

Liz Fry of Walla Walla, Wash., overcame the devastating diagnosis of bipolar disorder as a young adult to become an example of recovery and a teacher of what has become her model for recovery to others.

Liz was misdiagnosed with schizophrenia when she was 22 and after a year, diagnosed with bipolar disorder. "My first thoughts were denial: "No, this can't be happening to me," Liz said. "It took years to accept my diagnosis. You never get okay with the diagnosis because bipolar is a tough disease to live with."

Liz has faced challenges along the way. One challenge was finding the correct medication to sustain periods of "feeling good." I'd crash, and getting up from the crashes took a long time," she said. Another challenge was stress. Liz was a middle school teacher for 27 years and in a difficult marriage.

After decades of struggle with a brain and behavior disorder have had their ups and downs, including three very bad psychotic episodes. The last one in 2001 spiraled into the loss of her family, home, and job. At that time, with the help of medication and two therapists, Liz started a recovery that continues today. One of her therapists said to her, "You can thrive." And everything that came after that statement proves that she can.

I think recovery is possible and it's the most exciting thing in the world." Liz said. As the interview for this story began, Liz was clear that she wanted to share a message about "the beauty of recovery."

Recovery made it possible for Liz to repair her relationship with her daughter, with who Liz was estranged from the time her daughter was 15-18 years old. Bipolar disorder can devastate family relationships. Liz said it took seven years for her daughter to again trust in Liz. "We are closer now than we have ever been," Liz said. "It took a lot of work on both our parts but we made it! Recovery and lots of love and trust were, I think, responsible for this miraculous rejoining in our relationship."

In an effort to manage her life in a more healthy way, Liz reached out to find others who were facing the same diagnosis. "It was when I made these connections that I realized there was real hope."

Liz is involved with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA), volunteering as a NAMI support group facilitator, NAMI Connection (support group) state trainer and teacher of the Family-to-Family class on all types of mental illness. Liz

is also involved with the Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) designed by Mary Ellen Copeland, Ph.D , which includes elements such as a wellness toolbox and daily maintenance plan that help people recovering from mental illness prepare for the challenges they face. Liz feels so strongly about the importance of WRAP in her recovery that she is a trained facilitator in WRAP and teaches the program at the local VA. "I love teaching and seeing the progression people make after creating their wellness toolbox and practicing the program," Liz Said. "And so much of my wellness comes from giving to other people."

Her generosity is something Liz credits to her mother, Dorothy Locke who passed away in 2005 at age 101. "She gave me an incredible spiritual foundation - a foundation for giving to to other people. She was an amazing woman."

Liz had learned that scientific discovery plays a tremendous role in enabling people with mental illness to live full, productive lives. "If it weren't for the medications I have on board and the therapy I have gone through, I'd be a mess. I think and applaud research scientists for the work they have done in understanding these illnesses. Through more research, we will achieve more poaitive results."

For Liz, a combination of medicine, therapy, spiritual grounding, music (Liz is a flutist) and daily wellness practices that include exercise, prayer, meditation, connecting with her community and spending time with her dog make up her recovery. Liz is proof that (as she said) "You can have a positive and successful life even with a tough diagnosis."