

## MENTAL ILLNESS DOES NOT EQUATE TO VIOLENT BEHAVIOR!

I have a Mental Illness. This has meant to me that for much of my life I've had troubled relationships with family and friends, bopped from menial job to menial job, and felt the pangs of loneliness, hopelessness and alienation. I've been in some sort of therapy, on and off, since a troubled 1<sup>st</sup> grader, back in 1966. I now take medication, attend a monthly group session at Connecticut Mental Health Center, am active in civic affairs and, grounded by my Buddhist practice, stay on an even keel.

Many wonderful things have happened in my life – the last 20 years have been especially fruitful! I have earned a Baccalaureate degree, started and managed a small business for several years; I've made mistakes and have then had what are, for me, dazzling successes. A crucial part of the picture has been my membership in a psychosocial clubhouse, Fellowship Place of New Haven. When I was homeless, Fellowship reached out to me. Fellowship has become a second family to me. I've set a lifetime record of over three years' steady work at Wal-Mart. Fellowship's Supported Vocational Department has been instrumental in this. At Fellowship's Supported Housing I have not only a comfortable and safe place to live; I have met a woman who brightens my path and fills my life. I've been through the Valley of the Shadow, and as I strive for wellness, I work, love, err and succeed just as do every-day people.

Some years ago, in a dark period of my life, I attempted to end my life with an overdose of pills. I have learned to cherish life – mine, and that of others. I have learned to seek and to find joy and hope. The way I live my life is proof positive that one can live and advance with a mental illness. Stigma stands in the way of people's getting help, and that we should be working together as a community and as a humane society to make certain that ill people never feel desperate — that they should get the medical care and support they need.

Please continue to show compassion and wisdom in your support of mental health programs such as have helped me to live a full and productive life. The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Connecticut Mental Health Center, Fellowship Place, school psychiatrists and social workers richly deserve funding. The Keep The Promise Coalition continues to advocate for community supports for people who, in previous times, would live wasted lives as they languish in Mental Institutions.