

Choose to Stand

By Kevin Hines

People often speak of pulling yourself up by your boot straps, getting over the grief of a terrible loss, be it the loss of your inner-self or the loss of a loved one. Yet, those same individuals who tell you to “get over it” balk at the fact that awful emotional pain can be as strong and intimidating as physical pain. If they ever experience such pain, they would understand that is a kind of pain which can literally bring you to your knees. That very outcome has happened to me more times than I can count on both hands, in part due to my bipolar disorder-- and yet, I’m still standing.

Years ago my dad and I had a monstrous verbal fight which turned physical. I was in a manic state when my father wrapped the pea-coat I was wearing around my neck and tossed me around like a rag doll. It was like something you’d see during a hockey game which is entirely fitting since my dad played semi-pro hockey for nearly 20 years. So, he knew how to handle a jersey--or, in this case a pea coat--rendering my fighting arms useless.

My dad was only trying to gain my full attention. He was trying desperately to break my manic state caused by the bipolar disorder. After the tossing ceased, I collapsed to my knees in copious amounts of physical pain caused by emotional trauma. This was unlike any pain I had ever endured. The pain in my stomach and ribs was an incomprehensible-- cruel. It was a type of pain I would never wish upon my worst enemy. No jujitsu wrestling throw, football tackle, or fight in the schoolyard that I had ever experienced could even compare or surmount to this torment I felt. Make no mistake about it, it was all due to my emotional state. My brain took over my body. This demonstrates powerful the human mind really is.

Sometimes I still get “stuck in my head” which means I cycle through anger and rage. I still fall into a depressive pits of self-hate sometimes. When I am in these depressive lows, I cry myself to sleep, hoping to achieve some sort of emotional stasis.

When I was in my seventh psychiatric hospital stay, I was sedated and heavily suicidal and yet, I was cracked, but not broken. My family and friends, even my acquaintances, tried to awaken me from my depression, but as we in the mental health field know, that is not how it works. Those suffering from any mental illness or brain disease need to understand that it is a treatment work-ethic and the ability to become active in our wellbeing that will ultimately save us from this kind of daily self-destruction. It takes all of these things and so much more to allow us to live mentally well-most days. We certainly need a great deal of help and support, but we can do it. Mental wellness most days possible. I know, because I have discovered mental wellness despite my condition.

The difference between someone like me and someone who ends up dying by suicide, is that I know how to ask for help, and I know that no matter what life throws at me, no matter how many times I become suicidal (I still do), no matter my mental pain, I will always ask for help. That also means if I become a danger to myself, I send myself off to the “hotel”. (“Hotel” is what I have come to call psychiatric units I have frequented due to bipolar disorder and suicidal ideation).

I know how to heal from my internal and mental wounds. I know I must do cardiovascular exercise at least half an hour a day which will feed my brain the endorphins it needs in order to stay “above water!” I also know that I must keep a strict sleeping pattern, take my meds religiously. I also have to educate myself as to my brain disease and its newest findings as well as refrain from all recreational drugs and alcohol. I must create and keep an impenetrable support network of people who care for me, love me and need me alive. With my life situation, it is imperative that I have help. We all need it sometimes, some just more often than others. Your network can be vast or minimal, but it is crucial that you have one filled with people who have your best interest in their hearts. I have to do these things and much, much more to stay within the realm of mental stability.

After all, I am not depression, I am not bipolar, I *have* those two conditions, and have to deal with them every single day. I deserve to live well, and I deserve to live period. Forget about this brain illness consuming my future...that goes without saying. I must become *actively proactive* in my wellness once more, if I am to return to my wife, family, and friend with my head held high-chin up, filled with confidence.

My father often repeated one of his favorite phrases, one which I will never forget... “Kevin, you are in two feet of water and you are drowning...STAND UP!” All I-- and you--need to do now is stand!

KEVIN HINES IS A REMINDER THAT EVERY LIFE IS A GIFT....

Kevin has reached international audiences with his story of an unlikely survival and will to live. When Kevin was 19-years old, two years after he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, he attempted to take his own life by jumping from the Golden Gate Bridge. He is one of thirty-three to survive the fall and he is also the only survivor who is actively spreading the message of living mentally healthy around the country and the globe.

Since, Kevin has become an award-winning international speaker, author, and mental health advocate. In 2012, he was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award for his outstanding work as a suicide prevention advocate and speaker. He has also been recognized by SAMSHA as a Voice Awards Fellow and Award Winner, an Achievement

Winner by Veterans Affairs, and he has received a Three Star Marine Generals Medal Award in addition to his numerous accolades.

Kevin's will to live and stay mentally well has inspired hundreds of thousands of people worldwide. His compelling story has touched diverse audiences on university campuses, organizations, corporations, clergy, military, clinicians, the medical community, community organizations, and international conferences. *Cracked... Not Broken: Surviving and Thriving After a Suicide Attempt* is his first book and will be released on July 16, 2013.