
All I wanted to do was die

This was me sixteen years ago
In my life, I felt like I was in sinking sand
To get out of my dilemma, I chose to take
Medication, educate myself, and seek support
From those who understand

After I did that, I began to pick my life back up slowly
But surely, and on the road to wellness and recovery
Today, I am an individual who cannot only live in
Stability, but live a life of discipline, dedication and bravery.

Debbie Hastings
Los Angeles County

Inside a Shell

Here I am inside a shell,
By myself unable to tell
If I’m alive
Or just pretending
That the world would be ending
How should life be?
Should it be real?
Or just be real to me?
I should find a way to be strong
Reality will be long
Longer than the world knows,
To be together is how it must go,
And together is the only reality
Inside and out of a shell,
Not a shout, but a way to tell.

Rachel Rubio
Alameda County

The Rose

The single rosebud
held itself
nearly together,
revealing only
its outer petals
with their softness
and subtle shading.

One must never
force open a rose:
hothouse flowers
are too fragile
and never thrive.
It is the rose
that faces
Nature’s conditions
that has an
inborn fortitude
and stands strong
without wilting.

I admire the rosebud
but know
that it will not,
and should not,
stay at this stage forever.
And so I provide
warmth and light
and it grows on.
In comfort it unfolds
and reveals
the vibrancy inside.

I have always loved roses.

Vivian Imperiale
San Francisco County

Crossroads

At the crossroads of clarity
investigating a strong silence
stillness breaks against my unshod feet

I stare back at the world
through the mask
lines of age have made
of my face

I hold my tongue in my pocket
and having lost my own
to the ravages of time
I peer through my fathers' eyes

thoughts become old friends
fermenting in the same
wine cask
or just an.... ugly man
with beauty in each step.

WOODWOLF
P.W. Watkins
Trinity County
Diamond of the Lake

I know your love
Warmth and perfection.
All day, from light break
To evening dusk, and through the night,
Diamond of the Lake, you are
My treasure, my gem.

Hark! Break of day,
Mountains high, clouds float,
Waters flow toward the horizon and beyond,
From Sunshine’s golden sky blue to Rain’s grey haze,
Drifting, drizzling, even raging
Still, your hue mingles.
Sun sparkles,
Delights, as rainbows’ rays.

Evening arrives.
Dusk. Moist dew,
From twilights charm
To night’s bleak chasm.
From skies as black as light,
Color void,
To star’s sheen, Polka Dots on high.
Where moon’s luminous glow ripples,
Mirrors, dance on water,
You gleam.

With Earth,
Aground beauty abounds,
To beneath, into depth’s core –

Emerge delight.
Brilliant elegance,
Light and clear,
True as prisms. Eternal.

Day or night,
Diamond of the Lake,
You are. Here.
I know your love.

Linda Kehoe
Sonoma County

The Wind of Hope

To My Friend Claude:

Thank you for being a gentle breeze
encouraging me to listen and breathe

Thank you for being an anchor
when there has been storms and strong

Thank you for being a steady wind
that has carried me with hope.

Barbara Nolan
Yolo County

In My Father’s Eyes

In my father’s eyes
I’m still his little girl
In my father’s eyes
I’ve grown too fast for him
The grey hair came in too slow
I sometimes forget who I am
In my father’s eyes
I see him smiling at me
Standing still as can be
Remembering all my childhood dreams

In my father’s eyes
I’ve seen him cry
Over his little baby
And try not to show just what he
is feeling
In my father’s eyes

I see the man he has become
His family is still number one
He worked so hard for us all
through the years
In my father’s eyes
His dreams are big, some are
small
He still sees me as his little
child
I hold on to everything in a
memory and look at him and
smile
Look into my father’s eyes
You can see us all

Venus-Marie Mills
San Bernardino County
The Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission would like to thank all the artists who submitted their work to us. These are just a few of the outstanding pieces we received.

Untitled
Gabriel G.
San Bernardino County

“I Am”
Roni J. Hanke
San Bernardino County

Untitled
David Mordecai
San Joaquin County

“The Growth of Recovery over the Wreckage of Addiction”
Xan Blood Walker
Alameda County
The MHSOAC is always accepting client and family art and writing submissions for consideration in our publications and on our website. For more information, please contact us at: MHSOAC@dmh.ca.gov Attention: Art Coordinator
Reflections on the Road to Recovery

The MHSOAC would like to thank everyone who took the time to share their stories with us, and we hope you will find the following selections as powerful and insightful as we did...

My Story

I was alone, and drowning in deep emotional pain, when I heard about “Transitions-Mental Health Association” (TMHA), in San Luis Obispo county. The succinct description of TMHA and its objective, read as follows;

“We are survivors in recovery, helping to empower others. Our objective is hope & recovery for all.”

Wow! The words “empower”, “hope”, and “recovery” caught my eye and my heart. I contacted TMHA, and enrolled in one of their comprehensive Peer-to-Peer classes. What I found extremely valuable was that the class was led by mentors who had achieved recovery from mental illness, & are now teaching coping strategies to others, like myself. Upon completion of the Peer-to-Peer class, I gained an understanding of self-empowerment, hope, and the reality of recovering from a mental illness. For the first time in my life, I now had the feeling, that I was finally equal to other people, with or without a mental illness. My journey from mental illness to recovery, has just begun. The poem below, entitled “Finally” was inspired by my first Peer-to-Peer class experience.

The place is here
The time is now
For all with mental illness
To walk and stand tall
Hope is the answer

April Hart
San Luis Obispo County

Do you have a story of recovery that you would like to share? Contact the MHSOAC to obtain the submission form and submit your story!

Email: MHSOAC@dmh.ca.gov
Fax: 916-445-8696
Attention: Communications

The Power of the Mind in People with Depression

Depression is something that I would not wish on anyone. A person with mental illness, like schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, suffers a lot. It is like living in a different world. It is like your thoughts are different from everyone else’s thoughts. I think about life and I pass each day drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes. I don’t know why this is what makes me happy. The mind is very powerful and sometimes it plays tricks on you and you get in trouble.

We make mistakes and hurt others when we are tricked by our minds. Our families suffer and cry without being able to do anything to help. Only the doctors and the therapists and the programs where they listen to us and understand us can help. The mind is like a computer. If the mind’s computer does not work well, then nothing functions. Please do not stare and do not judge because of ignorance of the sick.

Juan Alvarez
Napa County
I Am Thankful

I am thankful to be living in a board and care where I can eat and after recently moving I even have my own room.

I am thankful to be stable on medication again. I am also thankful to have HEDCO House to come to and to eat lunch at.

I have experienced losses in my life but over all I am glad to be doing o.k. and have come back a very long way over the six years that I have been given a new start on life in.

I am currently recovering from the loss of my father who was my best friend but am thankful for my stay at Woodroe place and for all the support that people have given me.

Lance Frost
Alameda County

Importance of Self-Acceptance on your Mental Health

"There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."  Shakespeare

Acceptance plays a big role in our lives as we line up our needs and preferences. Self acceptance is a huge key to our personal happiness. What follows is my own story.

I was born missing four fingers on my left-hand. There is, basically, a thumb there. I spent a lot of time hiding my hand, being afraid that if people knew the real me, it wouldn’t be “good enough.” Somehow, I thought that a false version of me would be better. I was very much mistaken.

I hid my hand from practically everyone. I was very good at it. But...what I’m really saying is that I was very good at NOT being myself. I ended up in the mental health system due to antics related to this idea. I was placed in a mental hospital...really, all due to thinking it was not good enough to be me.

At one point, I believed that healing would come in the form of growing fingers...in some way. I thought that healing would be in making me look like everyone else. Once again, I was incorrect. Healing is accepting yourself as you are. It really doesn’t happen any other way.

What one has in common with others is the fact that everyone has something that they would rather not have...and, are hence, dealing with. People learn their life lessons in dealing with its acceptance.

There was a change in my attitude. Instead of thinking I would benefit from being something or someone else, I realized that the best that I can be is to be myself.

"...I realized that the best that I can be is to be myself."

But that, then, just opens the door. I next realized that it is important to find out what that means. It doesn’t mean that you suddenly do whatever you want and forget everyone else. It becomes a journey of self-discovery...uncovering what it all means. You are able to watch yourself unravel, sloughing off those unnecessary things we all seem to carry - to hide from being ourselves. (I remember hiding my hand from a blind man). What I once saw as a great curse is now a great blessing. Acceptance is the key.

I believe that mental hospitals are filled with people who have not accepted themselves. They are filled with people who think that if you really got to know them or if you even cared enough to get know them...you would be very disappointed in the findings. They have no value and no worth. They are mistakes...in some way. This misconception and ignorance has been handed down, through generations, since time began.

If you are still not convinced, the challenge would be this — Try It. Try accepting yourself as you really are. Remember that the longer you resist the truth, the more it will persist...as a problem. Even if it is just being honest with yourself about one thing about yourself...that is a good place to start. Take Care!

Paul Hendrickson
San Francisco County
I am left-handed, so that is supposed to mean I am in my right mind, correct? Well, maybe now, but that wasn’t always the case!

My story begins with the onset of a thirty-plus year mental illness. I was first diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder at the age of 21, at which time I began a journey filled with terror, confusion, humiliation, and most of all…self-loathing.

For probably the first 20 years I had no understanding of my disease and was never given any real assistance in understanding why these things were happening to me.

During the course of my mental illness I spent most of my time in acute-care, locked psychiatric hospitals or long-term board and care facilities, although there were brief periods of time when I was able to live on my own and hold down jobs.

I experienced auditory hallucinations, mainly the voice of my deceased mother telling me what a horrible person I was and how I had no right to exist. I went through extremely severe bouts of depression, often with suicidal thoughts and plans (in great detail). I only made 2 real attempts at ending my life; other times they were “fake” attempts that occurred when I didn’t know any other way of asking for help.

Early on I began burning myself with cigarettes and curling irons - they temporarily took away my mother’s haunting voice, but later they became a habit, and a way to get myself “5150’d” (a 72 hour hold in a locked psychiatric unit) during the times I felt incapable of handling the real world. Psychiatric hospitals became a place of safety, peace, and security. I became totally institutionalized.

Various treatments were tried over the years; many different psychotropic medications, group therapy, individual therapy, and three series of Electroconvulsive Therapy, each consisting of 12 treatments. Nothing was effective. Everyone who knew me in any capacity assumed that I would always have a mental illness, and would basically always be under the care of a psychiatrist and would always need medication. Did I ever show them!

During my mental illness days I also dealt with breast cancer (and am now a 9 year survivor!), joint problems, and other medical issues. I have had several surgeries for this and that, but none of that is really important now. I have my mental and spiritual health back and that is all that counts.

Everyone has a theory on how I regained my mental health. I myself believe it was a true miracle of God, although in something I read recently it states that remission can occur sometimes after 20-30 years with schizophrenia. I am not terribly concerned with the ‘hows and whys’: I only know that I have now been employed by our county’s behavioral health department for close to 5 years, am taking leadership roles within the mental health system, and look forward to beginning a 19 month program in September to complete my Bachelor of Arts in psychology. I own my home, and enjoy my two dogs and one cat, am active in my church and community and lead a whole and healthy life. I couldn’t be happier! To those of you who are reading this and have lost hope, please know that hope is still alive, and wanting each and every one of you to grab it and hold onto it!

Carol Underwood
Trinity County
Rise Above

I have enjoyed working for Fresno County as a Peer Support Specialist II. I started to work full-time after being on disability for 13 years. In the beginning, I didn't know if I could do the job but my supervisor told me early on that now I would be spending my time mostly at work and that work was my friend and my co-workers were my family. I really felt good about this idea of work as being where I wanted to be. I kept busy, in those early days I did a lot of transporting of clients. I soon found out, as I worked with the severely mentally ill, that my clients were special and many had needs that even in a short car drive they would talk to me. I tried to assist the clients as best I knew how, mostly motherly advice as I am an older Peer Support Specialist.

Time went by, and spring of 2010 was upon us. Now, the seasons were going back in forth in their weather. One day would be really hot and then it would be really cool, then surprises of surprises it would rain, which was rare for the dry, central area of California that I call home. Worst though, along with the shifting weather came a shift in my mood. I am bi-polar and had been doing well with my recovery and wellness and then my moods started to swing as the weather. I started off having a spate of physical ailment with pneumonia but then the inhaler made me go manic. I no sooner got over the pneumonia and then my mood went down and I got deeply depressed.

Fortunately, for me, I was able to call my psychiatrist in the morning and though I couldn't talk to her right then she called me that same evening. She adjusted my meds and in a few days I was feeling very much better and went back to work again. I could only imagine that in the past something like this might have had more serious, long term results or even resulted in a hospitalization.

I had felt overwhelmed at work during this time, for though I had a raise and more responsibility I didn't feel I could handle it. When I got back to work I talked to my supervisor and let him know how I was feeling. He got someone to help me out with my new position of scheduling clinicians for assessments. That support, of having someone else helping me out, took away my feeling of being overwhelmed.

Last week was my two year anniversary of working with Fresno County. I have really enjoyed all the people and all that I do here. Though I have suffered from mental illness this is the longest I have worked in one place, and it appears I will be working here for some time to come.

Jill Shepherd
Fresno County

Invisible

Good morning, I can't really tell yet. The day's just starting. It's all just begun for me. Lots can happen between now and then. I hope that days ahead will be a little brighter then it has been in the past two years. I really need some one that will help me and listen to me. Also be there for me in my time of need, during my depression or an emotional breakdown, during a moment of anxiety or a panic attack.

Nobody really knows what's going on inside my head. Right now my head is pounding and my ears are ringing. It seems like no one is listening to me, no one can hear me, yet people are all around me. I reach out, but nobody can feel my touch. So, as I sit here in restless calm, trying to find some kind of emotional comfort that only leaves me temporary relief in these difficult circumstances I'm in.

At some point in my life, my comments and my desires have fallen short. Just like the rest of life has in the last 6 months. I soon will be settling for some kind of substitute that will give me relief from my mental illness. Self medicate myself, to help me reduce the stress in my life a little.

Meanwhile, everything I have done so far is not working. I'm looking for a way out. One that will show me the door I need to walk through. The right door.

First I need to help myself. No ones going to help me if I can't help myself. So anyway I look back and nobody's there, I'm on my own, no one is listening to me. Why? Is my life not as important as yours? Why do you judge me? I don't judge you.

So instead of falling deeper and deeper into myself, I chose not to live like this, a life in pain. So I was lucky and found that door I was looking for. The help I need. I finally took charge of my life. There are people that listen, they do "So I was lucky and found that door I was looking for. The help I need."

feel my touch. They are here to help me. The door I opened was at Banning Mental Health. That door changed my life.

I am not invisible.

K.B.
Riverside County
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