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**Symptoms to Success:
People Make It Possible**

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I cannot adequately describe here the struggle of living with mental illness. However, I can cogently discuss individuals who have positively influenced my recovery. I could call them my Judge Ginger Lerner-Wrens. This morning I will describe just a few of them.

I grew up in Westchester New York, but I deteriorated mentally and emotionally starting at about age 15. By twelfth grade, I was psychotic, depressed, and dangerous to myself. I entered a private, long-term, psychiatric hospital where I lived for seven months without improvement.

In June of 1982, based on past overachievement and some in-hospital tutoring, I graduated ninth in my high school class. I transferred the next day to a short-term hospital under the care of a new psychiatrist, hired by my parents. Dr. K would be my physician for the next 25 years and bring me to some sanity. I will always be grateful for his perseverance in the face of my illness.

Dr. K prescribed a basic anti-psychotic and guided me through a few short-term hospitalizations. My last was over in June of 1983—engendered by several weeks of mania and a suicide attempt—and by last I mean last. I can't foresee the future, but since 1983, I have stayed out of the hospital.

Three tools have been essential in avoiding hospitalization. First, Dr. K and I developed that portion of my brain (observing ego) that knows what is real and what is not. Second, he taught me how to dose myself with anti-psychotic and anti-anxiety

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medication as needed. Third, I am practical and straightforward with my professionals. So, any of the many times I have thought I wanted to give up and check in, I just imagine trying to get back on my feet after such a respite, and I ultimately persevere with these tools. Looking back, staying removed from recidivism has been a triumph.

Life was a struggle. Dr. K said I had a lot of psychic pain, which he told Mom and Dad was “worse than physical pain.” Some of the symptoms I have faced when fully medicated were:

- Thinking people are angry at me.
- Thinking people are talking about me.
- Experiencing anger impulses.
- Describing all of my being with “Everything is dark.”
- I just don’t get along.

I was also eating disordered for 30-plus years.

I had a flat affect and few social graces. In my past, I was often convinced I had no friends. However, Dr. K never gave me a break, and I made good choices. I progressed through school, held jobs, and even improved my employment. I married a mature and smart spouse and let mistakes become teaching moments. And I stayed with Dr. K—demanding as he was—as long as I was in New York.

In 1995 I met Dolores. I joined her flock at her weekly Recovery, Inc., meeting, which imbued us with the cognitive behavioral training of Dr. Abraham Low. I helped with snacks and counted the free-will offering. I loved learning aphorisms from the program and took about 200 to heart and into my observing ego. The brain-training improved my quality of life. I eventually ran my own meeting, and I became Westchester area leader in 2006. However, in 2007, Rick and I moved to Frederick, Maryland.

I’d like to relate an anecdote: Pre-Recovery success, Dr. K once asked how the program was going, and I said: “It’s not much fun.” His response: “It’s not supposed to be fun.”

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After that, I worked hard to make the Recovery program worthwhile. I let it change my life. Dolores died in 2010. I miss her very much.

I've been working with an effective therapist and psychiatrist team in Frederick for more than ten years. They work in the same office and communicate. By the end of 2017, my therapist had seen me grow and stated: "You're not mentally ill anymore."

Indeed, now my problems are living problems and not sick problems. I'm even currently over my eating disorder for the last six years, although I accept that I am subject to relapse at any time.

Dr. K happened to specialize in eating disorders. However, despite all the pain I endured from self-hatred, along with overeating, undereating, over-exercising, and other purges, the best prognosis he ever gave me for getting over the food issues was vague. I eventually discovered an eating disorders program that has worked for me, and my sponsors have been wise and knowledgeable friends who have helped me surmount my food issues.

A member of UUCF since 2008, I have ultimately, with improved mental health, found a level of participation that works for me. And—y'all are my tribe. I am grateful for the opportunity to know you.

I haven't broken the law and required the therapeutic jurisprudence we've heard about that Judge Ginger Lerner-Wren spearheaded, but certain people in my life have made a titanic difference—the few I've mentioned having been just the tip of the iceberg.

The last coherent statement I heard from my late mother last May was "Susie, I'm so glad you're happy." What a gift. And when I recently told my dad that my therapist considers me mentally healthy, he was overjoyed. Hard times have led to good times and good memories. This is a good memory. Thanks, everyone.