

In this season of thanks, I would like to express my deepest gratitude. The past months have been an exhilarating ride. I have become in In Our Own Voice presenter and I can honestly say that it has seriously changed my life for the better.

I came in to the training hesitant. Although I do a lot of public speaking for my employer, I have done the same presentation for the past seven years. It has become ingrained in me. I teach new employees about our culture, benefits and policies in a two hour orientation. Somehow it just isn't the same as standing up in front of strangers and telling a deeply personal story about myself. As the two day training went on, I seriously doubted my ability to do this. I was petrified. For my first presentation at Bristol Hospital, I arrived early so I could catch another glance at my note cards. I began to panic in my car, and my fight or flight reflex kicked in. I said to myself "Tara get your stuff together!" So I began to calm down and breathe deep. I popped a Xanax and got through my first one with the help of Steven C. I didn't fall asleep that night. I had so many emotions. Being back in a psych ward and being able to leave when I wanted to was something that I found so exceptionally odd. It brought me back to places and faces that I tried to blur out of my memory for years. But as I left Bristol that night it was with a new found joy.

So as I am searching for holiday gift ideas for myself, as I do every year, I realized that already have it. It's a priceless gift. I am Happy. I like typing that. I am happy. My providers are over the moon with my progress in the past months. I told them, that ever since I have become involved with NAMI my life has changed. I now have a sense of purpose in my life. I feel lighter, I am stronger and I'll type it again. I AM HAPPIER. I wake up in the morning and I don't dread what's in front of me. I am smiling. I feel better about myself, and I love what I am doing.

The other night, after a rather hellish day at work, I was going through my mail. I opened up a card, and fell into a crying mess of happy tears. A Family to Family class had written the card to me as a thank you for my presentation to them. Several people had signed it, and one person wrote that I made them want to be a better person. NO psychiatric drug, or years of therapy have ever given me what that card has. I framed it. It is a constant reminder to me that my story has touched someone or has given someone hope.

So NAMI, I thank you. My family thanks you. My APRN and therapist thank you. I have been on the bipolar journey now for almost 25 years. In that time I and my family have struggled to understand what was happening to me. My wish is that NAMI can constantly move forward with the wonderful programs that you provide. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be an IOOV presenter. It has changed my life!

Tara K.

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