

## **NAMI NJ Expressive Arts – Poetry Showcase – January/February 2023**

### **A Sister's Story**

**By Maria del Carmen Rodriguez**

#### 1<sup>st</sup> act

Memories of my siblings playing together take center stage in the remembrance of my childhood. In our family, taking care of each other was our top value. My parents loved all eight children and especially urged us to protect the youngest one.

Our baby sister had an infectious smile, enthusiasm for academic work, love of classical dance and animals and was rattled by life's ordinary changes.

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> act

Her first battle with mental illness happened in her early twenties and we all rallied to her support.

After completing the 1<sup>st</sup> psychiatric hospitalization, I invited her to her favorite store, an ice cream parlor.

She noticed how strangers were looking at her with disdain. Thinking loud she said: "I guess I would have to live with this for the rest of my days". I hugged her tight reminding her of our mutual love.

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> act

She spoke about her fear and torment living with demanding voices that she could not turn off. I was afraid, too. I was puzzled by a symptom that defied my knowledge and was terrified of losing her even more.

#### 4<sup>th</sup> act

Despite almost completing a bachelor's degree in education, her illness did not allow her to achieve this meaningful milestone. Eventually, she got a job as an assistant at a daycare center. With the passing of time, her life "partner" convinced her to stop treatment and she paid serious consequences then and still does today.

#### Open-ended act

My sister has endured endless suffering and the rejection from strangers and from those close to her, too. Her life exemplifies dignity and courage and having her in my life is a blessing. Her gifts are her unique sensibility, appreciation for nature and children and above all, an indomitable spirit. As it was on the beginning, it is still true today: our sisterhood is unbreakable.

**I Cannot Tell**  
**By Faye Marks**

I have depression that's a fact  
Can you tell by the way I act?  
I cannot tell about my plight  
I need to hide it, isn't that right?

If I would my feelings share  
Would there be someone to care?  
I don't want any pity or fuss  
I need to be tough and strong for us

Discriminated, looked down on I would be  
And everyone would be pointing at me  
Would there be anyone to understand?  
Anyone to take me by the hand?

I try so hard to hide it you see  
I'm afraid of what they would think of me  
I don't want them to know I'm not well  
I wear a mask so they can't tell

I'm tired of trying to keep this all in  
I'm tired of the mask letting no one in  
To tell someone all about me  
Would let me finally be free

Free from all the things I've hidden  
From the things that seem forbidden  
but I feel I cannot tell  
they would not take it very well

I'm afraid that they would leave  
I'd be alone and left to grieve  
Everything worse it would make  
It's something that I could not take

So I will go on as I have been  
Avoiding telling anyone again  
If they found out how amazed I would be  
If they would still feel the same about me

**Jagged Swords of Ignorance (Haiku)**  
**By Shana Rodriguez**

Slithering concepts adjust  
Life lived in expectancy  
Air sharp as the next

Slithering words swirling  
Frantic shattered groundbreaking  
In cognitive parities disrupted

Friction carries uncharted spaces  
Darkness is faltered without foundation  
Barriers forsaken creation

Strong will lustering borders  
Breathe grounding forces  
Will struggles to live

Frightened shaking hands  
Assisting broken hypersensitivity  
Brain tremors destroy reality

Bathing sunshine deflects prosperous behavior  
Aspiring fruitfulness radically accepting  
This is the world; inhumane.

**The Mind of Many are Okay!**  
**By Tameka Bordeaux**

In many sectors,  
The health of the mind remains a side-eyed misunderstood thing...  
Because eyes still refuse to stare down the souls of the hurt - with a validation  
That all pain just don't hit the same-  
So let us cast down the stones  
Thrown at those which are seen as black cat, sheep, or a bottomless abyss of stagnancy,  
Eyes like these seem to see only weak and fragile *unstable* mishaps,  
Infested and unpleasant animals  
Because they refuse to see the dichotomy  
Between a pimple full of pus  
And a body and mind full of rust...  
Both enclosing contents in need of being free -  
But the mind of many  
Remix and repeat phrases like:  
*"you different," "weird," "not normal,"* all because you don't fit their kernel -

But mental health is crying with an allowance to be unbound,  
Not in fear but rather embracing the warmth of catharsis,  
Because lighter is the soul that grows in reverence of the tears that flow-

Mental health is the allowance to scream out loud that you are not alright,  
*And it's alright...*  
It's alright to admit that the thoughts won't stop,  
That the wear and tear your body has endured feels like a war-

But alongside those tears,  
Some church bells ring  
And the Saints scream and say:  
*"Just kneel and pray, that which afflicts the mind will dissipate...."*

But when you and the shadow been secretly dancing  
With silence placating that union,  
Them shadows climb out and back in-  
And the winds of conditioning  
Awaken that fight, flight, or freeze survival door to begin swinging off the hinges,  
Back and forth -  
And at that point, more than *My GOD* is needed...

We need to be okay to say that the dark done carried all that made sense away -  
That breathing feels like dying,  
And crying at times feels like boulders full of burdens-

The health of the mind begins at that very fine point...

Admittance...

Without a space to stretch the truth of that expression,

Generations will remain nurturing the falseness of "*I'm okay...*"

**The Revelation of Self and Everything in Between**  
**By Shari X Insanity**

After going through a dozen of downfalls  
Throughout my childhood and teen hood  
I became hesitant, negative, depressed, and doubtful  
That my life will change around  
Losing faith in myself to stand my ground

An emotional, liberating rebirth  
Almost destroyed me  
Finally I had positive rises later on in my life  
Looking back I am crying and smiling  
I can now say that I'm at my highest peak

Not letting my demons  
That are double-locked inside  
To allow them to be unlocked, unleashed, and set free.

While all of them try to get the best of me  
The smallest of things  
Still attempts to eat  
At my pale skin

Sitting on this edge of a cliff  
I'm looking down below my bare feet  
Feeling relieved that I am at a great height  
Because no harm in the world can be done to me

I will have relaxation and peace  
From the people that I cannot bear to see  
Having a minute alone to breathe  
Seeing the beauty of nature that surrounds me

Through my saddened, broken hazel eyes  
Wondering about all the obstacles ahead  
That are trying to sabotage or halt my path  
To bring reality into my dreams

Thinking about my past  
Everywhere that I have been  
How everything so far  
Have strengthened and shaped me

I thank the stars and moon above my head  
The caring hearts and hands  
Who have helped me along the way  
Because they are the reason that I am who I am today.

**STIGMATIC**  
**By Dana Hunter**

I don't like it.  
The constant remarks  
endless chatter from faces so dark.

The judgment  
unforgiving jests  
I find your empty opinions never rest.

Labeling me as a confused burden  
attached through birth  
lazy and mad, mind crippled and useless.

Stabbing words  
slice and dissect  
leaving me prone, damaged and spent.

Bringing rejection to what keeps me alive  
phrases that tear, rip and bite  
prevent me from believing I will suffice.

Recovery takes effort,  
time and regret.  
Never give in to the words that others meant.

Stand and move forward in a purposeful way  
out from the barrage  
of what others say.

**too much, no more**  
**By Soorya Baliga**

worldly conversation blasting  
louder than their “background” music  
how is that possible?

too much, no more  
must leave  
must leave NOW  
now, now, now  
excuse me, um, excuse me  
could you please give me a ride home?

thank you so much for the ride!

left externally uninterrupted  
slivers of shame pierce me

did I really crave to hear my mind?

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