

“Stigma of Chains”

By Susannah B. Alexander

I have a load of oppression attached
To my back.
For the mentally ill are bound to the stigma in chains.
We are lying and dying for a place to be sane.

If insurance uncovers us
We are just left to shout.
And go back to the streets with a heart full of doubt,
That humanity even exists.
We deserve better than this.

If they do have a bed for you
To rest your sick head,
You have to wait.
24 hours for some is too late.

I begged my counselor to let me go
And I'll be honest, they both told me no.
For the hope of my hospital stay was to help.
And I wanted to write and then see for myself,
If our hospitals were better
Than a decade before.
I waited and waited and then
She opened the door.

I was met by a woman with a face like yours.
The most compassion I've ever received
comes from a place so pure.
She said, “It's going to be ok”.
I felt shame and then relief,
Then fear and also grief.

I realized as I looked around
I wasn't the sickest one in this town.
I knew my name.
Dear God, please keep me sane.

Be grateful if you have a sound mind
And refrain from words like psycho, and crazy
Schizoor depression as just plain lazy!
And Bipolar as an emotion?!
Like if I could make some potion to make my brain as perfect
as yours!

Mental illness affects
1 in 4 of us!
I've heard men of God make fun of us
In their sermons.
I've seen
Monks laugh at us.
And sometimes I wonder if the spirit is even within some of us.

Maybe God feels like rapid cycling?
Sorrow and euphoria at the same time.
We bring our joys to him, when others are crying.

In the hospital she was there.
A tall, young woman with short brown hair.
She was angry and intense!
She would stand like this,
And talk to the air.
I could tell for some moments that she just wasn't there.
She was fierce and stood behind
My back.
Staring and breathing down my neck.
I prayed to God for what to say.

Then she walked across the room.
She looked deep at me and loomed.
And I faced her and said "Mia, What do you need?"
She then took a different stance.
Her aggression no longer had a chance.
She walked up to me,
And said "Your bracelets are in the wrong place."
It's amazing how much grace
We will find,
When we look each other in the face.

That night I had a dream.
My room was across from the nurse's station
I screamed, and cried out and
No one came!
I then realized I had to watch my back!
Because if someone came into attack,
I would be the only one that would know.
America this can't be!
We have to change our hospitals and
See what we don't want to see.
I think they are doing the best they can, but they need more
money and they need more hands.

I remember the nurse with lavender eyes.
I was so very grateful,
When I told her she cried.
Her words full of kindness,
As she gave me my meds.
I said, "I haven't always been like this,
So depressed in my head."
She gave me my lithium and put me to bed.

And why is it so hard to get the insurance companies to cover
our meds?!
Isn't it cheaper to pay for our medications?
Than a hospitalization?!

My psychiatrist has been there for years and years.
He's listened and prescribed through many, many tears.
Dr. Michael when you go,
I don't know what I'm going to do!
Because millions of people owe our lives to you.
We thank you!

I asked him the other day about healing.
For my friend had been to 9 doctors diagnosed bipolar!
He went on a religious retreat
And his illness left him!
My doctor sat up in his seat.
I said "When will the healing happen for me?!"
Dr. Michael said,
"Anna, Jesus never healed anyone the same way, on the same
day."
And not a single day while I was in there did any church come
to pray for me!

Every time I suffer I go to God.
It seems the oppression is worse than my post partum
depression.
I don't think I would have gotten so mentally sick,
If under those steeples the people had just loved me as quick,
As I've tried to love you.

My baby had just been born.
My breast were leaking milk all over the floor,
And my bottom was torn.
We asked our small group to come to our door
Just like they had a dozen times before.
They said "NO. Get a sitter."
You want me to take my baby, who's sleeping peacefully on my
chest,
Leave her at home away from my breast? To come to you?!
I was in need of love like never before.
My heart hit every nerve as my tears fell on the floor.
I wonder why has theological discussion,
Suddenly become more important than soothing the suffering?

We would have no poverty if we all served each other.
Isn't it amazing how much damage we can do
When we do nothing at all?

When I was growing up
My mother tried to start
A counseling center in our churches heart.
But they refused to do it.
Because they wanted to keep the nursery and
"those" people far, far apart.
My response to that clergy is
When are we too sick to be welcomed as Gods child?
I thought you would love us
No matter how old or wild.
If that is your view, your faith must be very, very tired.
The preacher's ask what do we do when the mentally ill get
here?
Oh don't you know Mrs. Minister?
Our Brother's and Sister's are already there!

We go to meetings under steeples.
Picking up white chips, we are the anonymous people.
Yet if we joined your congregation,
We'd be tempted to drink at those stupid socializations.
For I've seen more church members gather to drink,
Long before they ever serve the poor.
I've got anxiety as I walk through those doors.

Those junkies aren't trash to me!
Above everyone else they give me the most empathy.
My greatest regret,
Is I won't know your full name
Until the day you are dead.
I've breathed cleaned lungs 7 times around the Sun.
I wake up every morning and I say I'm done.

I'm begging you and everyone.
Please try to love us
The mentally ill.
It's going to take more than the government,
It's not about prisons, it's more than the pills.
It's about loving someone with a brain disease!
Open your mouth please, pretty please!
Genetic testing can help.
They determined my brain cannot metabolize folic acid.
Think about what good we could do
If everyone on Skid Row was tested?
Would we be closer to stability?

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. suffered from depression.
He tried to commit suicide twice.
He jumped out of the top window the day his auntie died.
And as his feet fell to the ground,
The Lord said, "I'm not taking you home now,

for you will **live** and **die** for the civil rights and I will be so proud.”

Can we stand for the freedom of our minds?

The freedom to heal.

And the freedom to love the brain within?

Because every time I am hospitalized I feel like I’m paying money to be afraid.

God forbid our bosses find out,

Because we will get fired and lose all our pay.

We have to be silent in our churches, because people gossip better than they pray.

Please understand that whatever your faith, you deserve to be loved.

And if you believe in nothing

I honestly cannot blame you.

But here it is Sunday, and my church is you.

If you suffer from a mental illness please stand up!

That is Depression, PTSD, Eating Disorders, Addiction, Bipolar Disorder, Anxiety, Schizophrenia, Personality Disorders and any illness I’ve neglected to name.

If you are a Veteran suffering please stand up!

If you love someone suffering please stand up!

If you work and serve the mentally ill

Nurses, doctors, counselors, certified peer specialists, sponsors please stand up!

My name is Susannah Alexander

I’m a beloved wife, 4 time marathon runner, and a natural birth mother.

And I have Bipolar Disorder.

And I am a human being! I am a HUMAN BEING!

And so are You, and SO IS EVERYONE ELSE!