

Workforce Development News

Integrated Healthcare Recovery Support Specialist Institute

Tucson, November 2, 2017

Certified Peer Support Specialist Graduating Class

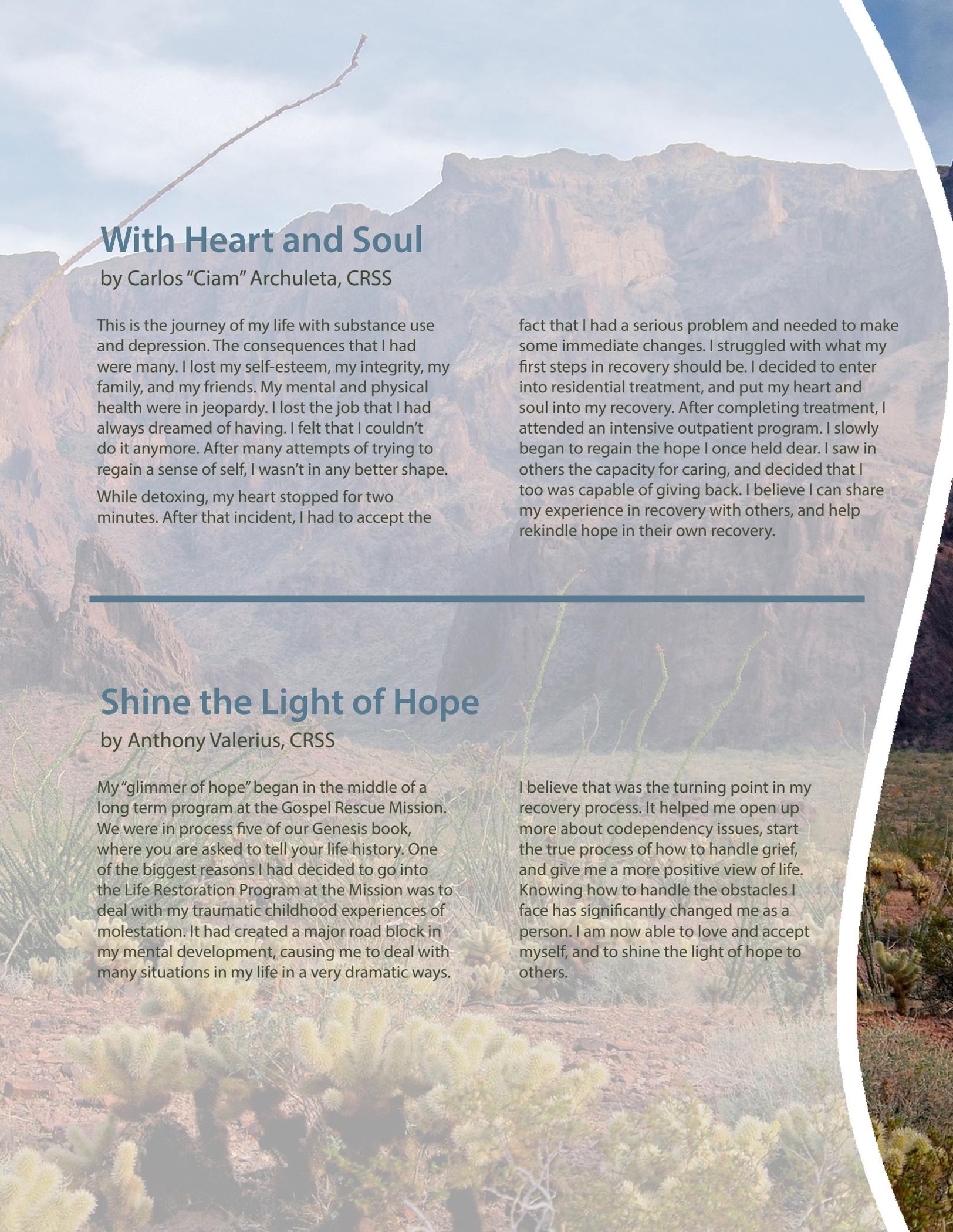
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Trisha Packard, Anthony Valerius, Angela Watkins-Davis*



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With Heart and Soul

by Carlos "Ciam" Archuleta, CRSS

This is the journey of my life with substance use and depression. The consequences that I had were many. I lost my self-esteem, my integrity, my family, and my friends. My mental and physical health were in jeopardy. I lost the job that I had always dreamed of having. I felt that I couldn't do it anymore. After many attempts of trying to regain a sense of self, I wasn't in any better shape.

While detoxing, my heart stopped for two minutes. After that incident, I had to accept the

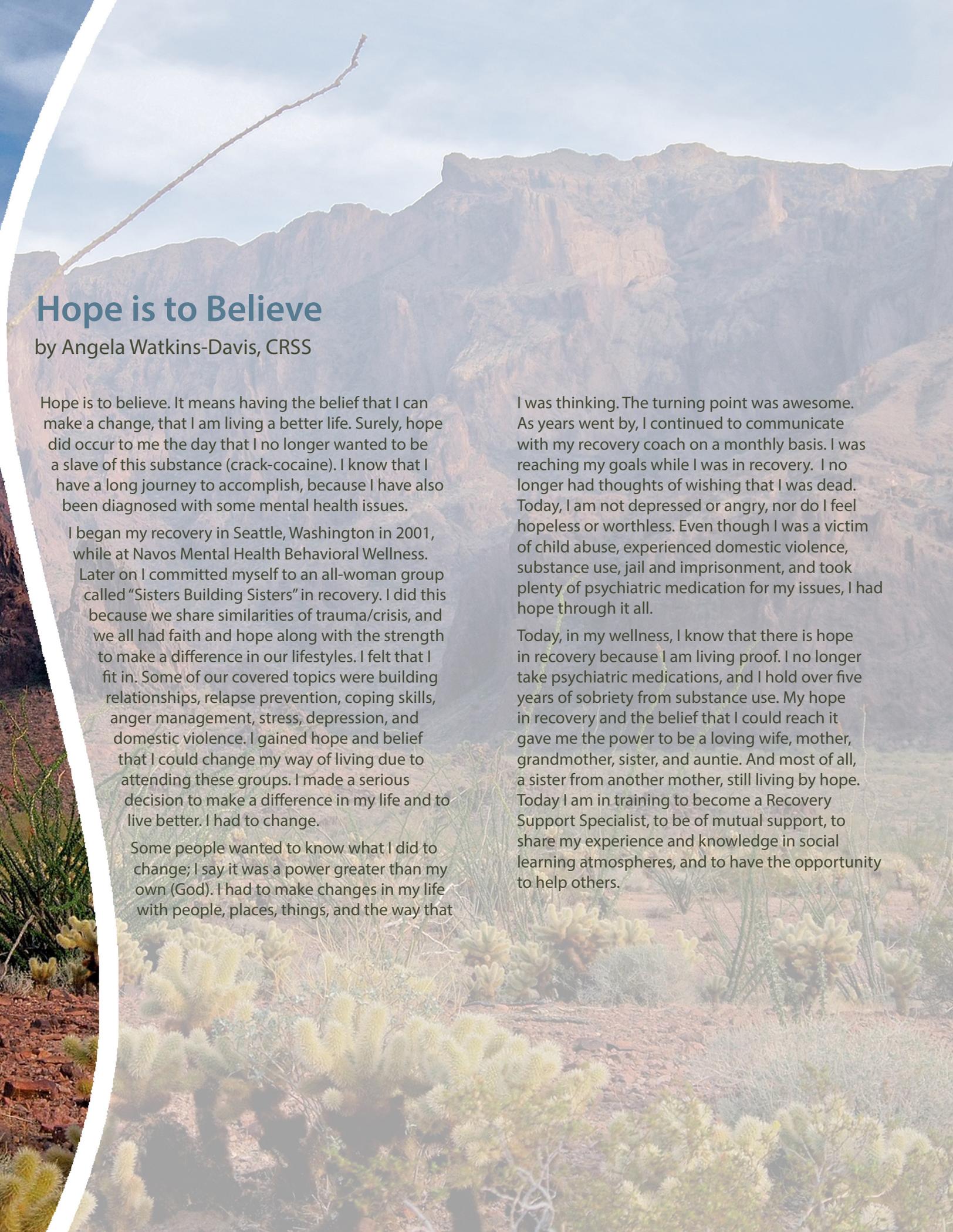
fact that I had a serious problem and needed to make some immediate changes. I struggled with what my first steps in recovery should be. I decided to enter into residential treatment, and put my heart and soul into my recovery. After completing treatment, I attended an intensive outpatient program. I slowly began to regain the hope I once held dear. I saw in others the capacity for caring, and decided that I too was capable of giving back. I believe I can share my experience in recovery with others, and help rekindle hope in their own recovery.

Shine the Light of Hope

by Anthony Valerius, CRSS

My "glimmer of hope" began in the middle of a long term program at the Gospel Rescue Mission. We were in process five of our Genesis book, where you are asked to tell your life history. One of the biggest reasons I had decided to go into the Life Restoration Program at the Mission was to deal with my traumatic childhood experiences of molestation. It had created a major road block in my mental development, causing me to deal with many situations in my life in a very dramatic ways.

I believe that was the turning point in my recovery process. It helped me open up more about codependency issues, start the true process of how to handle grief, and give me a more positive view of life. Knowing how to handle the obstacles I face has significantly changed me as a person. I am now able to love and accept myself, and to shine the light of hope to others.



Hope is to Believe

by Angela Watkins-Davis, CRSS

Hope is to believe. It means having the belief that I can make a change, that I am living a better life. Surely, hope did occur to me the day that I no longer wanted to be a slave of this substance (crack-cocaine). I know that I have a long journey to accomplish, because I have also been diagnosed with some mental health issues.

I began my recovery in Seattle, Washington in 2001, while at Navos Mental Health Behavioral Wellness. Later on I committed myself to an all-woman group called "Sisters Building Sisters" in recovery. I did this because we share similarities of trauma/crisis, and we all had faith and hope along with the strength to make a difference in our lifestyles. I felt that I fit in. Some of our covered topics were building relationships, relapse prevention, coping skills, anger management, stress, depression, and domestic violence. I gained hope and belief that I could change my way of living due to attending these groups. I made a serious decision to make a difference in my life and to live better. I had to change.

Some people wanted to know what I did to change; I say it was a power greater than my own (God). I had to make changes in my life with people, places, things, and the way that

I was thinking. The turning point was awesome. As years went by, I continued to communicate with my recovery coach on a monthly basis. I was reaching my goals while I was in recovery. I no longer had thoughts of wishing that I was dead. Today, I am not depressed or angry, nor do I feel hopeless or worthless. Even though I was a victim of child abuse, experienced domestic violence, substance use, jail and imprisonment, and took plenty of psychiatric medication for my issues, I had hope through it all.

Today, in my wellness, I know that there is hope in recovery because I am living proof. I no longer take psychiatric medications, and I hold over five years of sobriety from substance use. My hope in recovery and the belief that I could reach it gave me the power to be a loving wife, mother, grandmother, sister, and auntie. And most of all, a sister from another mother, still living by hope. Today I am in training to become a Recovery Support Specialist, to be of mutual support, to share my experience and knowledge in social learning atmospheres, and to have the opportunity to help others.

Something Much Bigger Than Myself

by Zachary Jucha, CRSS

My personal experience of hope is not a singular event, nor is it a person or place. "Hope" for me, and the experience of it, is a constant component of reality and ergo recovery. I have a personal belief that those living with PTSD are some of the few people who have brushed with the kinds of horror accompanied with death. That which is so beyond human comprehension that it may as well be grouped in a category among which we would place death; a grouping of profundity that human perceptual faculties are not sufficient to make sense of.

I personally experienced a sudden onset of widespread connective tissue deterioration from FQAD and spontaneous central and peripheral nervous system damage, which at the time I believed would be permanent. Ultimately, it peaked and lasted for a few years before stabilizing; physically I discovered I could walk and support my own body weight again, and so on. I was subsequently diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I came to know hope through learning that I could come face to face with the incomprehensibly inhuman living side by side with myself, but merely separated via a thin layer of psychologically constructed narratives that give the illusion of stability to billions of people every day. I also learned that most of those who live with PTSD have also experienced this unsettling reality, and they somehow make it through day after day and find a way to maintain a kind of homeostasis.

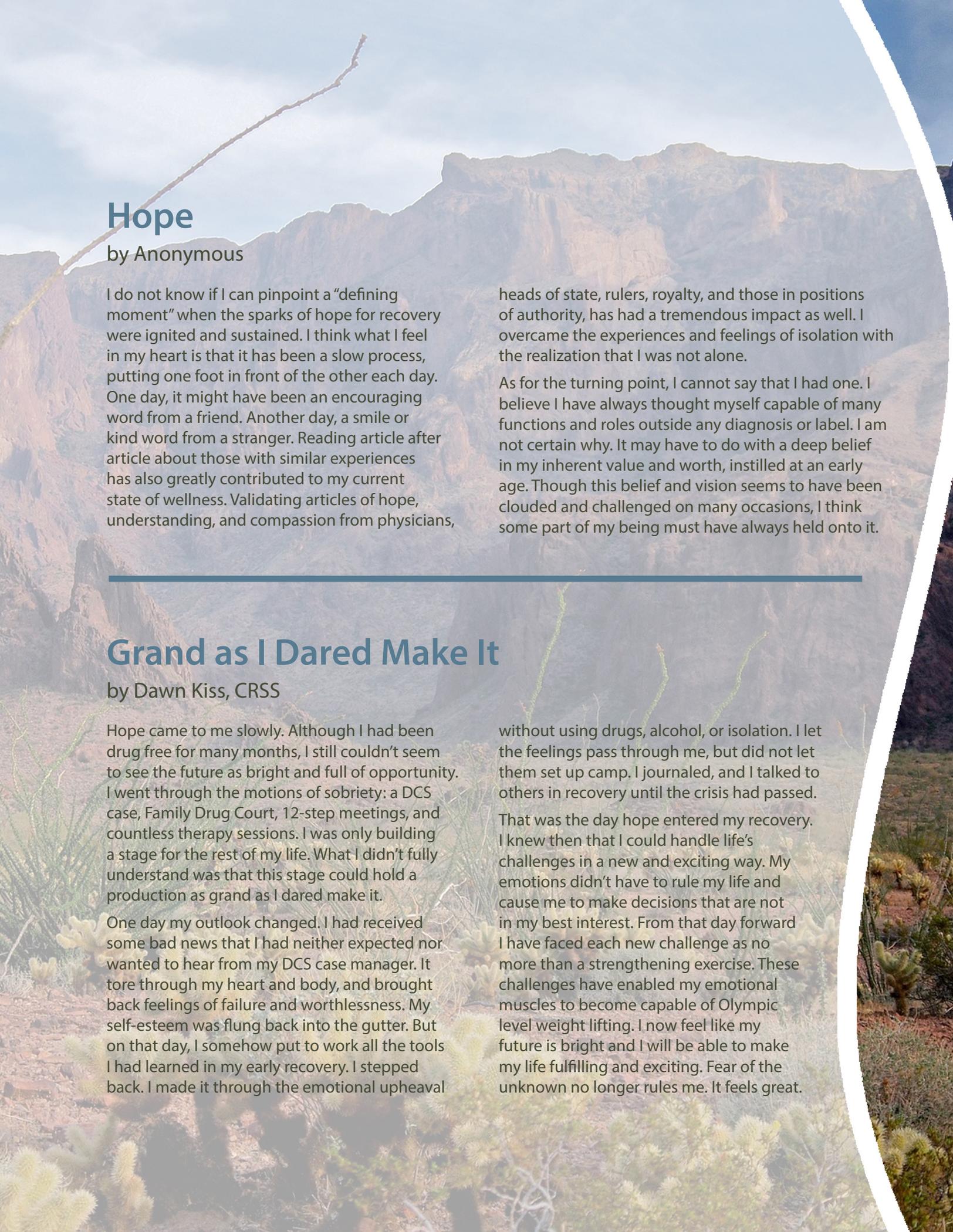
However, I must say to the outside observer this may look like an "achievement" or an "outcome", but that could not be more inaccurate. The state of an individual like this is one of constant engagement. Living with the cognitive dissonance implicit in severe PTSD means having to struggle to improvise reasons to do nearly every single task one is faced with, sometimes throughout every moment of the day. I do not consider myself a particularly brave person and I find myself resorting to cowardly alternatives every single day of my life, instead of facing what I know would be harder, better for me, more responsible, and inevitably, more rewarding.

When I speak of living with PTSD I am speaking of other people, primarily men who I encountered attending a men's PTSD group for over 2 years when I decided to seek treatment.

All of the men I met in this group are easily the bravest men I have ever met in my life. I have met many people in my life who qualify for recognition for living through extreme hardship. However, there is the silent struggle of the men whom I have met in group therapy. They do not wear their battles on their sleeves, they do not necessarily bear any scars, nor advertise their hardship or use what they have gone through to define themselves; these men give me hope every day of my life.

It would be impossible for me to describe how inspiring these men are, or even begin to explain their impact on me and the world around them. But to summarize, after experiencing the most devastating event in my entire life; losing the use of my body to the neuromuscular illness FQAD, I experienced the ensuing social, psychological and substance use complications that event set into motion. My personal experience of hope was that I then came to meet individuals who I am personally ashamed to admit probably would have been invisible to me had I kept leading a completely normal life. But by knowing them, I discovered that my definitions of the words "heroism" and "strength" were nothing but elaborate fabrications. That there are real heroes in this world, and the only thing that had stopped me from knowing them were the restraints I allowed to bind my own heart. Because the comfort of being like others was more valuable to me than sacrificing my own discomfort and living with the fear inherent in life in order to become something much bigger than myself.

My personal experience of hope is knowing every day that living with mental illness actually made me more free than I ever would have been living a life in which I never stood up to fear.



Hope

by Anonymous

I do not know if I can pinpoint a “defining moment” when the sparks of hope for recovery were ignited and sustained. I think what I feel in my heart is that it has been a slow process, putting one foot in front of the other each day. One day, it might have been an encouraging word from a friend. Another day, a smile or kind word from a stranger. Reading article after article about those with similar experiences has also greatly contributed to my current state of wellness. Validating articles of hope, understanding, and compassion from physicians,

heads of state, rulers, royalty, and those in positions of authority, has had a tremendous impact as well. I overcame the experiences and feelings of isolation with the realization that I was not alone.

As for the turning point, I cannot say that I had one. I believe I have always thought myself capable of many functions and roles outside any diagnosis or label. I am not certain why. It may have to do with a deep belief in my inherent value and worth, instilled at an early age. Though this belief and vision seems to have been clouded and challenged on many occasions, I think some part of my being must have always held onto it.

Grand as I Dared Make It

by Dawn Kiss, CRSS

Hope came to me slowly. Although I had been drug free for many months, I still couldn't seem to see the future as bright and full of opportunity. I went through the motions of sobriety: a DCS case, Family Drug Court, 12-step meetings, and countless therapy sessions. I was only building a stage for the rest of my life. What I didn't fully understand was that this stage could hold a production as grand as I dared make it.

One day my outlook changed. I had received some bad news that I had neither expected nor wanted to hear from my DCS case manager. It tore through my heart and body, and brought back feelings of failure and worthlessness. My self-esteem was flung back into the gutter. But on that day, I somehow put to work all the tools I had learned in my early recovery. I stepped back. I made it through the emotional upheaval

without using drugs, alcohol, or isolation. I let the feelings pass through me, but did not let them set up camp. I journaled, and I talked to others in recovery until the crisis had passed.

That was the day hope entered my recovery. I knew then that I could handle life's challenges in a new and exciting way. My emotions didn't have to rule my life and cause me to make decisions that are not in my best interest. From that day forward I have faced each new challenge as no more than a strengthening exercise. These challenges have enabled my emotional muscles to become capable of Olympic level weight lifting. I now feel like my future is bright and I will be able to make my life fulfilling and exciting. Fear of the unknown no longer rules me. It feels great.



The Seed of Hope

by Trisha Packard, CRSS

My first glimpse of any kind of hope was the first day I arrived at court ordered inpatient treatment. Of course, they used the good old “why now” approach, in which a group of peers break you down until you’re forced to admit you have a drug problem. Needless to say, this admission of powerlessness did not give me hope. It was quite the opposite; I had reached a new low of hopelessness. When I realized that all of the staff were people in recovery from addiction, hope began for me. Since that experience over ten years ago, my recovery journey has been a very long and rough road, with several relapses and setbacks. I had the seed of hope, thanks to the staff of Peers I had encountered. However, the tools I left treatment with soon failed me. My treatment plan was

not my own, and soon I was back in treatment. This pattern continued until I learned to avoid relapse by overworking, isolation, and white knuckling my way through life.

I truly believed that my recovery was going to be a lifelong tug of war until attending the institute. It was mind blowing to hear the possibility of recovery from mental illness, and that I could create my own road map for recovery. I am 35 years old and this institute has given me life-changing hope. The best part is that I have the tools that enable me to take charge of my recovery for the first time in my entire life. I feel truly blessed to have learned these skills, and to be able to give these skills to my peers gives me tremendous self-worth.

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Workforce
Development News

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UA Workforce Development Program promotes recovery and expanded opportunities for people with mental illness, substance use, and dual diagnosis by employing a collaborative approach to advocacy, service, education, and research.

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