

Gratitude: Relationships with Care Providers

Melissa's Story

I had about given up on finding a therapist who I felt understood sexual and physical abuse. Fortunately, I was referred to a therapist who has turned out be just what I needed. I've been seeing her for a long time and she truly understands what I've been through and how it impacted my life. She understands the deep sadness that sometimes comes out of nowhere and is there for me. She helped me understand why I feel the things I do today and my reactions to different circumstances today. She was patient and let me move at my own speed. She empowered me by helping me to know that I have choices and the power to make decisions. Most of all, she listened when I spoke from my pain.

Another instance is when I was inpatient for the first (and only) time. A nurse treated me with such kindness and caring. She took time to sit with me. She allowed me to cry. She allowed me to be in my pain and begin my healing work. She was a special gift during my inpatient stay. I won't ever forget her kindness.

When I was in the DBT Program (Dialectical Behavior Therapy), there was an OT who never gave up on me, especially when I was suicidal. I would say "I have nothing left to live for." And she would say every day to me, "Melissa, remember you are gift, you have so much to live for." She supported me in my recovery and believed that I would recover. That's was a long time ago. Today, we get together once in awhile for supper and she still supports my recovery and reminds me that I am gift.

I feel blessed in my recovery journey. I believe that I am alive today because these people and more believed in me. They helped me discover my true self. That is what I desire to do for people who have been sexually and/or physically abused. I want them to see the gift that they are to everyone.

Janet's Story

It was my social worker who worked hard at getting my SSI, and other types of help I needed, i.e., housing, transportation. Then when her work was done it was my visiting home nurse who I still see every two weeks. Her name is Betsy. Betsy fills my meds, takes my BP and pulse. She asks how I am doing and takes down my schedule for future meetings and dr's appointments. She also brought a co-worker nurse who lives with bi-polar.

Betsy helps get my prescriptions in order, especially when I am ready to go on vacation. Most people would think these tasks would just be a part of their day. But my moods still swing (not as bad) and Betsy help takes a lot of stress off me."

Molly's Story

After years of off and on therapy that never really seemed to help, I found Jennifer... a Clinical Social Worker. We began by working on the immediate issues of my being safe and getting out of an abusive relationship. She empowered me by taking things slowly and really letting me be in control and take the lead in my own recovery process. When the times of hopelessness came upon me, she held onto that hope for me and never gave up. There were many starts and stops and pauses but she was patient and never

August 2009

pushed. It was always my choice, my decision and my personal power that lead me to continue. She was the guide.

Some people would think that 10 years of therapy is a long time. But it took a whole childhood to develop the trauma history I have and she assured me it was OK to take the time to undo the unhealthy coping strategies I had learned in order to survive. She sat with me at times when I spoke with my psychiatrist about problems with meds and not wanting to take them anymore, helped me figure out how to get off the couch, shower and get dressed when I was paralyzed with depression, always a phone call away when panic set in and plans of suicide monopolized my thoughts. She taught me new ways to handle stress, negative thoughts, control impulses, be in the here and now and be able to have real and meaningful relationships. The list goes on and on. Jennifer didn't just help me become a survivor.... she helped me be a thriver.

Karen's Story

K. was my staff person at the clubhouse that I attended. In my ten years there, I worked with him for about seven. I knew him before he was my staff person and he imparted his wisdom even then: "Do one or two things really well instead of many things poorly," I remember him saying. Finally now, I am using this wisdom.

My first major encounter with K. was in 2001 when I was doing poorly. I had been falling apart for several months and I had reached a crisis point, thinking I'd take the clubhouse over as the director, believing radios were talking to me, not sleeping, etc. No one got through to me that anything was amiss. My staff person at the time was on vacation and K. was my "coverage" person. One day he sat me down, his long legs straddled out before him, gentle concern on his face. I needed to go to the hospital, he said. A giant wave of relief swept over me. No one had gotten through to me in quite the right manner. His only mistake was that he said I would be in there for a week. I was in the hospital for three months. How little he knew me then.

But we grew to be much more than staff worker and client. I no longer am a member of the clubhouse, but we are still in contact and I turn to him as a resource and a friend. He has taught me so much about passion and resilience. His knowledge of mental health benefits is vast, which moves me forward in my recovery. His talents as a mental health practitioner were superb. With a single word, he could calm my ruffled soul. He taught me life lessons: how to slow down, not panic, how to live in less fear and anxiety, how to focus on the moment. He refines these lessons in himself, so as to pass them on to others; further proof to me that we're all just human!

Our boundaries shifted, because I worked on weekends as a staff person at the clubhouse and we were on a Mental Health Center committee together. As much as I learned from him, he honored me as a colleague. He included me as an equal.

K. is himself almost a character out of a Dr. Seuss book, tall and thin, his gray-and-white wiry hair tied back in a ponytail. He routinely wears his plaid shirt, zip-up sweatshirt and jeans. He whistles on the job and could use a calming "med" of his own some days. He has taught me to look for the unique in humans, not a mythical norm.

Mostly, K. affirmed in me what I overcame, when I forgot to see that myself. He liked to point out my successes to me and further encourage me to achieve goals I sometimes never thought I could reach.

BethAnn's Story

After spending a great deal of time recovering from several major surgeries, and a profound depression, I found myself in the psych hospital one Christmas eve -- feeling very overwhelmed & wanting to die....yet too weary to do anything about it. I was lying in my bed, staring at the ceiling, when I recognized the quick paced footsteps of my doctor. What was she doing here? It was her day off - it was snowing outside - heck, there was a storm brewing out there. What was she doing here -- did I run out of insurance? I was apprehensive when I heard her familiar knock, knock, knock on the door - and when she came in, still bundled from the cold - flecks of snow scattered about - she had the look of an arctic explorer. She spoke with an Eastern European accent, and got right down to business -- she didn't sit down - she simply stood there, one hand on her hip, the other gesturing in the air as she spoke. In her rushed, staccato way of speaking, she explained that her son just returned home from college, and told her something that she simply had to tell me at once. It could not be shared by phone, it had to be done now, in person -- so she trekked all the way over there just to tell me. Ok, I said, with hesitation -- what is it? She cleared her voice, and simply said, Beth - life sucks, and then you die. That's all, Merry Christmas -- see you next week, bye now! And off she went back into the storm, back to her home and family.

Now to an unknowing onlooker, this may seem like a very cruel, mean thing to say, considering the circumstances. However, not so for me. It was worth a hoot and a howl, and was EXACTLY what I needed to hear! You see her message, and considerable effort to deliver it acknowledged many things -- such as my resilience - it honored her belief that I'd see this through; it spoke to my intellect & sense of humor. The fact that she would go to such lengths to deliver the message let me know that she was indeed on my side, and that her message would be the best gift I could get - ever! Ultimately, it made clear, that she knew what it was like to be me, and I was worth the effort.

Gail's Story

While muddling through the final days of a fading marriage, unfortunately, our children fell victim to the negative energy. Instead of being able to go about their business being kids, each one suffered considerably. I will forever be grateful to the therapist treating our son, who had become the container for all our distress. During that time, his therapist worked with him, to encourage him to experience regular "kid" accomplishments, that our son was certain he could not do. Our son was afraid of getting hurt during sports, feared riding a bike, etc. Years after the typical kid is proficient on a bike, our son would not even consider going near one. Over the course of time, and their construction of a trusting relationship, our son began to come to his sessions with his dad's bicycle. Sometimes, it would just sit there -- but eventually they would walk with it, until one day he agreed to sit on it, and lo and behold, what a day of triumph it was, when our son was able to zip by us -- firmly in the driver's seat - steering the course for himself, on the bike! It was such an exceptional triumph, as our son experienced so few joys during that time. Our boy was so worried about everything, and never wanted us to spend any money on him, believing he didn't deserve it. After experiencing the prowess on the bike, he actually allowed us to buy him his own bike. That was a milestone! As I look back on his life, I can see how that achievement, set the course for future steps to move ahead in life. He graduated from high school with special recognition; attends college, and holds a job. Wow. That is not the future I could have envisioned if it weren't for his therapist helping him through when we couldn't help our son in the way that he needed. I am forever grateful to his psychiatrist, Dr. M. who

August 2009

always held hope, and never treated him like a "mental patient" and always made it clear that he can and would get better.

Our other daughter's therapist gave our little one an outlet, to be the creative tot that she was - a respite from all the "noise" and the "no, don't do that" -- and permitting her to just "be." She shared her joy in working with our daughter, which allowed our entire family to experience her differently -- the wee one was just caught in the middle of a war zone, and she hadn't signed up for that.

And finally, the therapist that saw me through it, continues to work with me to this day. He has endured the wrath of those diabolical forces trying to pull me under. He withstood that assault - even when 2 other professionals (who endured far less) chose to quit, because the stakes were too high. In spite of the disparaging attacks to his character, which were ridiculous, he maintained. I have made such exceptional progress - the sort I never dreamed possible. A lifetime of trauma, drama, and rubbish -- finally seen through a different lens, and its tale now serves a purpose. This therapist helped me realize I have value, I am capable, and helped me to understand what the messages of prior therapists -- that just never clicked until now. I've suffered enough, and I deserved to have a life. He is still there with me, as I lay claim to that life. For this I am lost for words to express my profound gratitude -- for this therapist, his colleagues, and the original one working with my son, who lead all of us to the people who helped us to heal. Wow. I don't know what else to say. It is just that gi-normous. A very heartfelt thank you, from the core of my being.