

WE NEED LOVE TOO



JOCELYN MACNEIL

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- 1) Foreword by Eugène LeBlanc **(1)**
- 2) Acknowledgments **(3)**
- 3) Why I Needed to Write my Story **(4)**
- 4) Noise Comes to Me **(4)**
- 5) Some Good Moments **(6)**
- 6) Psychiatric System: Here I Go! **(7)**
- 7) Trying To Cope **(10)**
- 8) What I Would Like Everyone to Learn **(11)**
- 9) Poem Published in Our Voice/Notre Voix #49 **(12)**

FOREWORD

Giving people the opportunity to articulate their experiences as they are living it in society's mental illness business is quite challenging, and at times a frustrating mission. The prevailing discourses are often surrounded by the themes of disease and treatment; and in turn, those interpretations are supported, in large measure by our culture and of course by our governments.

When we give the *floor* to those who are long term recipients of mental health services, so that they too, may give their side of the story, their views seem too often neutralized and drowned out by more politically correct opinions.

The purpose of The Mary Huestis Pengilly Life Story / Activism Scholarship Writing Fund is to counteract this trend by giving the *voiceless of the voiceless* an opening to state their beliefs on the reason for their disempowerment and pain in their lives rather than the usual dismissive, unquestioned psychiatric theories to human suffering.

Without such channels, our communities become bullies because they go about crushing the resilience of those who try the best they can to cope with overwhelming trials. As the topics of mental health and mental illness get more into the mainstream of societal concerns, it is imperative that there be a balance in the debate by greatly enhancing initiatives

directed by citizens living with these experiences. Such projects involve self help, advocacy, the arts, owned and operated businesses, etc...

In light of this, I am very pleased to be able to present to you Jocelyn MacNeil's life story. Although a short read, when one takes into consideration the highlights of her life, we can begin to better appreciate her current situation. I think such observations are important to ponder on because they give us a more accurate understanding of the cries and hopes of people.

Thank you for reading We Need Love Too, and for having an open mind in matters that pertain to not only the brain, but more importantly to the heart.

Sincerely

Eugène LeBlanc

2) ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Mrs. Paulette Steele from the Moncton Community Mental Health Center, Dr. Sultan, Louise Boudreau, Mrs. Chantal Comeau and her staff for their ongoing support.

Furthermore, my heartfelt thanks to Mr. Eugène LeBlanc, Director of Programs at *Groupe de support émotionnel inc.* and Publisher of Our Voice / Notre Voix without whom none of this would have been possible. His patience and his understanding have helped me in my journey of regaining some sense of self-worth in my life.

3) WHY I NEEDED TO WRITE MY STORY

It has always been a dream of mine to see my life story in print. Since childhood, I always felt that I had something to say; however, barriers of timidity, confusion, hyperactivity and learning difficulties mixed with nervousness has always prevented me to clearly express what needed to be said. Even to this day, my memory is somewhat poor but the main highlights remain vivid in my mind.

Since youth - feelings of isolation - on many occasions have intensified where I was not able to properly communicate to friends and mental health professionals my thoughts in a logical manner.

Having the opportunity to write my story with some assistance from *Our Voice / Notre Voix* gives me a sense of contentment because finally, my side of the story has had the chance to see the light of day. It is also my hope that it will give others who feel powerless in our mental health system to speak out and tell their story as well. Thank you everyone for reading me.

4) NOISE COMES TO ME

I was born in 1953 in Montreal, Québec. My father worked as a mechanic and mother worked as a secretary. As a child, I remember lots of shouting

between my parents. They sent me to kindergarten, but being nervous and perplexed, my parents decided, for awhile, to stop sending me to school. Since my mother's relatives were from New Brunswick, my parents decided to move over there in 1958 with hopes of a new beginning.

Living on the outskirts of Moncton in St-Anselem, my father went to work for my uncle in the construction trade and my mother was a homemaker. My brother, Peter, was born when I was around ten years old; he grew up to be very tall.

One day, not long after we were settled in, my mother rushed me to the Moncton Hospital where I had emergency surgery for appendicitis; I almost died.

At twelve years old, my folks decided to separate; they could not get along anymore. This caused me to feel helpless and angry. My father kept the house and my mother went to work at the Fox Creek Bakery. She was dedicated to her children and took care of both myself and my brother in an apartment.

Mom began getting sick and had to go to Saint John where she underwent medical treatment for colon cancer. While in convalescence, my mother brought my brother and I to live with her at my aunt and uncle. I remember waiting for her to return home; I was missing her terribly.

5) SOME GOOD MOMENTS

We eventually moved to Memramcook. I remember my teenage years as having some friends; I would sew and do crafts with the girls and some of us even played baseball with the guys. Sometimes, we would eat out at a restaurant in College Bridge.

In my high school years at Memramcook's *École régionale*, I took various courses as well as family economics. I once finished my year with honours in biology! I had become good friends with one of my classmates; Carmella and I would go to weekend dances and try to meet boys.

We once went to her mother's home in College Bridge. In one of our outings, we had gone to enjoy the picturesque view of the Bay of Fundy!

Another good memory of mine was going to Halifax with my mother and cousin to attend a sporting event for three days; we had also gone shopping. I remember all of us coming home happy. This stands out in my mind as being a lot of fun and brings to me a smile.

After graduation, I went to work as a house maid for a lawyer in Moncton. I remember my employer treating us with fairness and respect.

Regardless of those good moments, I began feeling some anxiety and tension that I could not explain. I later learned - much later in life - that if I failed to understand the cause of my emotional problems that someone else would do that explanation for me.

6) PSYCHIATRIC SYSTEM: HERE I GO!

As the fantasy dreams of many young women, I wanted to marry and fall in love with a prince charming. And then one day, I did fall in love or so I thought. I met Paul (*fictitious name*), at a dance in Memramcook. We dated for a few months, and then we began discussing marriage. My mother was worried and did not want me to marry this man from Sackville; she did not trust him. Too bad, I did not listen to the saying, "Mother knows best". My heart gave in over the logic, and I married him anyway. We had our honeymoon in Toronto where we stayed for about six months. Afterwards, he found another woman and left me. He would not accept and live with my mood swings. By then, I had become pregnant. I tried my best to master my emotions but failed.

I returned home, to New Brunswick, by train. I was carrying with me enormous pain: pain of failure, pain of loneliness and pain of uncertainty. With all this anxiety, I miscarried and lost the baby. I became very

saddened by life where I often felt hopeless! My mother could see my depression and was urging me to see a psychiatrist. I did not want to see one, but I eventually agreed to my mother's wishes. It is at this point that I entered the mental health system.

My first encounter with *Dr. Michel* was a *prescription* for six months of psychiatric hospitalization; with this came lots of medication. I was drugged to my eyeballs! I was given so many pills that it came to a point that I did not even know what I was taking! My nerves were a wreck. According to the doctor's explanation, my madness was because of the fact that I was reading the Bible too much, and I was trying to hard to understand its profound messages. True, I read the Bible a lot for the purpose of finding answers to my problems, but to say that it turned me into a crazy woman is somewhat debatable. I have also been given different psychiatric diagnosis throughout the years.

I was referred to the *Centre du Jour* program for adults living with a mental illness. Part of what they had to offer me was to work in the horticulture program; I loved caring for flowers and found it a solace in this great time of distress for me. At the time, I lived with my mother.

I reconsidered going back to work; but not feeling too well, I decided not to. My concentration was failing

me, and I was lacking motivation. This was partly due to the medication I was taking.

By this time, my brother had left for Montreal where he went to university. He had become an intelligent young man.

My mother and I eventually decided to go live in a special care home! She worked as a kitchen cook, and I would help her run errands. I tried so hard to be happy, but I found it difficult.

I often stayed in my room and constantly fought bouts of depression. A friend of my mother wanted me to work out my emotional issues on my own, but that was too much for me to bear.

A great loss hits me in my mid-twenties where my mother dies of a mass stroke at the Moncton Hospital. I remember being in shock.

At my mother's funeral, I was surprised and glad to see my cousin from Ottawa along with the rest of the family. This was the last time that I would see my brother, Peter; I never saw nor heard from him again! I often wonder where he is today and how he is doing. Some wonderful friends at a Church on Mountain Road tried their best to help me during this difficult time.

Not long after, my father dies of pneumonia; he had become an alcoholic. I became so lonesome, aching to see both my parents alive. I felt lost and empty inside.

6) TRYING TO COPE

With all the dramas and traumas of my life, I have at times failed to cope in a healthy way, but I have also achieved some measure of success. I regain some mental strength and went to work for Daisy's Clothing Store in Moncton; now I work for Ergon for a few dollars per week.

I have stayed in five group homes. They can be of help in some circumstances, but they can also test one's sanity. House rules are not obviously one's own and that is always a challenge to cope with. You have to get along with many kinds of personality and behaviour that may not necessarily be compatible with yours. There should be a better way to house people like us.

Poverty is always a stressful issue. We might have a roof under our head and food on the table but as for a social life like regular folks – forget it! There are no funds left at the end of the month for that.

I have been a member of *Groupe de support émotionnel inc.* since the early 1990's. Under the leadership of Eugène LeBlanc, this activity center has

given me a sense of belonging and has helped me to establish friendships with others.

I read; I draw; I go shopping at second hand stores; I try to keep my mind occupied; I try to smile to lessen the lonesomeness in hope that fate will come along and lessen the burden that I need to go through everyday.

Despite life's upheavals, I have an unwavering belief that the process of recovering requires one to reach out to others through social outings as well as making an effort to expand one's circle of friends. These things help us to become happier, content and appreciated by others.

8) WHAT I WOULD LIKE EVERYONE TO LEARN

As someone who has navigated the mental health and psychiatric system for the most part of my life, I think that society should be more sensitive to our needs and help us become more productive and respectable community citizens. We are often shunned and turned away by others. It is of course profitable for some to maintain the status quo, but for US it only brings further pain and disappointment. We need to go beyond existing and start living in forward motion.

And that's what my mother tried to tell me on her death bed, "*keep on living and don't give up.*"

If I had to summarize in a few words everything that I have mentioned in my story, those words would be: *people like us need love too.*

BEAUTÉ

*La lune illumine la terre;
Les étoiles travaillent notre imagination;
Le soleil réchauffe notre planète;
La pluie arrose les fleurs;
Les montagnes nous peignent un dessin;
Et nous donnent des couleurs.
Moi, toi et nous tous,
Soyons émerveillés
Par cette beauté.*

JOCELYN MACNEIL



WHO WAS MARY HUESTIS PENGILLY?

A native of Saint John, NB, Mary Huestis Pengilly was married with five sons and one daughter. After the Port City's great fire of 1877, she moves to Massachusetts. While living in the states, she becomes so engaged in writing a book on the laws of health that she forgets to eat for eight days. Being worried about her condition, her sons manipulate a way to bring her back by train to the Provincial Lunatic Asylum in 1883 where she will remain a patient for six months. Denying her insanity, she spends her days trying to make life a bit easier for some of the other patients and faithfully accounts in writing the treatments and injustices people are being exposed to. Mary dies in 1893. In keeping with her spirit of advocacy in the mental health / psychiatric system of her era, the purpose of this scholarship is to be mindful of such a task and to pursue it with the same determination and vigor.

THE SCHOLARSHIPS' PAST RECIPIENTS

- Katherine Tapley-Milton – Mind Full of Scorpions (2006)
- Arlen Rundvall – The Bipolar Guide to the Gift (2007)
- Moncton Capitol Theatre – Diaries from the Asylum (2008)
- Jocelyn MacNeil – We Need Love Too (2009)

More information about the MHP Scholarship can be obtained by contacting Our Voice / Notre Voix. *Ces informations sont aussi disponible en français.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

At 55, Jocelyn MacNeil lives in a special care home in southeastern New Brunswick. She likes to do crafts, read, knit and shop. She has been a member of *Groupe de support émotionnel inc.* since the early 1990's where she enjoys meeting new people and taking on new opportunities.