

Schizophrenia

My name is Nick and I was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia in 1980 at the age of 19. When I was 22 years old my mom told me she had thought something was wrong with me when I was in high school but she didn't know what it was. I had gradual onset schizophrenia but a bad LSD trip is what triggered my psychosis. I had smoked pot daily for my last two years of high school, drank every weekend and occasionally took acid.

I got my first job as a dishwasher in a local restaurant when I was 17 and in the next two years I had about 15 other jobs none of which lasted more than three months. It was said half-jokingly in my family I had no problem finding jobs it was just keeping them was the problem. I moved out of my parents apartment a month after I turned 18 years old but after the bad acid trip I moved back in with my parents when I was still 19 and eventually started seeing a therapist. The amazing thing was how I took this in stride. This was my normal for me. Looking back the drugs probably contributed to my decline, but anyway after 6 months of weekly therapy a psychiatrist from the clinic I was going to recommended to my parents to put me in my first psych ward.

I remember my therapist who was this nice, cheery young woman cried when this happened; I had put on a good face with her and she had no idea I was this bad off. In the hospital I decompensated and for the next two years I was psychotic without literally no relief from symptoms for even a minute and I think other schizophrenics know what I'm talking about.

I will say what my illness was NOT before I explain what it was. I DID NOT have any religious delusions, I did not have delusions about aliens, the FBI, the CIA, or about cameras following me or people plotting against me, or microchips planted in me, all of which are common in people with my diagnosis. My disease took the form of feeling as going to go crazy at any moment. In my case this meant I was afraid I would go stark, screaming mad and lose control and not be aware of anything around me and totally disappear into my own world and have no grip on reality.

I spent my time in those days by myself at a place called Soteria House fighting to not go crazy. I was always on edge, I was always scared, and I could not relax and my thoughts raced constantly until my brain felt like oatmeal. These may not seem serious but believe me I went through hell and suffered. Soteria didn't believe in medication but after I got kicked out of there after a year and a half I was put in a locked psychiatric hospital where I was put on a massive dose of one of the older anti-psychotics and I stayed there for 8 months. I was released to a residential treatment home in a rich college town near Stanford University. I had to have a daytime activity so I went to their vocational program in which we did yard work for people in the community and mailing projects. After several small steps another client and I were given a job at a family owned small business. They knew our story and the deal was that we would work there for 4 months and then another two people would get a chance etc. but they liked us so much we worked there for four years.

Near the end I got addicted to crack and powder cocaine which contributed to three things : I lost this job, I lost my housing and I ended back in a psych ward after not being in one for 6 years. I lived the addict life for three years; clubbing, parties, spending lots of time getting drugs in the town which became the town with the highest murder rate in California. I should insert here that I had been getting SSI and SSDI since my stay in the locked facility.

Not clean in 1990 thanks to AA, CA, and NA and I have not touched drugs except for my meds or drank even one drink to the present day. In 1990 I moved into a board and care home for 5 years then in 1995 I moved out and have lived independently since mainly renting rooms in peoples houses. I have had to move three or four times; the shortest stay was 3 years in one and the longest 5 years.

I started driving in 1998 and have driven since, owning my own car. I have worked almost steadily since that first job in the 80's albeit part time. I have now lived by myself for the last 2 1/2 years.

I credit my recovery to my family, my sisters and mom and dad for constantly giving me support and inviting me everywhere. I have many drastic symptoms but I am twenty times better than I was 25 years ago. I have gone to school and I am more than halfway towards an associate degree. In my disease I have flown across the country, been camping, played on a church baseball team, driven 200 miles one way to visit my dad in Sacramento by myself, gone out to eat often and to movies, I was a park ranger for two years, unloaded trucks for 4 years, tried construction work.

I thank medication and therapy for not being hospitalized since 1990. To sum it up I was incapacitated from the ages 19-22 but now what they say is true, in older schizophrenics the symptoms subside, they go in remission. I just made friends with a fellow sufferer who has many friends and we go out to eat for entertainment. I dated but have never married though I have no interest to. I find it easier to talk to women now, which I wish would have been the case years ago. I have hope things will get better. I have many ups and downs and constantly mis-read situations, I feel like it is chaos driving in the Bay Area where I live, but for someone who has never had confidence, and has low-self esteem I think I have accomplished a lot and I have goals to keep taking college classes in library science to get a job in a library since I can't do physical work forever. I just hope my story inspires someone if they think their future is hopeless.