A certified master life coach, I own a small life coaching business, New Tomorrow Life Coaching LLC, in Virginia Beach, VA. I specialize in self-esteem, interpersonal relationship skills, and coping with mental illness (Depression, Anxiety, ADHD, PTSD, Bipolar, etc.). I too have been diagnosed with clinical depression at the age of 15, fibromyaligia at 25, bipolar type 1 and PTSD at 28, and a 5 year opiate addiction later in my twenties as well. I've been a psych patient for almost 18 years and this is the short version of my story.....

15 was a weird age for me. My grandmother had just passed and my father and I had a falling out resulting in me moving in with my mom. My mother was, all too often, bombarded by my severe sadness and angry outbursts over different things. Every day had come to look very different and my instability was getting hard to miss. Barely eating, I began to look frail. A once healthy, bubbly, driven, and exuberant teenage girl had become what my mother called "a shell of myself." I have always been a social individual who tends to get along with everyone pretty easily and I stopped wanting to see my friends or leave my house. I remember the times when I refused to go to school and unplugged all of the phones in the house when my mom left for work and I just slept. Just slept for days. Very concerned, my mother took me to my family doctor who diagnosed me with what was then referred to as clinical depression(major depressive disorder). I was put on an SSRI and sent to talk therapy with a pediatric psychiatrist.

My teen years were more than rocky after that. I rarely attended school and ended up in police custody more times than I'd like to admit. I ended up dropping out of high school and getting my GED at 17. My struggles with insomnia surfaced hard keeping me up for days without 5 minutes of sleep leading to auditory hallucinations from sleep deprivation.

Over the years I suffered from periodic but severe depression. It was in my late teens that I began to self-mutilate up and down my arms and I knew something was wrong but had no idea where to turn or what to do about it. I knew that none of this was normal but felt it was just the way things were.

At the age of 20, I experienced my first psychosis. I was in another state with my then boyfriend and one night I woke up and had no idea who he was or who I was. I didn't even recognize my own dog. I was taken to the hospital via ambulance. It lasted about 8 hours until it just clicked like a woke up. Although, seemingly otherwise unexplainable, we just brushed it off as being exposed to a large amount of stress has my grandfather had recently passed and I had just returned from giving his eulogy.

At 22, I got married and conceived my first child shortly after. When my son was born, I didn't feel joy. I felt a consuming hopelessness and had no idea how I was going to take care of another human being. I pushed through and began working as a bartender not yet back on my meds.

Throughout my twenties a struggled with both alcoholism and drug addiction, overcoming both of them but my relationships suffered.

After my second child was born I was quickly put into a pain management program after a diagnosis of fibromyalgia where I was once again prescribed an SSRI antidepressant along with multiple other pain meds.

I was in pain management for 4 years and I had become so severely addicted to the opioids being prescribed to me, that I was taking 200+mg of extended release morphine AND 150mg of oxycontin daily! An easily fatal dose for most. I would often run out of my meds and after several withdrawals, close calls, and ambulance rides it had gotten to the point that it was either get clean or die. It was time for me to start picturing my children without a mother if I didn't stop.

About six months after I began my recovery, I remained on antidepressants and fell into my first hypomanic state shortly after that lasted for months. I'm not going to lie, it felt amazing! Finally, everything was good. I was being productive more so than ever. I had little need for sleep and I thought I was on top of my game!

After a serious addiction, once you are clean, it's almost like you have to start from scratch in rebuilding yourself and your life. I was rebuilding from the ground up and learning about myself and all of these strengths that I didn't even know that I had. Learning how much different of a person I was than anything I had ever been before the height of my drug addiction.

It wasn't until 31 that I experienced my second and third psychotic breaks. The second one was horrible but mild in comparison to the third. The third time was devastating. Once again, that night I had no idea who I was or any of my family. I broke everything in my home that I could get my hands on even to the point of throwing my 52in TV across the room, with a strength that came out of the dark.. I had hallucinations that I was being attacked. I ended up tearing a rotator cuff and woke up covered in huge black bruises from the physical violence that I displayed. I tried to start several physical altercations with my husband to where he eventually had no other choice but to get the police involved. When they arrived, I was told that I needed to go check myself into the psych hospital and my mother said that she would take me. Once we got there, I stormed out of the waiting room and began walking down a main road in my pajamas and didn't know what was happening.

I don't remember any of this, but many of my relationships were heavily taxed because of my actions that night and I felt as if I literally had nobody. Nobody, including myself, knew what to think. The shame that I carried alone from hurting so many people was almost unbearable. This horrible thing happened to/because of me and then all of the sudden, all of these people who I thought would never walk away from me just disappeared.

Now usually when someone suffers a serious trauma, they wake up to get well cards, flowers, and family. This is not always the case after a psychiatric crisis and certainly wasn't for me. Not even family would speak to me. I cried every day for months.

Meds were adjusted and added and things began to get better but the isolation of being ostracized as the result of my psychotic break was one of the most heartbreaking things that ever happened to me. I cried daily sometimes uncontrollably and it was clear that even my own husband saw me differently now. The lack of acceptance and social support was like a kick to the face when I was already on my knees. It took upwards of a year for me to reach a full recovery and find my own normal baseline of stability.

Two months after my psychosis I began to suffer severe and debilitating flash backs, panic attacks, nightmares, headaches, and I had to get up at least once in the night to change my clothes because they were dripping from night sweats. I didn't leave my house and even missed Christmas with my family because my anxiety was too bad and physically painful to go anywhere. It wasn't long before a received a co-diagnosis of PTSD.

Coming back to the fibromyalgia. living with this condition is a series of daily decisions. My energy and strength is limited, so even on my good days, I have to choose wisely what I'm going to spend that energy on otherwise I'll fall into a "flare" and for those who are not familiar with fibromyalgia, these flares include widespread pain, extreme fatigue, sensitivity to touch, "fibro fog" or confusion and cognitive impairment, headaches, and severe weakness, especially in the hands. There many things that can trigger these episodes including, any kind of med change, any small infection or virus, cold weather, and even a bad sunburn or lack of sleep can send me straight to bed for days and even weeks sometimes, unable to move without being in pain.

The biggest trigger, however, is stress. My body doesn't handle stress well. Don't get me wrong, I can put the most beautiful smile on the outside while dealing with a million heartbreaks on the inside and you'd never know. I handle things pretty well emotionally, considering my situation, but my body reacts physically especially from high amounts of stress and there is very little that I can do about that. As you can imagine the exacerbated stress levels from PTSD and fibro don't mix very well and I lived in a constant state of pain, confusion, and shame.

I began to force myself to begin to participate in society, connect with friends old and new, and be social but I was scared. Scared of getting close to anyone after everyone left me alone when I needed them the most.

To this day I stay guarded due to the judgments people will and have made about my life and this is all a gift of the stigma.

"Stigma: A mark of disgrace associated this a particular circumstance, quality, or person."

As human beings, we naturally fear what we don't understand and our society, as a whole, is simply uneducated when it comes to mental health which makes all of this so hard to understand. It's not something that can really be put into words. Until you or someone close to you has been affected by mental illness, you won't understand through no fault of your own.

We are still learning about these conditions ourselves and I strongly believe that the best kind of therapy is group therapy and peer support. It's nice to talk to someone who's been there. Someone who can understand from a first person perspective. Someone who knows more than what can be taught in a book. I never want to see anyone suffering alone.

These diseases can take a life a lot easier than people are led to believe. It's time to stick together, erase the stigma, and start saving lives.