

Suburban Life

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Recovery

A self-help method of coping for those who are told: 'It's just your nerves'

Recovery - part 1

By Loralne McClish
staff writer

THE MEN AND WOMEN who come to Recovery meetings come because they have experienced heart palpitations, dizziness, shortness of breath, excessive sweating, depression or fatigue with no apparent physical reason. Or they may have unexplainable fears of crowds or space, people, travel, choking. Others have obsessions, compulsions, bizarre thoughts or sensation.

A common fear is one of making a mistake.

"Don't buy the it's-just-your-nerves response," said Mary Armes. "Of course it's your nerves — it's your emotions coming out in all of those pains. But after rounds and rounds of doctors and physicals nobody told me what to do about it, or how to handle it."

"My own experience was typical, I think," the Farmington Hills resident said. "My heart would be pounding so hard I was sure I was going to have a heart attack, but physical examinations showed I had an exceptionally strong heart. I had dimness of vision, but examinations showed there was nothing wrong with my eyes."

"In a situation like that life is suspended. You might not do anything at all."

Armes connected up with Recovery almost 25 years ago, has been an assistant leader for groups and still attends "as many meetings as I think I need," she said. "There's one in session somewhere in the metro area going on day or night most any day of the week."

Information on dates and times of Recovery meetings may be obtained by calling Recovery headquarters for the metro area, based in Dearborn, 561-2521.

DURING RECOVERY meetings the self-help groups led by two facil-

itators deal only with trivialities.

"It's the trivia, the little picky things that make for the big frustrations," Armes said. "If your house burnt to the ground, that's a once-in-a-lifetime thing and you could handle it. You could cope. It's the silliness like the husband who forgets to fill the sugar bowl after he's used the last spoonful that sets you off."

Armes wants it known that Recovery is not only for those who have been set off right into a nervous breakdown.

"I never had a breakdown. Somehow I always kept going and somehow stayed it off. I never had one great big trauma that was never resolved to cause this. I had a series of tragedies that came all bunched up that I thought I handled, but didn't," she said.

Meanwhile her imagination was working in the pattern that she knows so well now, symptomatic of the nervous person or the mental patient.

"Everything is negative and everything is exaggerated," she said. "If the nervous person has a headache he's sure it's a brain tumor. If he has a cold he's sure it's pneumonia. And the language is always defeatist. He always thinks the worst."

"Nobody understands me or I'm the only one in the world who is this sick" is a common cry, she said.

Setting exceptionally high standards for oneself as well as those immediately nearby, is also a common trait.

RECOVERY is a systematic method of self help developed by the late Dr. Abraham Low designed to prevent relapses in former mental patients and prevent a chronic condition from developing in the nervous.

It is all based on Low's book "Mental Health Through Will Training" that is used in every meeting. Group meetings are informal, but

they follow a definite structure, conducted by those who have been in Recovery and have taken the mandatory training. All of the leaders are lay people who, though they must be over the age of 21, come from all walks of life.

"The training is on-going. We (the leaders and assistant leaders) meet once a month, which is necessary to keep from deviating from the original structure," Armes said.

Recovery is supported by its members. All meetings are open to all comers. There are no fees or dues.

"People give what they want or can. We are not supported by any government funds. We are self-help all the way," she said.

Armes does not advocate Recovery as a magic pill.

"There is no miraculous path to good mental health," she said. "You will learn to change your language. Learn to take the danger out of your symptoms. Learn to change the thought, which will change the attitude. When you rearrange the thinking, you'll rearrange your whole life," she said.

"You'll get out of it exactly what you put into it."

Illustration
by
Marvin Teeple



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— Mary Armes



Breaking the hospital and medication cycle

recovery - part 2

By Loralne McClish
staff writer

TED WILSON said if it hadn't been for Recovery he would still be going in and out of hospitals, or maybe have killed himself by now. But he refused to give his real name or have his picture taken for publication because he is a school teacher by profession.

"We're still in the Dark Ages so far as nervous patients are concerned. And the stigma persists on two fronts," he said. "There is the stigma from the community — job applications still have the blank space that wants to know if you've ever been treated for any mental illness."

"And there is the stigma I put on myself. That's the most damaging one because I can't forgive myself

'I liked the idea of it because you were doing something to help yourself. Then you can give yourself the credit for whatever progress you've made.'

— Ted Wilson

for being sick.

"The cycle runs something like this: I'm a smart guy, I'm so smart I should have come out of this a long time ago. I'm not as good as other people. Then back into depression. Back into the hospital. Back to the psychiatrist and the shock treatments and the drugs and the medication."

The Farmington Hills resident began to apply the techniques to break that cycle about nine years ago when he was prodded by a friend to attend a Recovery meeting.

"That's the way most of us come

to Recovery — word of mouth — because you know somebody who knows somebody who was helped by Recovery. Or maybe they read about it in a Dear Abby column. She's a big advocate of Recovery," Wilson said.

"I liked the idea of it because you were doing something to help yourself. Then you can give yourself the credit for whatever progress you've made."

WILSON suffered from "not being able to feel myself," he said.

"This was not psychotic. I could still function. But it was a profound feeling of unreality. I did not feel as though I was myself. I was dead. There was no concentration. I felt as though I had been drinking, though I hadn't been," he said.

The fears that stemmed from these feelings were compounded with "fears that I was never going to get over this stuff, a feeling that I was doomed," he said.

"Add to that, that the nervous person is always angry, angry at himself, angry at everyone around him, angry at God. I'm a nice person, how could God let this happen to me? I was angry and dominant. There was some violence. The kids didn't know who their dad was. Now comes the guilt while I was still holding onto the anger."

Wilson resigned from his job in a nearby school system, before he was fired, he said, and moved out of his house to live with a relative for awhile as he concentrated on helping himself with methods outlined in Dr.

Help us celebrate our 100th birthday

We're looking for readers who will help us in the celebration of our 100th birthday.

The first issue of the Farmington Enterprise was published Nov. 2, 1888, so our staff is on the countdown now preparing for our Centennial Edition. Actually two editions. One will be printed in November, of course, but a preview is planned for distribution during Founders Festival days. And we need help.

Not one of our staff lived here while the Enterprise was published. We can look up the history. We can find the dates. What we can't do is tell the stories of grow-

ing up knowing the Farmington Enterprise as our home town paper.

Maybe you can tell us about an editor, a photographer, a delivery boy, a story, a column that was meaningful, or poignant or humorous. We would certainly welcome your sharing those memories with our readers in 1988. It will be the memories, not the historical dates, that will make our Centennial Edition meaningful to all of us.

Tell us your stories by mail, addressed to Loralne McClish, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River, Farmington 48024. If there's a question, call her at 477-5450.

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