

Finding a miracle within everyone

ANN KOLSRUD • FOR THE PRESS-CITIZEN • DECEMBER 22, 2009

'Tis the season -- to rejoice and look for gifts. Meanwhile, as everyone shops for that perfect gift, we are surrounded by miracles. Here is my miracle:

I have spent most of my 41 years riddled with mental illness. Not only me, but my parents suffered, too. It especially bothered me when all my peers were becoming doctors and lawyers while I struggled to enter and drop out of college. The lowest point in my life was when I parked my car on the dike in Clinton, thinking about jumping off the bridge to end my suffering. The only thing I could do was breathe. I focused on each and every breath. Eventually, the tears began to flow and I was able to drive away from the temptation.

It has taken a long time to rise from that despondency, but I have and now lead a relatively "normal" life. I am the author of the book called "Almost Normal." I want my book to touch lives and it has. I find that many people who have read my book can relate to some part of it.

I feel blessed by all the people who have touched my life. Now I rarely compare myself to others and have come to an understanding about myself. Sitting at the bus stop by Old Capitol Town Center, I thought to myself, "Look at all the weirdos." Then I chuckled to myself, and thought, "I fit right in!"

The greatest gift I am receiving for Christmas is my renewed relationship with my parents, and the greatest gift I can give them back is my love and respect. It is important for family to realize how valuable they are. This holiday season, think of the people in your life and how they have added color to a monochrome existence.

Being relatively new to Iowa City, I have quickly developed a bond with the city. The people here, I find, care about the issues and actively voice their opinions. The shopping is good, and the support I receive for my illness is even better.



Unknown by many, Iowa City has a strong National Alliance on Mental Illness affiliation. Mental illness exists throughout the different seasons, but many people especially find Christmas a challenge. NAMI has support groups for those suffering from mental illness and for families who have a loved one suffering from mental illness. Don't be afraid to reach out.

Remember to respect differences and reach for understanding when there is none. And don't forget that within every single person is a miracle.

Ann Kolsrud poses with her parents, Don and Judy Kolsrud, and service dog Nick. (Special to the Press-Citizen)

DETAILS

- The National Alliance on Mental Illness is the nation's leading grassroots, self-help, and family advocacy organization solely dedicated to improving the lives of people with serious mental illness. NAMI Johnson County is an organization where people can meet and learn from each other. Educational meetings provide information about illnesses, symptoms, treatment options, and available services. Advocacy and public education activities offer opportunities to improve the system of care