

# *Stories of Recovery and Hope ....*

*(Recovery is a process by which a person overcomes the challenges presented by a mental illness to live a life of meaning and purpose).*

Before I started Recovery, I was extremely anxious and spent all of my time being worried, nervous, and paranoid. I was driving my car down the road one day, and a mountain of grief overcame me, I felt like I was going to die.

When I went for help, I was taken to the hospital and put on medication. Soon after, I was placed into a day program that got me started on my recovery trail.

Slowly, I became a more active person in the days going on. I continued my day program and started Recovery International and Taking Charge. I even became a President of SHARE (Self Help Association Regarding Emotions), and held the position for one year.

With the help of many professionals, including Clay Sperry, I learned that I had gotten myself into some faulty thinking and I needed to attend all of my groups and study hard. In Taking Charge, I learned to stop judging others and myself. This was my way of overcoming my fears and anger.

Now, I know that I can change my thoughts and direct myself to follow whatever path I want to follow. There is considerably less troubled thoughts and nervousness to hold me down.

I find that I can now live with myself. I can work and become a productive citizen again.

BA 2/7/08

This story is about my recovery journey. Ever since I can remember, I've had a hard time. As I got older things got worse. So basically, I'm gonna tell you how things were, and how much better things are now. I was always in trouble in school, I saw a school counselor through the middle school and High School I fought every boy or man that crossed me. I started doing drugs and drinking alcohol when I was 12 yrs. old. When I was in mania, I would just ramble on and hide. I got myself into a lot of positions, I didn't need to be .

I've been to rehab which helped, but I didn't stop drinking. I went to jail for damages of \$1,500. I used sex, drugs, and alcohol to medicate myself. I was molested by my father and step father and raped four times from the ages of 2-23. I was having symptoms of PTSD and didn't know how to handle it. My children were taken away from me, but they ended up being my strength.

Through the whole thing, I've only tried therapy three times. The first time was in 1993, my first husband was having a hard time with me taking drugs, drinking and night mares, and running away. I packed up my children and everything and ran away. I did not realize all my night mares were about my Dad. So my first husband came and got us and had me start therapy. That's when I was diagnosed as a Manic-Depressive. I then lost my family. I moved in with my mom and just kept going steady self-medicating and running trying to work when I could do it, but mostly I stayed away from everyone and drank.

I met my second husband in 1995; he has also caught hell from me, the whole time. In 1996 went to jail for busting up his house and truck. He called me crazy, and I blacked out. All that rage that I had stuffed in, had come out at one time. When I figured out that I had done that, I turned myself into the police. When I got out of jail, my husband talked me into counseling again. In 1996-97, I went to therapy one on one, then got involved with a group. It was not a good experience. It was a regular bitch fest, not good for me. I took on peoples problems. I tried the medication, but was still doing drugs and alcohol so I was real aggressive. So once again, I quit therapy.

In October 2003 I started going back to therapy again because my husband and I got into a major fight and I ended up splitting his head open, and that was definitely the last straw. I needed peace. So I went into therapy again. When I started back this time I decided to stock it out. It was very hard. My therapist put me through relaxation groups and one on one anger management. He also made me deal with the flash backs (PTSD) head on. I was definitely living in the past. I was having major headaches, and severe upset stomach, through all of this. I was taking my meds. And trying all the erbs that the Doctor had prescribed.

In 2005. my therapist kept trying to get me to go to a group. I was scared, because of my earlier experience. Finally I gave in. At first, I tried to buck the whole thing. My Peer Support person taught me the Yoga Tongue Lock, to help me keep my mouth shut. Also he had me do a mirror exercise, going to the bathroom mirror, say my name and then, "I love you and accept you, just the way you are".

When I started in group, (Peer Support) I was still having major anxiety. I was having trouble with my daughter, she was physically removing children in the lunch line and hitting and shoving them. We would argue all the time. I also took every thing my husband said to heart, which in turn kept me in temper. My Peer Support person taught me that calm begets calm, and how to let things slide off me like a Teflon frying pan. Peer Support teaches "Taking Charge" It has definitely helped me. My Peer Support person has been there for phone calls, to review the mental fitness tools to help me get out of temper when I was stuck.

I also attended a "WRAP" group, a program to keep you from going into or returning to the hospital. Now I have something to refer to, that helps me deal with setbacks, or relapses. I took the Recovery II program, dealing with boundaries, which helped me also. Nothing helped me as much as the "Taking Charge" class. When you are taught how to reword what you are thinking, it will help on what you are feeling. Peer Support has been the best thing that has happened to me, along with my therapy and regular Doctor appointments. I have come a long way. The first book I ever read all the way through was Peace of Body, Peace of Mind, by Rose Vansickle. The book we use in "Taking Charge".

All of the mental fitness tools I learned are in the book. I am definitely a calmer person than I used to be. My daughter and I don't argue, I am the parent. My husband and I don't argue all the time either, and I definitely don't live in the past. I take my meds and work through my problems as they come along. There are times when I have setbacks, but soon return to recovery using the tools I have learned.

Julie K.

I'm sure my illness was with me when I was a little girl. I've had some depression since I've been a teenager until now grownup. My diagnosis was having Bipolar at 36 years old. I've been in mental hospitals a number of times.

They said I would take medicine for Bipolar the rest of my life. I'm now over 50 years old. I got a chance to go to a Taking Charge class back in 1997. I wanted to get out of my apartment. Something new to do. I was very scared to get out of my apartment. I've been doing groups ever since that first time.

I now do volunteer work in Mental Health. I went in training for the groups. Recovery For Life I, Recovery For Life II, (Boundaries) WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan). I have me own groups at times. I'm a trained facilitator for these groups sometimes. These groups are such a pick up to me. Also the Taking Charge class has been a great help to me.

If you take your medicine, see the doctor, I know that's very helpful, but also you need the classes to help you be a better person. If you plan, decide and act, on the classes, you will grow in your life. One of the best tools I use in Taking Charge a lot is "Distressing not Dangerous". It's been my reason to succeed in recovery. My goal is to have these same classes for young kids.

If you work the program, it will work for you. My life is now full of Peace, Love, and Joy.

Kay H.

I have had seizures since I was twelve. In 2002 I was told I had a mood disorder. During this time, my symptoms were temper, I had no self-control, I was always correcting others, and getting into arguments. Later this was said to be Bipolar Disorder. I started attending Peer Support classes in the RILS area of Waccamaw Center for Mental Health in 2005. I attended a WRAP Wellness Recovery Action Plan class, Recovery II, (Boundaries) Taking Charge (of your Words, Thoughts, and Actions). I saw that the Taking Charge helped me develop self-control, and I could see a difference in me, and others could as well.

A Taking Charge meeting started over at Jordan's Assisted Living Home in Conway. I started attending with the Peer Support Specialist facilitating. It was noted that I learn better by listening, but at first I was always interrupting and could not keep my mind on what was going on. Soon this changed and I have become much more attentive in class and have learned a lot. It has helped me in my relationships at PRS and my family relationships.

I started attending Recovery, Inc. meetings on Tuesday night, this helped me even more. Without these meetings and Taking Charge classes I wouldn't be able to control my temper, and have self—control. I still am working on my family relationships, although they have improved. Like a lot of consumers I would like to stop taking medications some day, but I realize for now, it is necessary to take my meds. I have met some wonderful people in the groups, and meetings, who have helped me with my recovery. I would recommend these classes to anyone interested in their recovery.

Kathryn C.

My mental problems, started at a very young age, between the age of six through eighteen, there were many attempts of suicide. Then there were good years, where I had no suicide attempts. At the age of thirty-four my problems came back. I was told that I suffered from major depression. All the time I would say to myself, what did I do to deserve this? I went from therapist to therapist trying to get fixed. Nothing helped.

I still suffered from depression, although I was told there was nothing wrong with me. Two years ago, I was given a change of diagnosis, Bi-Polar Disorder, I was almost happy to hear this, because it meant that I did actually have something wrong with me. I was not making it up. It was not all in my head. Right about this time I began attending a group (classes), facilitated by a Peer Support Specialist. I didn't want to go, I had a negative image about groups, but my counselor said it would be good for me, and they were more like educational classes. Learning how to recover from mental illness. This group helped me to see things differently. I learned that I could change my feelings by changing my thoughts, this was something new to me, with the help from the Peer Support Specialist, and my therapist, I have made a turn around in the way I look at things.

Every thing that happens is not a big emergency. I went from the world being against me, feeling unwanted, being useless, and helpless to a person that can go and do and face anything that comes along. I know that without the group and the Peer Support Specialist, I would still be hiding from the world, and anyone who was trying to get in. I was blessed to have the group and the Peer Support Specialist come into my life, and help open my eyes to see that life is truly worth living.

I am also grateful for the efforts and support that my Doctor and Therapist have contributed to my recovery.

Mary M.

Before Peer Support, and Taking Charge, I was a loner, with lowered feelings. I didn't like myself at all. I didn't go out or mingle with other people; I lost a lot of friends because of how I was. With Peer Support and going to Taking Charge classes, and reading the books that were offered.

I learned to use secure thoughts from Taking Charge. With Peer Support and the classes it is easier to get out of bad situations. In Recovery International and Peer Support, I learned how to like myself how to replace insecure thoughts with secure thoughts, to help me deal with situations. The symptoms are still there, but when I practice the method, they are not as intense.

I have learned to get up in the morning, even though sometimes I don't want to. I make my bed, and don't go back to my room, until bed time. I used to not like eating out. This is my secure thought for being in a diner, Dis—stressing but not dangerous, and it's not how I feel, It's how I function. There are many secure thoughts to use. When I meet people now, I don't just listen and walk away, I talk to them. I've met a few new friends, in Peer Support, and Recovery International. I've learned not to judge people anymore, here's why, "There is no right or wrong, in the trivialities of life, just differences of opinions". "He or she is not wrong, their average." "I'm not wrong, I'm average".

These are 2 more secure thoughts from Taking Charge classes. Recovery, International, and Taking Charge, very useful if you use them. Replace insecure thoughts with secure \_ thoughts, and help yourself with, "Helplessness is not hopelessness?"

Here's what I am working on now. "Digging up the past does not change present feelings or behavior".

#### "Changing Direction"

1. From this moment on, I will concentrate on what I can do for myself, not on who or what I can do for myself, not on who or what may have caused my difficulties.
2. I accept who I am, and move forward with conviction.
3. When I change what I think, I change how I feel, I change how I react.

I also give credit to my Doctor and Counselor, who have helped me through my recovery.

D.A.R.

Before Peer Support and Taking Charge classes, I was this meek, shy, scared, and negative person. I was always a victim. I was a victim of my own abuse. I put myself down terribly, called myself some nasty names and my husband did too. He also physically abused me. I was so mentally and physically beat up that I didn't have any self—confidence, self-love, or self-esteem. I was very suicidal when first attending classes. I really believed I was going to be the first hopeless case in Peer Support. I thought people could tell I was mentally ill, just by looking, or talking to me. I was very insecure and self-conscious.

In Peer Support and Taking Charge classes I have learned that although I may be helpless at times, I am not hopeless. I'm not wrong, I am average, and he or she is not wrong but average. This is something I needed to learn because I always thought of myself as way below average. I've learned that my words and vocabulary have worked against me in the past. I have also learned to change an insecure thought to a secure thought. I have learned that everyday stressors are a triviality compared to my mental health. I've learned to put my mental health first above all else.

The changes in me have been gradual. I'm no longer shy, I don't feel meek and scared all the time. I no longer think negatively. I laugh a lot more. I am more patient and understanding. I am kinder to myself, making me kinder to others. I am no longer self—conscious and don't care what others think of me. I care about what I think of me. I have self-confidence, self esteem, and self respect. I actually like myself after 40 years of being my worst enemy. I've learned to take responsibility for my life by not blaming others. I've learned to take responsibility for my life by not blaming others, and I have learned forgiveness.

I cannot brag enough on how my once negative thinking has changed to positive thinking. My whole outlook on life has changed for the better. I am learning to step out of my comfort zone by attending functions, dinners, and get togethers'. Fear is no longer in control of me as I learned to control the fear. The inner peace I feel is so worth the few hours I spend a week at the classes. I was able to quit smoking because of the tools I learned in Peer Support. I have had setbacks and go back to my old habits sometimes, but I recognize them right away and practice, practice, practice the method, because they really do work, I'm living proof.

I also give credit to my Doctor and Counselor for their help in my recovery.

Cindy L.

April 10, 2006

In October 2004, I was introduced by my psychiatrist Dr. Gibbs, to Clay Sperry, a Peer Support Specialist. At the time I was living at a nursing home in Conway.

I was obsessed with getting my wife, son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren back, and I was not interested in doing nothing for my own recovery. I used to call my wife daily, several times and she would end up hanging up on me. On the first meeting with the PSS I had very low self—esteem, self—worth, and confidence, and I was incessant about getting my wife and family back. Although my family came to see me once when my sister died, there have been no other visits since last year. I have resigned myself to the fact that my wife will never want me back, but it bothers me that my son will not visit or talk to me. The calls to my wife have become shorter and less frequent.

Shortly after the first meeting with the PSS, I began working on some of my goals and on a recovery program titled Taking Charge. For three months, Clay worked with me on a 1-1 basis trying to divert my attention from the loss of my family, to my own personal recovery.

Several weeks passed on, I got involved in a bowling activity and I found it was a pleasant experience, but I did not go again. Then after about three months, I decided not to get Peer Support anymore, but agreed to continue taking the Taking Charge Classes. I was very passive in the group, initially but I was persistent in my attendance and I became an active participant in the class eventually.

One day, Clay asked me to share my story with the group and this technique raised my self-esteem. I told the group that I was educated in Puerto Rico, studied to be Doctor, I had a major in Chemistry, and a minor in Biology with two years in medical school, and then dropped out. My father was extremely upset with me for dropping out, and would not even speak to me for several years, until my wife and I established a clinical laboratory in Ponce. The business was a success for awhile, but illegal competition drove us out and we went bankrupt. Once again I felt shame and quilt for the assumed failure.

In the Taking Charge Class, I learned to "Endorse myself (give myself credit) for the efforts I put forth, not necessarily the outcome".

Shortly alter the business failed, my wife and I moved to the USA and that is when I began having serious symptoms of depression.

In October 2005, Clay obtained a scholarship for me to attend the SC Independent Living Council, Conference and at the end of the Conference I told Clay I was very inspired by what I saw, some people were blind or wheel chair bound, but still lived independently and participated in much life and activities in spite of their disabilities. As Clay took me home, I told him I would like to go into Independent Living and he referred me to Waccamaw Housing at WCMH.

Several times I was scared, and was going to change my mind, but Clay talked to me and assured me that everything would be ok, because my fears were unfounded. Also that, he. Sean Pierce, Dr. Gibbs and Waccamaw Housing would be there for me, and I need not worry. (In Taking Charge we learn "F ears are beliefs, and beliefs can be changed").

Waccamaw Housing secured mean Apartment, and I am presently living independently. I have learned the bus routes and have also have advocated for myself on certain issues with the Apt. complex, and the telephone company. I have even learned to take care of my finances and have made friends at the Apt. complex where I live. I am enjoying learning to cook Puerto Rican food.

In summary the Taking Charge Class and its facilitator, Clay Sperry has helped me grow as a person and to change the way I think. Although my family situation is still the same I have learned to change my attitude and my reaction towards it. Finally I am focusing on something I can control, myself, my thoughts, my words, and my actions. I feel a great joy for having achieved this recovery victory.

I am also very grateful to Dr. Gibbs, Sean Pierce, WCMH Housing, Audrey and Jackie, all my friends at the Taking Charge group, SC ILC, and others who inspired me and helped me along my recovery journey. Although I have far to go, you all were there when I was stuck in my recovery.

Thank You,

N.G.A.