



EVERY DAY IS GIVING TUESDAY

"What we do for ourselves, dies with us: What we do for others, remain and is immortal...". Albert Pike

TOGETHER WE CAN DE-STIGMATIZE MENTAL ILLNESS AND PROVIDE AFFORDABLE HOUSING TO THE HOMELESS:

I AM NOT MENTALLY ILL

Her thick wavy hair was pulled back in a puffy pony tail and her face was fresh without any make-up--no lip-stick, no earrings, nothing. She was dressed in a t-shirt and loose-fitting blue jeans. She appeared to be about thirty-eight years of age.

Lucille was interviewing for one of Hyacinth's Place affordable housing unit in this supportive living program. The interviewing team explained the criteria for residency. "You must be homeless, and you must have a mental health diagnosis." Her face turned bright red. "Oh!" she said. "I live in the shelter, but I am not mentally ill. No! No, I do not have a diagnosis."

Having received the referral from a Licensed Social Worker at the Shelter, we decided to follow-through with the interview. In less than five minutes into the interview, when asked a simple non-intrusive question, Lucille just sat quietly while her huge eyes welled up and the tears began to flow. Once that flood gate opened, there was no stopping the tears. This was the only interview where a candidate spoke to us--from beginning to end--through her tears. At the end of the interview, feeling sure there was at least severe depression among other mental challenges, we directed Lucille to a psychiatric office for an assessment.

When Hyacinth's Place opened its doors some months later, Lucille was among one of first four women accepted. She had a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), severe depression, and anxiety disorder. She has lived at Hyacinth's Place the longest. After five years of being with us, she was still insisting "I am not mentally ill." She continued to refuse medication, would not participate in program activities, and isolated herself from the other "crazy folks."

Lucille was the oldest of four girls from a middle-class, suburban family. The only unmarried daughter, her sisters all had the "white picket fence homes, husbands, kids etc." Her mother was a retired airline employee who had moved out of state after Lucille's alcoholic father died.

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<https://www.patreon.com/HyacinthsPlace>.

Lucille's college education afforded her three different jobs including federal employment. She walked off of all three because the voices kept telling her "You don't have to take crap from anybody." When she openly responded to the "voices" as they were getting louder and louder, "folks started treating me like I was crazy!" Now unable to pay her rent and bills, she lost her home. For a number of reasons, living with her family was not an option and she ended up in one of the District's shelters.

Lucille's stay at Hyacinth's Place was fraught with challenges, hard work and a great deal of patience. Her journey to emotional stability began with a tear-jerking session when she spoke uninhibited about the way the rest of society regarded the mentally ill. She wanted people to regard her as the intelligent woman she knew she was, so they did not "talk down to me." She would go to none of the planned activities with the other women because "folks would look at all of us coming out of a van and knowing we were from a "group home." She would take no medication, because "it made me feel as if I had no control... I only want to have a normal life," she wailed. Lucille had seen so many women enter the program and after a year move on to their own one-bedroom apartment. She finally asked, "Tell me what I need to do to move on with my life...."

The next year with us was a very long year. Volunteer clinicians worked with Lucille to help her understand and accept her own diagnosis. She was encouraged to attend emotional support groups at Hyacinth's Place, sessions addressing the importance of medication compliance, understanding the side-effects of medication, and being empowered to have discussions with the psychiatrist about her prescribed medication. She was exposed to education relating to identifying and utilizing community resources. Lucille was also given the tools to address her many insecurities.

Lucille, began to understand that there was "no cure" for her illness, and she slowly accepted there was a way to manage her illness and enjoy a good quality of life. When she left Hyacinth's place earlier this year, Lucille was a woman with a ready smile on her face. She was moving into a new apartment with a promise that "I am coming back to cook Thanksgiving Dinner for the ladies..... "



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