

A Brighter Day [1st Place]

By Nora Weiss

It was herself she despised.
Criticized. Dehumanized.
And no one seemed to realize
Her happiness was a disguise
Tricking foolish eyes.

But a few –too few-
Were far to wise
To be deceived by the lies;
To not see through her disguise.

They declared her sanity to be feign;
She was trapped inside her own damaged brain.
She had lost her ability to reason;
Her only solution was constantly scheming.

How could she have felt so safe
In such a dangerous place?

Oh, it was hard,
So hard to ungrasp
From the self-destructive thoughts
That had taken over so fast.

Her life had been stolen,
Yet she was not broken.
She gained her freedom back;
Put her life back intact.

Recovery seemed impossible:
An impassable obstacle.
But eventually she did it.
How? She cannot say-
But when she looks for tomorrow
She sees a brighter day.

And there's now light in her eyes
And laughter in her step.
She has been able to realize
Her happiness will not ebb.

NAMI NJ Dara Axelrod Expressive Arts 2016 Mental Health Poetry Contest - Top Ten Poem

She has found salvation
Within her own mind.
She has reached illumination
Her pursuits in life aligned.

Her gratitude grows every day she walks the earth
She has, at last, established her self-worth.

Thanks [2nd Place]

By Sneha Bolisetty

When I couldn't breathe
Because sadness was a heavy weight sitting on my chest,
You moved it over to sit next to me instead.
When I thought monsters were coming after me
In all of my darkness,
You were the one to turn on the light
And scare the monsters away.
When I couldn't sit still
Because I was so anxious I started to cry,
You went for a walk with me
And held my hand.
When I couldn't get out of bed
Because my bones were heavy
You made me feel weightless
And danced until I smiled.
When I cut all my connections
Because I stopped caring
You taped and locked and glued ours together
So scissors couldn't get through.
Sometimes I can't say thank you, and I'm sorry, it's the just the way I am.
I'm a hill and valley, I'm an up and down, and I'm a contradiction,
But you don't see me as a combination of statements
Opposed to one another,
Because although I may think of myself as just a statement,
You see me as a whole,
A sentence with clauses and phrases,
Verbs and nouns,
And I just wanted to thank you
For seeing me as a person when I can't do that myself

The Upside of Mental Health Challenges [3rd Place]

By Annie Glynn

In professions with stringent rules, those with OCD excel,
They are conscientious, and maintain sterile environments quite well.
While others may be content to leave items in disarray,
Those with OCD meticulously arrange them in an organized way,
Which can significantly reduce time spent looking through a pile,
And improves productivity, making having OCD a tad worthwhile.

With ADHD, you have laser sharp focus on whatever interests you,
Which at times bewilders others, who wonder how that could be true.
Immersed in your passions, you get into a flow state or the zone,
Time ceases to exist, and before you realize it, time has flown.
Lacking a sense of urgency means you are not frazzled at being late,
Au contraire, you remain in a cool, calm and collected state.
Therefore, your blood pressure level does not spike one bit,
Which is quite a good place to be, won't you admit?

Having mental illness is definitely not anyone's desire or choice,
But through advocacy efforts, you can give others a voice.
Wisdom and insight can emerge from the deep pain,
When you shift your perspective, you appreciate the gain.
You cultivate grit to deal with obstacles you encounter in life,
Which may not have occurred without experiencing such strife.
You may be inspired to volunteer your time and talents galore,
And unexpectedly discover that it benefits you much more.
You find purpose and meaning supporting others through their pain,
And realize that your difficult experience has not been in vain.

Mental health challenges help you develop compassion and empathy,
And dealing with adversity can lead to increased resiliency.
What's meaningful and important in life becomes crystal clear,
It's not the accolades or even material things that are dear.
Rather, it's the love of family and friends that mean the most,
They provide unwavering support and remain quite close.
You can persevere and grow throughout the journey too,
Cultivating strength and courage, to become a better you.

Never Did I Think [4th Place]

By Stephen R. Garvey

Never did I think that I would fall in love
With someone as fractured as you
With someone pure and true
With someone who loves her shades of blue

Never did I think that I would fall in love
With someone who talks to the animals like a Disney princess
With someone who fights so hard for even the simplest success
With someone with three personalities, no more, no less

Never did I think I would fall in love
With someone who is never alone even when I am not there
With someone so empathetic and has a care
With someone who lives in her own nightmare

Never did I think that I would fall in love
With someone who struggles through the day
With someone who never thinks things will be ok
With someone who has the courage to say

“That I have mental illness”
“Never know complete wellness”
“How could you ever be with someone like this?”
To which I say, “those things makes you you,
And without them they would be the things that I miss”

Seed [5th Place]

By Mercedes P. Kobrin

As a seed held tight inside my own closed hand,
I did not grow; could not grow
Until I took a risk and dropped onto the ground.

At first, I moved further into myself
Frightened of the darkness
Frozen in the unknown
Then something began stirring inside of me:
A secret wish for beautiful yet painful change

When the warmth of the sun came
Making the hard earth softer
And bringing gentle rain
I swelled with hope and my seed's shell split

String-like roots reach downwards
Quenching unrealized thirst
And receiving nourishment from outside myself
I grew larger and deeper, anchoring firmly into the world

With new strength and confidence
I reached a cautious finger to the sun
The wind caused the delicate tendril to sway
But my roots held me in place

Tenacity and Will had pulled me from both ends
No longer a seed, I unfolded into nothing
But a truer version of myself

Hungry creatures gnawed at me
Blistering summer suns burned my leaves
In droughts, I turned to my inner reserves
Until the strong rains came, threatening to loosen my grip and topple me

Over and over, I face these challenges
And I endure!

Now a tree, I marvel at how I've grown
Stronger with every hardship; wiser with each experience
I discover that I do not stand alone; I have never stood alone

NAMI NJ Dara Axelrod Expressive Arts 2016 Mental Health Poetry Contest - Top Ten Poem

Other seeds, plants and trees – We form a forest
As unique as the challenges we face
All of us sharing this common ground
I bloom in compassion
I bear fruit in love
Here I will remain, always changing
A companion in Empathy
A testament to Hope

Joy Division [6th Place]

By Laurie Goldman

Your digital piano,
is powered by electricity,
but without you,
it stands in silence.

You play every day,
You have to,
It kinda keeps you breathing.

Then one day,
mid-song,
the power goes out.

It's happened before.

You call your electrician,
but this time,
he has trouble restoring the power,
You'll have to wait.

In the meantime,
you play your acoustic guitar,
and though you're not very good,
you do what you can,
until you get the power back.

Untitled [7th Place]

By Patrica Korsak

You are not alone.
I have been there. Other people have been there.
We empathize.
Speak up. Express your feelings.
Despite the tears, despite the hurt, despite the anger, despite the desperation.

You are not alone.
Take a chance. You'll be surprised.
We understand.
Share the fear, share the hurt, share the anger.
In spite of the anxiety, in spite of the trembling, in spite of the self-doubt.

You are not alone.
Lean on us. Let us support each other.
See us in you.
Acknowledge us, talk to us, recognize us.
Fight with us, struggle with us, strengthen with us.

Together we can make a difference.
Together we can fight stigma.
Together we are so much more.

You are not alone.

MANIC DEPRESSION (BIPOLAR DISORDER) [8th Place]

THE GOOD STUFF

By Valerie Ryan

Because of the depths
I appreciate more the heights
Because of the heights
I know I have the might

Not the might like in Maybe
But the Bolt like in Tight
The might to prevail
The heights tell me: Go Sail

Not the heights like in Everest
But more like the Poconos
Some call them hills, bumps in the road
I call them wills
Like I Will; I Won't just Try
I can reach for the sky

So the ups and downs
They may not be my friends understand
They are not me
They are part of who I am

I am proud nowadays
In recovery I can say
Wellness is mine
Most of the time

And if I slip up, set back, fall down
I know I'll get up
And go out on the town

I see more, I feel more
I intuit more, I know myself
I'm aware, I'm mindful
I CARE

It's a gift
In a way, experienced every day
And as Lady Gaga said
"Baby, I was born this way!"

Untitled [9th Place]

By Melanie Aaron Pappas

A gentle touch, a warm embrace
A whisper of your kiss upon a face
The laughter dancing in your eyes
Always takes us by surprise
Each step forward stretches into a mile
With simple achievements, we share a smile
Hands outstretched, you reach for more
Never letting the world ignore
You make an impression on all you meet
Pushing the labels and boundaries to defeat
For years, together we've traveled this road
When the sticks and stones, others have slowed
You pitted your shoulder against the scruff
Showing you're made of better stuff
Words – not your primary communication
We've honed our skills in translation
Just when we thought the journey's done
You take on a new challenge, a 5k run
You applied strength in another matter
Forcing naysayers into silence, to scatter
The doors you've opened when you thought you couldn't
Have taken you where others wouldn't
Letting sunlight in to conquer fear
Moving us to quietly cheer
We watch you dance and twirl – and shout
Understanding the acting out
Knowing you, our lives have changed direction
We've learned a different type of affection
A varied language and vocabulary
That fills the gaps and makes us merry
You know we'll never change
Though outsiders might find it "strange"
The ongoing cycle of life we enjoy
No one can destroy
Through surreptitious looks and slights
Together, we'll look down from dizzying heights
Hold our hands
We're the ones who understand
Precisely

Perfectly.

The Never-Fading [10th Place]
By Melissa Seymour

In the deepest dark there is light
In the abyssal waters there is still life
So too in despair there is hope
The sun ever seeks to shine
Even as clouds roll in

Though rain and fog have shaped the days of my life
I ever recall the warmth of the sun
Bathing me in its cheerful light
The sun will forever shine
Even when I cannot see it

So I turn my face to the sun
Let the light dispel the shadows in my soul
As my petals bloom bright
And the garden is watered by caring hands
Which slowly pull the weeds strangling me

My bloom will not fade
For I am there amaranth amid dandelions
From the rock-bed my roots burst
And nothing shall cut me down
Through wind and rain I am here still

And I always will be