**CLIFFORD W. BEERS AWARD NOMINATION: KIMBERLY ZAPATA**

When I was 17 years old I tried to kill myself with a bottle of pills and a can of Coke. I wrote a four-page suicide letter in mint green gel ink: a note of explanations and apologies. Of “please understands” and “I’m sorrys” and, when I was done, I folded it up, placed it in my right back pocket, and headed to the park, where I sat at a picnic bench and poured the red and yellow capsules into my hands.

Where I dumped the red and yellow capsules down my throat.

I still remember the names on that note: Mom, Nana, Dan, Amy, Nessa, Jason, Diane. I remember wanting them to know how sorry I was. I remember wanting them to know how desperate I was. How much pain I was in. I remember wanting them to know it was not their fault. My suicide was not their fault. But I also remember wanting to die.

Their compassion couldn’t help me. Their love couldn’t hold me, and their support couldn’t save me: not from myself. Not from the sickness which had taken over my life and my mind because I was dealing with an undiagnosed — and untreated — illness.

I was deep in the throes of my first depressive episode.

Of course, I didn’t die. (I wanted to die, but I didn’t.) My body fought for me when my mind no longer could. I threw up at hourly intervals for two days but, in the end, I came out alive. Five pounds lighter and a million times more depressed and confused, but alive. But I didn’t wake up because I was strong or smart or had some secret will to live. I woke up purely by chance. By fate. By faith and — well — by luck.

I woke up because I got the formula “wrong.”

What happens when you “wake up alive?” When your eyes open minutes, hours or days later? How do you pick up the pieces? How do you find the will to live — the will you’ve already lost?

Well, I didn’t. Not at first. I wasn’t happy to be alive. In fact, when I opened my eyes and saw our nicotine-stained drop ceiling hanging overhead and felt the bile race through my stomach and into my throat, I tried to swallow it. I wanted to lay there and swallow it — I wanted to drown in my own vomit — but apparently it is impossible to asphyxiate yourself if you are fully conscious, i.e. if you are trying.

I felt like a failure. Nothing more than a suicidal failure.

*“What good am I if I can’t even kill myself correctly?”*

But after 48 hours of violent heaving, after emptying myself of every food and fluid you can possibly imagine, I was exhausted. I was numb. And while I moved forward and kept going — I kept working, kept going on dates, kept preparing for my senior year — I was simply surviving, at the most basic level.

I kept surviving this way for many years.

But then I got help. Thanks to several doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists, and the right mix medications, I found hope. And while today I see myself as a “suicide survivor,” I am more than that. Today I am someone born from the ashes of suicide. Today I see my life, and my ability to live it, as a direct result of my attempt on it. And while I still struggle with depression — bipolar depression, to be exact — and anxiety, today I see myself as lucky, and I have dedicated my life to helping others feel the same.

I want others to find help and hope long before they find themselves starring down a barrel, a blade, or a bottle. And I do so through writing, speaking, and an outgoing commitment to advocacy work.

I have dedicated my life to mental health work.

I am a crisis counselor for Crisis Text Line. I am the founder of [Sunshine Spoils Milk](http://sunshineandspoiledmilk.com/), the place where motherhood and mental health meet. I am an award-winning writer, one who has written more than 100 articles about mental illness for numerous outlets including Huffington Post, Washington Post, Babble, Scary Mommy, YourTango, Ravishly, Romper, Little Things, The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, and The Mighty — to name a few. I am a mental health speaker who has spoken on several panels, including those at Columbia University, The College of New Jersey, BlogHer, MomsEveryday, and Mental Health America. And, most importantly, I am the founder of [Greater Than: Illness](https://greaterthanillness.com/), a nonprofit which aims to empower teens and young adults struggling with mental illness.

But how does Greater Than: Illness help others? By speaking openly about mental illness. By speaking honestly about mental illness, and by giving these young adults what they need most: an outlet. A safe space (and place) to talk about their problems.

That said, it is easy to feel lost, alone, and "less than" in the face of adversity — when confronting a challenge or an illness —  but we at Greater Than: Illness believe everyone has the power to rise above. To be more. And we use writing, speaking, storytelling, and physical activity to foster courage, confidence, and growth.

Greater Than: Illness works with area schools to provide after-school writing programs — and scholarship opportunities.  We work with health and wellness allies to fight for prevention services. Greater Than: Illness is host to a virtual run club — which helps promote both physical and mental wellbeing — and, most importantly, we share real-life stories which inspire confidence, faith, optimism, and hope.

Make no mistake: being open about mental health struggles is not easy. I have been called crazy, dramatic, and “insane.” But I believe very strongly that the best way to change the conversation is to be a part of it. As such, I work hard every day to fight for a stigma-free environment not only for myself but for others.

For the next generation of mental health consumers.

**Mental Health Awards, Publications, &  
Speaking Engagements**

**Online Publications**

[***Scary Mommy***](http://www.scarymommy.com/author/kimberly-zapata/)**,** various articles

[***Babble***](http://www.babble.com/contributor/kzapata/)**,** various articles

[***The Mighty***](https://themighty.com/author/kimberly-zapata/), various articles

[***Romper***](https://www.romper.com/authors/kimberly-zapata-1339)***,*** various articles

[***Huffington Post***](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/author/kimberly-a-zapata-418)***,*** various articles

[***Washington Post: On Parenting***](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2015/10/08/mommys-boo-boo-explaining-depression-to-a-toddler/)*, “*Mommy’s ‘Boo-Boo.’ Explaining Depression To A Toddler”

[***Mamalode***](http://mamalode.com/writer/615)***,*** various articles

[***BonBon Break***](http://www.bonbonbreak.com/light-in-the-darkness-the-upside-of-my-mental-illness/)*,* various articles

[***YourTango***](http://www.yourtango.com/users/kimberly-zapata), various articles

[***Sammiches & Psych Meds***](http://www.sammichespsychmeds.com/author/kimberly-zapata/), various articles

[***Yahoo Health***](https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/a-letter-to-those-affected-1302724151214134.html), various articles

**Print Publications**[***So* *Glad They Told Me: Women Get Real About Motherhood***](http://www.herstoriesproject.com/call-submissions-glad-told/)*,*anthology

[***Women’s Health***](https://www.womenshealthmag.com/health/amy-keller-laird-obsessive-compulsive-disorder)***,*** *May 2016 issue and video interview*

**Awards**

2018 Voices of the Year Recipient

* [”Chester Bennington’s Death — And The Conversation We Should Be Having”](http://sunshineandspoiledmilk.com/2017/07/20/linkin-park-suicide-not-selfish/)

2017 Voices of the Year Recipient

* [“Thank You, Carrie Fisher, For Giving A Voice To All Of Us Battling Mental Illness”](https://www.babble.com/entertainment/thank-you-carrie-fisher-mental-health-advocate/)

2016 Voices of the Year Recipient

* [“Aftermath”](http://mamalode.com/story/essays/aftermath/)

WEGO Health Awards Nominated Blog

Healthline Best Blogs of 2016 Nominated Blog

**Public Speaking/TV Appearances**

The College of New Jersey (2018)

Columbia University (2018)

MomsEveryday (2018)

BlogHer (2017)

Women’s Health (2017)

Mental Health America (2017, 2016)