

Survivor's Tale

RINA'S STORY

My name is Rina. I want to take a moment and thank you for taking the time to read this article about my illness. This article could change your life or the life of someone close to you, so I hope you continue reading.

FACT: Complicated mental illness like schizophrenia is recoverable. What do WE need to do to save ourselves and our loved ones?

I believe the more we educate each other and unite for the sake of mental wellness for all, our world would be a better place for our children to play. I hope you share this believe, if so, welcome on our journey...

My name is Rina and, quite honestly, I have been to hell and back and I am proud to be able to stand here tall and say I have survived and I am continuing to survive my illness and society's stereotypes of me. I am also simply a woman, mother, wife, and an individual with schizophrenia.

While growing up, my parents thought something was just not right, my mood, my preoccupation with fear of dying; they took me repeatedly to my doctor where we were all told I was simply going through puberty and my emotional distress would submerge as I developed hormonally. After my mother taking me to this same doctor several times a month over the course of a year, we were finally referred to a psychiatrist. I was 17 years old. The doctor said to me, during my initial appointment that 'I am going to have you thrown into the psychiatric ward'. Now, I don't know about anyone else, but he frightened me beyond anything I had ever felt before. I refused to go back to that doctor for help, I was afraid I would be wheeled out in a straight jacket.

That experience caused me to put off seeing another doctor until I was 19. When I was finally able to get over my fear of psychiatrist, I met with a wonderful doctor who took the time to properly diagnosis. It was then that I was formally diagnosed with schizophrenia.

I have lived with this illness all of my life. I can look back at my childhood now and see the waves so high, then crashing so slowly. I have lived with part awareness of my illness for 14 years. Those 14 years were the most difficult period of my life. There definitely were times where I wasn't sure if I was going to make it. The realization that my brain worked differently than the majority of people did not sit well with me. I fought that fact for years.

I viewed my illness as a personal weakness. It has only been over the past few years that I have discovered the unique beauty of my illness. It was then that I decided to share my music with many others. Hoping above all hopes that one person would be able to relate and it would help them. The goal, share the beauty with the, so maybe we can come together and build a bridge of health. As a society, we need to focus on the

beautiful unique differences between us rather than continually be fearful of others differences and view them as a threat to one's stability or safety.

Over the past 5 years I have found that through acceptance of my illness has given me the opportunity to live a rather "normal" life. At least as normal as I have ever experienced.

It took over 10 years to find the right medication combination that worked well not only for my illness, but worked well with my body. Some of the side effects of the medications we are given are sometimes much worse than dealing with the symptoms of the illness. A lot of the medications cause weight gain, and that is a hard thing to accept. But when you have to choose between looking great and feeling good , I'll choose feeling good.

I have been well now for almost 4 years. I am on maintenance medication. I give tuitions in music to the neighbourhood children. I have used that time growing into the person I have always dreamt I could be. I've made a decision that I am not going to allow myself to be stigmatized. And, if you do want to label me, make a poster of mine, because I believe together as a mental health community we can educate society to the many precious gifts we have to offer our society.

Who am I? What am I about? I am a survivor.

I feel honored that I get to actively participate in the mental health movement. I have discovered that music therapy, in addition to following medication regimens, has been instrumental in my healing. Due to my disorder, it has taken me a long time to learn how to identify my actual feelings. Through art other therapies, I can freely express myself without fear of being offensive or harmful to anyone. I firmly believe that any form of self-expression is key in the recovery process.

It is my sincerest goal to help not only other individuals with mental illness, but help our society re-evaluate their misconceptions about people with a mental illness.