

## Overcoming Obstacles

by Margaret Phinney, Chair, Peers of Cayuga County

Mental health recovery is hard. The work that is involved with recovery is daily: no breaks, even at night. The funny thing is, I had never thought about it until I had a breakdown in 2011. At that point, I didn't know life could get better and that I would survive.

Skip forward to the spring of 2012. I left my home of 13 years in New Mexico and returned to New York State and was homeless. I stayed with a friend for a few weeks and ended up living in a small camper in my daughter's lawn. After three months, my world turned upside down. I hadn't been sleeping or eating, and was hallucinating and hearing things. I knew I needed help, but just didn't know what to do.

One day when I was alone, a migraine came on and I didn't want to be in pain. I went to my daughter's house, took 800 mg of pain meds and hoped for the best. It didn't work quickly enough, so I took more and a sleeping pill. That wasn't enough, so I took more and more and finally went to sleep.

Two days later, I woke up in the Auburn Behavioral Health Unit. While there, I had a flashback and broke down again. I was discharged 12 days later to the Unity House respite room, and then moved into a supportive apartment. I began working with a therapist, which I didn't think would do me any good. If I couldn't fix myself, how could anyone else?

I need to say: peer support and therapy have pulled me through. I know if I hadn't had other people to speak with about all of this, I wouldn't be alive right now. The best support I got was from the two women who founded Peers in Cayuga County (PC<sup>2</sup>). My therapist also helped me look into myself and find emotions I didn't know I could have.

In the past four years, I have gone from being scared to leave my apartment to going out to stores and being able to be around some people. I even go to big functions sometimes, as long as I have someone with me. I am more confident about my abilities, which is why I became the chairperson of the PC<sup>2</sup> board. I have also been asked by Unity House to help train their staff in becoming more aware of the sensitivities of people diagnosed with a mental illness. I have learned how to help other people who are working on their recovery. I have become a better friend, a peer advocate, and basically a better person in general. I have come such a long way since my initial breakdown.

What I know is this: recovery is possible. Believe it can happen and it will.

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