



**YOU NEVER KNOW HOW STRONG YOU ARE UNTIL BEING STRONG IS THE ONLY CHOICE YOU HAVE... Bob Marley**

I grew up as the youngest child in a family of three kids. My relationship with my older brother (12 years older) was normal. I was good at annoying him when he had girlfriends over and I made a good income because he paid me to "disappear". My other brother (10 years older) was my best friend. I was his shadow; I had complete trust in him and knew he always had my back. Our household as a family unit was a fun place to be and very peaceful. In 1973 that all changed. I was eight years old the day my middle brother went missing and my Dad spent what seemed like ages searching for him. Eventually, my dad and brother came home, but it wasn't the same brother--he had changed. I lost my best friend. My family never explained to me why my brother was so different. I feared the person he had become. Being a parent myself, I now understand that my parents did the best they could, and they had their hands full trying to help my brother. No one realized that by my not dealing with the changes in my brother I was internalizing a lot of pain.

Unfortunately, mental illness was not really talked about and my parents continued to treat my brother as if everything was fine. Both of my parents worked full time and so they left me to look after my brother and subsequently this is when my mental health challenges started at age eight.

My parents had to help my brother a lot and I was always the peacemaker, so I kept my feelings to myself. Internalizing my feelings left me with a smorgasbord of diagnoses: chronic PTSD, fear of abandonment, suicide ideation, depression, and severe anxiety. I was very talented at disassociating.

I always felt like something wasn't right in my head before I was diagnosed. I didn't have a formal diagnosis until I was in my early 40s. Being around my brother was very triggering for me. I didn't understand his different mood swings. To take care of myself I didn't spend a great deal of time with him.

On Sept 14th, 2018 I received a horrible phone call. My brother--who I hadn't seen for 6 years--was found non-responsive and they had to intubate him. I was informed he may not make it through the night. The universe put me with the right person; I was out to dinner with one of my closest friends. I had just told her I felt like dread was going to happen and then my phone rang.

I mustered up enough courage to go to the hospital, though I still hadn't decided if I was going to see him, let alone talk to him. Remember that I feared him as a child because of his mood swings and in the past when I saw him I would get triggered.

With my friend by my side I was able to look at my brother from across the nurse's station. The door was open, and I could see him. The nurse said, "you can go in". I told her that we have a tenuous relationship and that being this far away was fine.

After seeing him from afar, I went and sat in the family waiting room.

*We are the evidence; We hold the hope.*



Once my older brother arrived, I felt braver. With his help I was able to put myself into the corner of the door to my sick brother's room. My older brother stayed in front of me, between my sick brother and me. I asked him, "What are you doing?" He said, "Protecting you". That was the first time my older brother had ever done that. I gained so much this day. My older brother really understood and acknowledged all the pain I had endured from not getting the help I needed when I was a young child.

Four people tried to get my sick brother to wake up but were unsuccessful. He is hard of hearing, and even when I was very young I've always been able to wake him up. On this day I got him to wake up once again! He said "Lynn, are you okay?" I said "yes". He then asked for a pepperoni pizza. Yes, I got him his pizza a week later.

I feel as if the universe has given us a chance to heal the pain that my brother's illness has caused the both of us.

This time when I saw my brother I didn't have a stomach ache and no fear. Up to this time, I had been getting a stomach ache every time I saw him for the last 45 years, so not getting one this time was huge.

I am excited that I will be able to strengthen my relationship with my older brother and quite shocked that I appear to be making inroads to some form of healing with my mentally ill brother and mother (our relationship is strained due to the family situation when my brother changed) before it's too late, and still manage to take care of myself.

I am living proof that you can get well and stay well. I am not and will not be my diagnosis; I am **more** than my diagnosis. I am a sister, a daughter, a co-worker, and a peer. My ill brother is not his diagnosis. He is a son, a brother.

My mother used to tell me that if my ill brother committed suicide that it would be my fault. I lived with shame and guilt for an extended period of my life. Through therapy and healing, it is nice to finally be rid of that paralyzing shame and guilt.

I am so happy that the world sees mental health struggles the same way that we see physical illness. The brain is an organ just like the heart.

I love my life and I'm enjoying all the healing that comes with it.

Lynn Millar

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Peer Specialist News Letter