IN HONOR OF WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY,

AFTER 8 YEARS OF FACING MY OWN MENTAL ILLNESS

There are a few things I've learned from the warriors around me, the mistakes I & others have made, & the cultural ignorance that daily limits those in need. Here are some simple steps you can take to break the stigma around Mental Illness:

1. When I don't speak, I die. When others speak wrongly about my experiences, I die. Both metaphorically & literally, Shame perpetuates Death. The more transparent conversations we (all of us) have about our experiences, the more those that are struggling are invited into the circle, as opposed to being banished into the fringe to figure it out alone.

2. When someone confides in you that they think they may be struggling with Mental Illness, don't blame them. Listen. Be transparent about your limitations & offer what you can. One of the best responses I heard from a friend is: "I'm scared & don't know much about this, but I'm here for you no matter what."

3. Ready for the M word? Medication. Med. I. Cation. Neither a fix-all solution, nor a Monster. We should not flinch around this option, nor should we claim it as Our Lord & Savior. We can't underestimate the Literal Business of Medication in this country, but we also can't deny that for many, it is an anchor in an abyss of terror & endless effort. Too many people I know won't even exercise the option because they are afraid, have been misinformed, or shamed out of learning about it. Which leads me to #4.

4. One of the best things those with Mental Illness can do is find each other. There are actual groups for this. I've been to them. I've sat in those circles. There is no lifeline like this. Ask. Talk. Be. Worry. Let it out. There is a potency & power to just Being With those who are also on this particular path that cannot be underestimated.

5. In a culture where Health is so often prioritized BENEATH Achievement, Individuality, "Privacy" (Secrecy? Shame?), we often forget that Vulnerability, Community, & Openness are key tenets of Happiness. Daily, ask yourself: Am I honoring myself? Am I wearing my spirit & body down? Am I sacrificing my true needs for x y z? See where you waver. Ask why. Kiss your shoulders. Stick up for your health. Value your Wholeness. Imagine & begin a different way of being. We can create a culture that values Wholeness.

6. Be aware of language. Don't make fun of Mental Illness. Not your friend's, not a celebrity's. This Perpetuates Stigma in Huge & Subtle Ways. Don't call the weather "schizophrenic." It's not. Don't say you felt "so Bipolar" yesterday. Unless you did, you didn't.

7. Recognition of the daily effect of Racism, Sexism, Misogyny, Able-ism, Heteronormativity, etc. on the psychic & physical well-being of our community members IS Mental Health
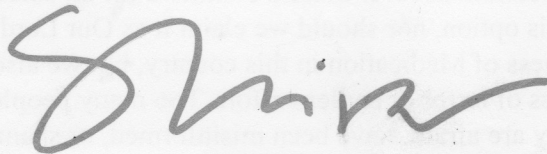
Awareness. IS Love. IS Listening. IS our responsibility. IS a start. Recognizing the various ways this culture enacts violence on our (and others') wellbeing is imperative to changing it.

8. There is no more radical or revolutionary of an act than valuing your own Well Being. Taking care of your heart, body, & spirit perpetuates Acceptance, Joy, & Ease in the world. This spirals out & causes incredible shifts in the lives & Well Being of others.

9. Everyone is on their own path to Wholeness (whether they face Mental Illness or not.) There is color & aliveness & sorrow & change in this realization. Mental Health is not just about "Fixing the Mentally Ill." Mental Health is about Wholeness. It's about Every Body. It's about Releasing Delusions & Illusions. Looking Reality in the Eyes & saying "Okay, Buddy." Accepting one's self in the light of Love & What's Possible. Cooking carrots & topping them with maple syrup. Swallowing a pill a day, if you need to, for now. Keeping a diary where all you do is scribble. Untying the knots of the past so you can set sail. Valuing the Dance of Aliveness.

May we all be happy. May we all be whole.

With maple syrup,

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