A Message from Muguette

We have enjoyed a beautiful summer here in Seattle. As you know, all good things must come to an end; fall is upon us. No more heirloom tomatoes and freshly picked corn from the markets. Time for canning and preserving. I love this season. Change is in the air and change is coming to NAMI Seattle as well.

Our marvelous Program Manager, Katie Mahoney, is expecting a baby at the end of the month. She and her family are preparing for the arrival of her boy and NAMI Seattle is preparing for her maternity leave. Aislin Percival, our office coordinator, will take on some of Katie’s duties but we will all chip in. Katie will return to work in February 2020.

Our favorite Volunteer & Resources Coordinator, Faarah Misbah, has started graduate school at Antioch University. She is studying towards her MA in Couples and Family Therapy. She will still be working full time.

Our indomitable Communications & Outreach Manager, Maddy Noonan, is leaving us to pursue her acting career. If you have met her, you know she is a talented actor. We look forward to see her name nominated for an academy award in the future. We will all fill in the gaps her departure will create and we will hire for her position next year.
At the core, NAMI Seattle will have the same focus and offer the same programs. We will continue to address the unmet mental health needs within our community through support, referral, education and outreach.

A couple of months ago, I visited the Damascus Baptist Church with volunteers Lisa Moore and Shayla Collins. Pastor James Broughton, his wife Tammi, and members of their congregation came together to hear about NAMI Seattle services, workshops and trainings. We look forward to collaborating and building a community with them.

Thank you to all who came to our Depressed Cake Shop annual event. It was lovely to see old friends and make new friends. It was a resounding success. The money we raise will support the programs which give our community hope.

Fall is upon us. Change is good. Let’s embrace it.

Muguette
Back to School with Faarah

As of a few months ago, I’ve officially signed myself up for school again for another 3 years or more. Only this time it’s different. Now, I am absolutely sure and certain that this is the best path for my life. Growing up, I was witness to the mental health issues and stigma in my own community and the greater community and always wanted to be in a position to help. At first, I had looked into research and found that I enjoy working one-on-one with people. Since then, I made the decision of working in community mental health and started at NAMI Seattle, however now I am also adding the challenge of a Master’s in Couples and Family Therapy at Antioch University Seattle. It’s a challenge that is very much needed that will set me up for a future where I can make a difference one person at a time.

Another Opportunity for Aislin

Prior to working as the Office Coordinator, I volunteered with NAMI Seattle for years as an intern in college and then in a progressively wider variety of signature programs including Peer to Peer, In Our Own Voice, Ending the Silence, and on the helpline. I enjoy all the work I do for NAMI Seattle, but programming is truly where my passion lies and where I find the most purpose. As Interim Program Coordinator, I am excited to get more experience not only facilitating programs on the “front line” but also from behind the scenes. Filling this position is a wonderful opportunity for growth. Let’s do this!
Life is a garden. An orderly plot of greens, reds, purples, and blues. At least -- that's how it should be. My garden is chaos. In my garden, weeds are rampant and color is sparse. In my garden, disarray is law.

Early on, I fenced my garden in -- I knew it would grow and grow, threatening to expand onto and overtake all gardens. The neighbors watched from afar, wondering why and how my once beautiful and vibrant garden could have gone dull.

As I stride through my garden, careful to avoid the bramble that has encroached upon this once sacred place, I notice the thorns. Thorns that drip with the blood of broken hearts. These patches of brambles were at one time a bush of red lustful roses. Now, they act as a barrier; a preventative measure, a wall to hide behind, to protect me from my neighbors' prying eyes. I can feel their glances turn into stares. Judgment masquerades as curiosity.

The sky is grey and my garden seems to match. All my plants have given up on life, almost choosing not to glow in their former glory. I look out past my fences. I look out onto my neighbors' plots of land. I stare and I reminisce. Thinking back to days when Father, Mother, and Brother visited this place. Back to days when my violets seemed to sing sad songs as they swayed in the wings and glowed in the most deep, beautiful shades of blue. Shades of blue you could feel, a presence in your chest that made a promise: A promise that someone, somewhere feels these infinitely deep shades of indigo just as you do.

Next to the violets were Mother's roses, which didn't need to glow to command attention. Gazing upon Mother's roses lit one's soul ablaze with a feeling so intense, it would threaten to consume your very essence. A feeling we all know too well. A crimson that reminds you of those nights you had snuck out to chase "the one" -- a red that reminds you of waking up next to your person, knowing you take up all the space in both their heart and mind.

Behind Mother's roses stood Father's sunflowers. When you first entered my garden, you would be greeted by many scents -- you could spend days following each one to its origin. One of those scents would have led you to Father's tall yellow plants. As you stood among Father's flowers, wondering how a flower could be so tall, you are captivated by the rings of bright yellow petals. Their bright hue makes you feel how you feel when your favorite song comes on. This yellow evokes a content state of being, like seeing the sun come through the clouds on the last day of school.

This yellow has a promise, too: A promise that, yas, you may feel shades of blue, the sun will set, and some days it might rain. But that's why we have jackets and umbrellas, you can't see a sunset if the sun never descends, and there will always be a tomorrow morning. This yellow promises that shades of blue, no matter how deep, can be washed away with a little bit of sunshine.
Mingling along the patches hide Brother's poppies, bursting with a bright orange curiosity. A genuine wonder about everything there is on this planet. The orange petals beckon you over, as if they'd like to tell you their secrets. A bright tangerine that wanted nothing more than to get out from underneath Mother and Father and explore.

I reminisce about the day when these colors truly blossomed, then I remember that I am staring off into space in my rainy grey garden. I remember how it once was. How I feel it should still be.

Back in my gloomy present I trudge over to the shed and grab my tools, for I have grown tired of the groom. For days, I hack away at the bramble and for days more I turn the weed-ridden soil. I work from dawn until dusk and each night I fall asleep exhausted and satisfied with my hard work.

After many days of difficult and often tedious work, I stand at the entrance of my garden and behold the fruits of my labor. Once again this land has regained its beauty, this time molded by my hands. It has become a sanctuary in its own right, with its rows of violets that sway and sing as they did before and a patch of Mother's romantic roses that burned with passion twice as strong as before. Father's sunflowers stood behind the roses and violets and seemed to smile with hope for the future. Brother's poppies run around looking for all the new sights to see. These four patches dances together, a happy family in the center of the garden, surrounded by brilliant oranges, greens, purples, pinks, and more. All coexisting in the harmony that is life.

If Kenyon's story resonates with you and you're looking for someone safe to talk to, please consider TeenLink, a helpline for teens by teens. From their website: “Our teen volunteers are trained to listen to your concerns and talk with you about whatever's on your mind – bullying, drug and alcohol concerns, relationships, stress, depression or any other issues you're facing. No issue is too big or too small! Calls and chats are confidential.” You can call 1-866-833-6546 or chat at teenlink.org.
Program Updates

Our next session of **Family-to-Family** (registration closed) is taking place in Columbia City, and we are working on adding 1-2 other sessions this fall in other parts of town. To be added to our early-notification list in order to be notified as soon as registration opens for a new session, contact our Helpline.

Our current **Peer-to-Peer** class series (registration closed) is taking place in Capitol Hill. Contact our Helpline to be added to our early-notification list, and find out as soon as we schedule our winter session!

We are excited to announce that **NAMI Basics** is now available to take online! Basics is a 6-session education program for parents, caregivers and other family who provide care for youth (ages 22 and younger) who are experiencing mental health symptoms. Sign up today at basics.nami.org.

Registration is now open for **Familia y Amigos**! This half-day seminar is offered entirely in Spanish for friends and family members of people with mental health conditions. The seminar covers diagnoses, treatment, recovery, communication strategies, crisis preparation and NAMI resources. It will take place on Sunday, Nov. 10 in Seattle’s Central District. For more information contact familia@namiseattle.org.

Join us on Monday, November 18th at the Seattle Center Exhibition Hall to participate in the **King County Behavioral Health Legislative Forum**. The evening will include Remarks by King County Executive Dow Constantine, and an overview of King County’s proposed behavioral health legislative priorities for 2020. For more information, click [here](#) or visit our calendar for further details: namiseattle.org/events.

Does your office, organization, or place of worship have a meeting room or classroom that can hold 15-30 people? If so, we are ALWAYS looking for donated meeting spaces to hold our free community classes, workshops and support groups, either for one-time use or on an ongoing basis. If you have a connection to a meeting room that might be a good fit, please email aislin@namiseattle.org to let us know!
BY ELLEN MENY

Yeesh.
That's what I think to myself every time I try to start this blog post, because mental illness is hard to write about.

You would think that, after years of living with it, documenting it would be as easy as breathing. I wear my anxiety like a second skin, so why should my story be so hard to tell—especially after I've told it so many times?

Of course, that's never the way it works. As those of us who live with it know, mental illness is messy. It will never work the way we want it to, it will never shrink itself into something neat and easily consumable. Talking about it, writing about it, is hard. But that's exactly why we need to do it.

I'm a television reporter and a writer. I tell stories, shoot video, and appear on camera almost every day. And for a long time, I was terrified to speak publically about my anxiety—mostly thanks to my own internalized stigma.

Stigma can take so many insidious forms. It can be discrimination at work from someone who doesn't understand mental health. It can be a parent, not believing their child is depressed. Or it can come from within—the fear and belief that revealing one's mental illness or mental health struggles could destroy one's life.

I had a bad case of that last one. I was scared of telling people I had an anxiety disorder.
I wasn't completely unfounded in my fear. The TV business is an extremely competitive, stressful business, and not everyone in it is entirely understanding of mental health. Much like any other job, revealing your mental illness could result in either nothing, or a potential black mark on your character.

Now, I'm extremely lucky to work for a supportive show and station that embraces people telling their stories—but a few years ago, the climate of our business was vastly different. In my experience, people on TV didn't talk about their own mental health struggles. Maybe that's why it felt so lonely.

I think loneliness is an almost universal experience in mental illness. Although there are so many amazing people around the world chipping away at stigma and closing gaps between people and feelings, struggling with mental health can still feel incredibly lonely. And that's why I felt so strongly about going...
public with my anxiety— I had felt so alone for so many years, and I didn’t want anyone else to feel that way, if I could help it.

Easier said than done.

Every time I thought about taking to social media to release my anxiety to the world, I thought about the consequences. Would my boss look down on me? Would I lose future job prospects, that evidence of my mental health condition tattooed on the Internet for eternity?

I assumed that if I revealed I had an anxiety disorder— aka a mental health condition, aka a mental illness, aka something that made me a “crazy person”— an angry mob of townspeople would suddenly materialize with torches and pitchforks. I thought my job would be over. I thought my life would be over.

Looking back, it feels kind of ridiculous. And it feels even more ridiculous to write about— but I know openly discussing mental illness can be very challenging and possibly detrimental. It’s a clear and present reminder that stigma is still alive and well.

And despite my promise to myself, that stigma kept me quiet for a long time— until Anthony Bourdain’s death.

Anthony Bourdain has always been one of my creative heroes— as a writer, as a storyteller, as a chef. Hearing about his death affected me in a way I didn’t expect. Shock, grief, and a sudden push through fear and doubt. Suddenly, I felt like I would be doing a disservice if I didn’t talk about my mental health.

I did it the millennial way. I sat down, turned my phone camera on, and then posted the video to my professional Facebook page. It was very short, very matter-of-fact. I talked about my anxiety. I told anyone who was watching that they weren’t alone. And then, I posted the video.

When I hit the post button, it was simultaneously an incredibly freeing and scary experience. It felt like a massive weight had lifted from my shoulders, because it was out there now, and I had no control over it anymore. Of course, I was also waiting for the crowd of angry villagers to burst into my news station and haul me out of TV forever, but, you know, that’s anxiety.

The angry villagers never came. Besides the likes and shares and other Facebook things, the one direct response I received came a few hours later, when I got a text from one of my news contacts. She told me that she had seen my video, and she had sent it to a relative who had anxiety as well. And then, she thanked me for posting it.

Everything seemed to click into place. My promise to myself, my role as a very minor public figure, the power of talking about mental health, as hard as it is. Ever since then, whenever I’ve brought up my anxiety, it’s led to something positive— someone sharing their own story, or bringing up a friend or a family member who’s been affected by mental illness.

For me, there is such power in talking openly about my anxiety— but even a few years later, mental illness is hard to write about, and hard to talk about. I hope that one day it’ll be easy. But until then, I hope you keep writing and talking. Because as hard as it is to do, it is so important.

So, as messy, or small, or strange as they feel, those stories matter. And so do you.

Ellen Meny is an Emmy Award-winning reporter and author working in Seattle. For more of her stories, check our her website: ellenmeny.com. Photo Credit: Cameron Thomsen.
Acknowledgements

IN MEMORY OF
Ellen Cline and Earl Petti
Sandra Moran
Thomas Justin (TJ) Farley
Nona Farley
Robert Hassan
Tennessee Horseshoe Pitching Association
Dr. John and Emily Roop
Roslyn Vicario
Esther Wang
Brent Musico

IN HONOR OF
Trez Buckland
Karen Schneider
Eleanor Owen
Frank Jose
Katherine Rautman
Travis Rautman
Marty Pisciotti
Amelia Gilbert
Gordon Wang
Anonymous (3)
Jann Blackbourn
Patrick Bufi
Scott Burdette
Laurie Clark
Rose Forinash
Anne Doss Hardy
Tim Hingtgen
Bill Kelly
Robert Kornfeld
David Lersten
Tracie McGovern
Deborah & Mark Nelson
Julie Nelson
Rodger Nelson
Barbara Ogden
Joy Lim Rothrock
Mya Tracy
Gordon Wang
Monica Fosmire Weber
Marilyn Whitford
Monica Wx