

When I first heard the term “recovery” quite a while ago now, I had pictures in my head of someone recovering from a bike accident. I've been in a few bike accidents and it's always been such a frustrating process to be “in recovery” from one. I imagined limping from place to place, the searing pain of each step being an all too vivid reminder of the accident. Recovery didn't seem like it would or should be a goal of mine. I can't help but chuckle at the naivety of my reaction to recovering from mental illness.

But I still think there's some inherent wisdom in the first picture I conjured up about recovery. Recovery isn't a noun, it isn't something to be obtained in the sense that, once you own it, you can rest peacefully knowing you're in recovery. With a mental illness, you're constantly in a state of looking back at old scars and realizing how far you've come and how much pain and suffering you've gone through. Recovery comes with limitations. Recovery comes with a certain kind of immobility.

When I was still coming to terms with schizoaffective disorder, I was completely ignoring the limitations that come with living with this illness. I was walking around, leaving a trail of self-hurt everywhere I went. To be less abstract: I was still going to parties despite the panic attacks, I was still watching TV despite the paranoia, I was still going to school and working full time despite the crippling effects of psychosis, and I was still stubbornly, even openly, refusing to take my medication. My brain was making requests of me, my brain was pleading with me to take it easy, but I just ignored it completely. But no one can ignore such gaping, tragic wounds for too long – and I soon found out that my wounds were going septic. So I ended up in the hospital, I ended up getting electro-convulsive therapy – and my entire life fell apart. I lost my memories, I lost my job, I lost my fiancé, I lost my independence, and I nearly lost my faith.

But people believed in me, people helped give me the tools I needed to mend my broken brain and I took the medication that would remove the sepsis of my brain and minimize the grip of my illness. I must admit it was easier before I got to the point of recovery. It was easier to embrace my delusions and paranoia, to believe the voices in my head, and to treat my hallucinations as real. It was easier to wallow in the pain of depression and act impulsively in the grips of mania. But the easier path leaves a trail of destruction in its wake.

I initially put in the hard work to get to recovery for other people; because of how much my suffering hurt those who love me. Then I discovered how much I longed for independence and how much I desperately wanted to be healthy. Nearly 3 years later, I've learned that it takes nearly all of my energy to stay healthy and stable. I work and struggle every day to maintain as healthy a lifestyle as I can. I've discovered that I can live with tremendous discipline and I've discovered how strong I am. My therapist calls me “tough as nails” and I try to live up to that each minute of every day.

Recovery comes with a limp of sorts. I've slipped many times. But slip though I

may, I've always gotten back up again and I've kept on walking – tending to my wounds with a tenacity I've come to depend on. Recovery requires tremendous strength and a good deal of help. I'm thankful to those who've let me lean on them when the crushing weight of psychosis has nearly crippled me.

In honor of my newly found limp and limitations, I've avoided large crowds whenever possible to reduce panic attacks. I've learned grounding techniques to keep panic and chaos from reigning high. I've sworn off TV and movies, I've mastered mindfulness techniques to keep my mind from drifting. I've applied for and obtained disability so I can realize my dream of being as independent as possible. I've decided to attend to the needs of my brain. Above all, I've learned to accept the fact that, even though my brain is a malfunctioning brain, it's a beautiful brain nonetheless. A brain deserving of careful attention and love.