

My Story - Why I'm So Passionate About Mental Health

My story, my life, began when I was born here in Dixie on April 15th of the year 2002... but I won't bore you with the irrelevant details of my entire life, so we'll skip ahead. When I was 7 my parents separated and the custody arrangement was as follows: with mother during the week and with father on the weekends. After they split, I started to notice a shift in my father's behavior... a darker side of him coming out. I may have been young, but I was smart enough to realize that my father was drinking frequently and that was a contributing factor to his change in behavior... I may have been young, but I knew that the consistent yelling and physical beatings weren't "normal". But, like every young abuse victim, I kept my mouth shut about it out of fear and I kept my mouth shut even when I started to be sent to behavioral therapy because my mother was noticing subtle changes in my behavior and drastic changes in my sister's. These issues began to grow and consume me until, in late 2012/early 2013, we were forced to move back to Dixie (after having lived in Alachua for about 6 years) due to the foreclosure of our home--which happened due to the loss of my father's income and then the loss of his child support payment when he left the country on April 15th, 2012 (yes, my 10th birthday). After that, it was a downward spiral for me... I got here and I was met with a wall of hate, bullying, and prejudice for my lack of belief in Christianity (or any religion for that matter) which eventually turned into bullying due to my appearance/weight. I felt alone, and for the most part I was, and I isolated myself from everyone. After a year, I demanded to cease therapy and I fought a daily uphill battle for the next three and a half years... alone... faced with attending a school where everyone, except a select few people, were pitted against me. I had "friends", but nobody I trusted to confide in... nobody I wanted to confide in. It was a rough, dark time for me and those were the days where there was a constant thought nagging the back of my mind that death would be preferable to the life I was living... that was my greatest enemy. Every day I kept that enemy at bay and defeated him when I managed to fall asleep at night, but only to have him come back the next morning for another round. I'm proud of myself for making it through that and I'm proud of anyone else who fights that battle successfully, but let my story be a cautionary tale... not everyone is strong enough to fight that constant battle and that doesn't make them weak... it

makes them human. Don't let those around you slip down that hole and don't let them fall through to the other side... reach out, let them know everything will be ok, let them know that you're here to listen, and let them know that you care. Ever since I started the road to a TRUE recovery, I have become an advocate for mental health and a person that ALL people can trust to confide in. I hope you will do the same for all those around you.

A few things I like to keep in mind when I get down, in case you need them: 1.) I love my family and they love me, whether I know it or not they would be devastated if I left them and I would be too; 2.) The future is ALWAYS brighter when you decide to MAKE it brighter and the way you think about it contributes as well, so stay positive; 3.) I may not be able to make my own life better, but maybe just maybe I can help others and make their lives better; and 4.) There are plenty of people out there who suffer just like I do, or who will suffer like I do, and maybe I can help ease that pain or help lower the number of people who have to suffer as I do in the future. But that's just what works for me... that may not be what works for your friends or yourself, so figure out what works best for THEM and help remind them of those things when they are feeling down!