

EDITOR'S MESSAGE

The White Picket Fence is now at its fourth edition. Its publication has been a varied and interesting journey in peer self expression. The White Picket Fence by its very name conjures up images of small town America, where neighbor knew neighbor and enjoyed conversing across each other's lawns and picket fences. In this newsletter, peers tell their individual stories and perspectives on life but speak as if with one voice of their hope, courage and strength of character. All the authors of these newsletter articles, as indeed all peers, are uniquely creative and intelligent individuals. It is an honor for NAMI/PBC to offer them this space for communicating their innermost thoughts and feelings.

SPRING CLEAN YOUR MIND

LORI JO BAACH

Get rid of the clutter. Turn the cobwebs into dream catchers. Make believe you were having a mental garage sale and sort out and toss all of the bric-a-brac that has been accumulating to only take up unnecessary space in your brain. Turn the acid rock pulsating between your ears into Lite FM. Take self-inventory and decide what's really worth saving and what "gunk" you need to free yourself from.

Remember, "stressed" spelled backwards is "desserts." Plan something pleasurable for yourself to focus on this spring. Maybe take Zumba or a photography class or volunteer somewhere or breakfast with an old friend every Saturday morning. Be creative. How many coffee mugs do you have in your pantry? Have you ever thought about modifying the one you use daily for one stored up in the cupboard? (Maybe it should be called the "Cup-bored")...

You are an amazing person. What are you going to do to love and take care of yourself this spring? Breathe again. We live in a fast food world. Drive the speed limit of life. Spring into action. Spring clean your mind!

ART — OFFICIAL FLAVOR

MICHAEL

I am currently and always known as "the dreamer."

Sometimes I'm flying,

Sometimes I'm falling,

In and out I go to the masses

and serene emptiness.

I like to see things that can't be seen.

I take comfort in the pulses that logically

no audible tone can be heard.

To be kind is to void activity.

Performed as heartless discard.

All my talents exist to serve

a believer of beliefs.

As per design: we do not kneel

to a glass God; rather that moment

we earn, achieve, win.

Scarlet Fever

VOTING, THROUGH PLEASURE AND PAIN

CAROLINE CHEN

Why vote? I can think of two reasons: for your own sake, and for the sake of society. You can vote so that you will feel good that your opinion was heard, and you can vote so that society will benefit from your carefully considered opinions that arise from your unique life experience.

Voting can bring on varying emotions. It feels bad if you tell yourself, "Among the millions of registered voters, my vote is so small that it doesn't count." It feels good if you tell yourself, "I did my civic duty by voting." It feels

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bad if your candidate doesn't win. But it feels good to know that, by voting, you made an effort and were part of an important national, state, or local decision. Part of mental health recovery is moving from being passive to being active, and this can include active participation in our democracy.

Vote if you're angry! Vote if you're hopeful! Vote if you're afraid of what might happen if you don't vote. Vote if you care about the future.

Encourage others to vote. Be respectful of their opinions, especially if they differ from yours. If someone says things that offend you, make an effort to remain calm. If necessary, make a joke or change the topic to keep the peace.

During one presidential election, when I was young, my mom voted for David Donkey and my dad voted for Edward Elephant. When they got home that evening and told each other what they had done, they laughed and said, "We cancelled each other out!" They were still friends, they still disagreed, and they still each did their part.

FEEDBACK LOOPS

SILVIE AND HEIDI

Heide and I were speaking on the phone to each other when we felt like we had a breakthrough. We decided to write about our ideas that came from this conversation in hopes that it may help you. We invite you to respond to what we have written. Perhaps you can express this in a different way that will, in turn, help someone else.

These are some of the questions we came up with:

Have you ever had a time in your life when you have had extreme feelings of depression?

Have you ever chastised yourself about your thoughts?

Do you make or have you ever made a long list of why you are not good enough just as you are?

There are a lot of people who struggle with these questions in their minds. We can tell you, that we have been there too, just like many others with and without brain illnesses.

The problem seems to be that people with brain illnesses go through an exponentially rougher time with these thoughts. Why? Because we are excellent thinkers; we think, and we think...and we think some more!

Recently, we learned that we create feed-back loops in our minds. These feed-back loops can be tapped into our thoughts for different reasons and on different occasions that suit us at a particular time. We would say that it is whimsical; however, whimsical implies fun and these feed-back loops can be far from fun.

Over the course of our lives, we excellent thinkers have created some extremely damaging ideas about ourselves. We re-play these same ideas over and over again until it inevitably becomes a feed-back loop in our minds. When we have established a feed-back loop in our minds, we automatically and constantly think of ourselves in the same way. WE create these negative feed-back loops in our minds.

Heide and I realized that our negative feed-back loops hold us in bondage to depression. While Heide and I understand that sometimes we need to have our medications adjusted to help our minds find a happier place, we also know that neither of us enjoys being locked into depression and can't imagine anyone who would.

Since constant and numerous negative feed-back loops can have such a daunting effect on the way we view ourselves, it is best to try and eliminate negative thoughts and replace them with positive thoughts. If you choose, see if you can catch yourself thinking through one of your most frequent feed-back loops. It is automatic thinking so it may be difficult to catch when it happens; but if you do catch it, write the thoughts down. If you have a trusted person in your life, ask him or her to listen to your feed-back loop and tell you whether or not the information you have been telling yourself is accurate.

[Here's a clue: If the feed-back loop is negative, it is probably not accurate information!]

I would like to invite you to think new thoughts. Think good and caring thoughts about yourself in place of the negative ones that have been dominating your feed-back loop. Write down the new, positive thoughts about yourself and keep them close to you! Practice creating a new and improved feed-back loop by consistently thinking positive thoughts about yourself. Believe you can replace the negative feed-back loop with your new, positive feed-back loop; it is possible! You will know that you will have achieved new thinking when you automatically think of yourself in the best possible way at all times. Heide and I think you are worth it!

FRIENDSHIP AND PEERS

Friendship, as we know, is a deep feeling for another person. Reflected in some of our best literature and naturally found in childhood and adolescence, the art of deep friendships becomes more difficult as life goes by. In this day and age when our adult acquaintances can number in the hundreds (at least) due to Twitter and Face book, feeling incomplete because we have seemingly few good friends may be a common feeling. We have been taught that, no matter how few they are, friends should be nourished and appreciated like hot house plants. Yet, to be honest, most people at some time in their lives feel that their own good friends are few and would wish for more of them. In this fast-paced material world, sometimes it may be difficult to find the time for friendships at all. And yet, friendships are so important to feel connected and, eventually, to feel nurtured.

How successful are peers in developing friendships when they step out into the community? They are very successful. Through its educational role, NAMI/PBC sees so many peers become most successful at forming buddies and friends. It is almost like peers have that friendship-forming knack that people have in high school or college, where many friendships are fluid and easy. Whatever the setting- a NAMI Connections Support group or high-wired Peer-to-Peer Course, the effect is the same – a peer lends a helping hand, a group shares group wisdom, a smile or an encouraging word leaves peers feeling supported and on a stronger path to recovery. And what about the NAMI Peer Council, that association of peers that meets for peer advocacy, education and socialization? All peers who lead or participate in the Council find in it an invaluable world of support.

Whether they are few or many, friends do make a difference. Friendships help trigger peer recovery from mental illness and can supplement family ties. Peers need to create social safety nets for themselves to combat the social exclusion which is associated with mental illness. They could, therefore, access communal associations, workplaces, families and volunteer opportunities.

You can bring humor and kindness to any relationship.

RUMINATIONS

MANUEL

Depressed individuals, specifically those who con-

stantly ponder in the negative, show brain network activation different from those of normal people (As if there is a definition of normal).

In a study cited in the recent article "Activity in brain networks related to features of depression," the results were that those people who think pessimistically about memories or thoughts in repetition are at an elevated risk for depression.

It seems that the 'default mode network' (DMN), a region of the brain, is abnormal in people with depression. What is not understood yet is the association of the DMN and the 'depressive ruminations'.

As an individual who suffers from depression, I was drawn to the article and the study, if just to learn more about myself in the process. I feel like my mind is constantly racing around in circles with negative emotions. It's a major part of my depression, and one that medicines or therapy has yet to conquer. Will my life be forever like this, endlessly thinking about the worst (or close to it) without having at least some down time where my brain is not going wild?

Those people with Major Depressive Disorder, my own mental illness, may be able to relate to this. Any level of depression involves the negative in a myriad of ways. Science continues to find out more about the complexity of our brains, and how it relates to our mood.

I feel that reading and learning more about our disease, and specifically the science behind it, might allow for us to make more sense of our disorder. Knowledge truly is power. Now that science has yet again proven how depression works, hopefully with that information we will be better equipped to speak to the professionals that help us and treat our symptoms.

Our illness is lifelong, though we can reach a point where we can cope. Through the information we find through organizations like NAMI, we will find ourselves on a path to recovery.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NAMI/PBC Peer Council

The NAMI/PBC Peer Council meets every fourth Sunday of the month at 11:00 a.m. in the NAMI/PBC office. Call—561-588-3477.

National Alliance on Mental Illness of Palm Beach County
1520 10th Avenue North, Suite D
Lake Worth, FL 33460

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Or Current Resident

Sufferers of brain illnesses require high doses of respect, dignity and compassion, as in the case of other illnesses. However, the good news is that people do recover. People can proceed to more productive, happier and healthier lives where they can contribute to society. There are many factors involved in recovery, the most important one being hope. Medication, counseling, group therapy and self-help, all benefit people with brain disorders. NAMI/PBC brings many avenues for recovery to the table. Please see NAMI's website at www.namipbc.org

PEER-TO-PEER RECOVERY PROGRAM

This empowering program teaches people to live well in their recovery. Taught by 2 mentors and 1 volunteer, it teaches people to cope through stress reduction, interrelationships, relapse prevention and advance directives for hospitals. It is a life changer.

NAMI CONNECTIONS

Currently, 2 NAMI/PBC facilitators offer this lively self-help support at South County Mental Health Center in Delray Beach, which is well attended and instrumental in drawing people out and solving their problems.

PEER COUNCIL

Originally named Consumer Council, this association has recently been renamed "Peer Council" in honor of the strong relationship existing among peers. The Peer Council supports friendship, networking, education, and advocacy, and is in an expansion stage. You can join the Council through the Open Door policy by contributing \$5.00 to NAMI/PBC.

FAMILY-TO-FAMILY COURSE

NAMI's Family-to-Family course teaches families how to assist family members with brain disorders. You can inform your family members about the course.

FAMILY SUPPORT GROUPS

These groups offer people with loved ones who have brain disorders the monthly support they need.

NEWSLETTERS

As a NAMI/PBC member you receive "NAMI's White Picket Fence" newsletter which is produced by the Peer Council and covers fun topics for peers. You also receive the "Voice" newsletter from NAMI/PBC which covers information concerning topics, activities and events on brain disorders.

GENERAL MEETINGS

These meetings offer hope and information on mental health issues and recovery topics of interest to persons affected by brain disorders. Flyers are sent to the main mental health centers.