When I was a kid, I never heard anything about mental health disorders.  To tell you the truth, before I hit the age of 18 I could not have told you what a mental health disorder was, let alone named one.  I don't know if I grew up in a particularly isolated community or not.  I do not think that that is the reason I knew nothing about mental health conditions.  Sure, I knew about crazy people – I had seen some on the streets.  But no one had ever talked to me about the debilitating conditions that they faced.

That all changed when I hit the age of 18, and my world began to crumble.  They did not know what was wrong with me at first.  Diagnosing mental health disorders can be a tricky business.  At first they thought I had an anxiety disorder.  Then they amended it, thinking I had a more serious schizophrenic disorder.  After a while, however, they were scratching their heads.  They had no idea what was wrong with me.  All they knew was what I knew: I had a serious mental health disorder, and I was getting sicker by the day.

Unless you have suffered from mental health disorders, you have no idea of the stigma attached.  It can be terrible.  If, for example, you have cancer, people treat you well.  They understand that there is something wrong with your body, something that is causing you to be sick.  But if you have mental health disorders, somehow it is all your fault.  People think that you can just stop being crazy.  This is ridiculous.  Can a cancer patient just stop being sick?

Mental health disorders, like cancer or any other disease, have a genetic component and an environmental component.  No one has any choice over either of these factors.  If you come down with a mental health disorder, however, you do play an important role in deciding whether or not you recover.  People with mental health disorders, more than anyone else, need community support.  This can come in the form of halfway houses or other programs which provide a therapeutic community where they can recover.  In my case, I went to a mental health farm where we were allowed to work with the animals under careful supervision.  A combination of farm work and therapy helped me get better, and now I have made a complete recovery from my mental health disorders.