

## Looking for a Word from a Word:

### Behind The Scenes: What You Don't See!

by Michael Curry

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Thank you very much Diane. A couple of weeks ago My mom and I attended a living our faith team meeting here at the church and once the meeting had concluded Pastor Ken asked if he could speak with my mom and me in his office. The first thought that came to both of our minds was that he was going to hold off on speaking to the congregation until he could definitely be in attendance. I never dreamed that he and Diane would invite me to be a part of the sermon, this morning.

With that said, I would like to begin this morning with a quote. The quote that I would like to begin with comes from the section of hope from Vern McLellan's book called Wise Words and Quotes. Someone once said, “ Anyone can over come depression. The first step is to simply realize there is hope.” Next Sunday, October 4<sup>th</sup> begins a very exciting month in the life of Shadow Rock and today, I am here to tell you more about it.

Before I continue though, I would like each of you to stop and take a moment to think about something and this is what I want you to take some time and think about this morning. In a given year there are an estimated 54,000,000 Americans who have been diagnosed with some form of mental illness. Also, did you know that there are over 200 different forms of mental illness? In addition to that, most families are not prepared to cope once learning that a loved one has been diagnosed with some form of a mental illness. The information that I just shared with you comes from an article that I found on a website called **Mental Health America** and it comes from the article titled, “ *Factsheet: Mental Illness and the Family: Recognizing Warning Signs and How to Cope.*”

I would now like to take a moment and introduce myself for those of you who do not know me. My name is Michael Curry and I am 23 years and I am one of the 54,000,000 Americans living every day with a mental illness.

At the age of 10 I was diagnosed with a high functioning form of autism called, “**Asperger's Syndrome.**” Even though there are a laundry list of symptoms that are associated with this particular mental illness here are the four symptoms that most affect me on a daily basis.

1. **It is very difficult for me to socialize with people my own age.**
2. **It is very difficult for me to tell whether people are laughing with me or at me.**
3. **I do not like any changes in my daily routine.**
4. **I have a high sensitivity to loud noises such as fire alarms.**

When I first brought the idea to Pastor Ken's attention about the possibility of letting me speak and introducing mental health awareness month to the congregation this morning. I was not sure if I was bothering him with my repeated desire to speak or was in the fact that I have such a passion for mental health awareness?

During the months of our July Sabbath, the month of August, and up until today the Adult Education team has been working diligently and dedicating themselves to put together a series of classes that will begin next Sunday, October fourth during the 9:00am education hour. If you could not already tell by the title of my sermon printed in your bulletin, this morning, that the theme for this year's Mental Health Awareness month here at Shadow Rock will be **Behind the Scenes: What You Don't See.** (x2)

You have heard some specifics about what it is like for me, personally, to live with a mental illness on a day to day and week to week basis. There are also some things that you generally, do not know or see about me on an everyday basis. This not only pertains to me but also pertains to my family as well as my close friends.

A couple of weeks ago I had a phone conversation with Pastor Ken and he offered me some guidance about when I am telling a story about myself to other people and this is the guidance that he offered me, **“Am I telling my story because I am not yet healed from my wounds? Or am I telling the story because I am healed from my wounds and I want to help others heal from theirs?”**

I would now like to take a moment and share a story with you. The story that I would like to share with you, this morning, takes me back in time to when I attended the United Church of Christ Southwest Conference Church Camp. Each family group is in charge of conducting a worship service each night in the vesper's area. One night I remember I was sitting by myself with my eyes closed in the vesper's area and I remember that there was some reflective and meditative music playing in the background.

I remember that this was at a time in my life when my parents were going through their divorce and when I heard them fighting I thought that they were fighting about me. I also felt like at the time that I did not really have any friends nor did I feel like I had a purpose in life. Then I remember hearing a voice and I believe the voice that I heard was the voice of God and God said to me, “Michael, you do not want to do this. You do have a purpose in life.” It has taken me much longer than I had anticipated to find my purpose in life but today I feel like I have finally found what my purpose in life is. My purpose in life is to not only have the opportunity to share my story with you as well as educate each of you about mental health issues.

One of the other things that you do not know or see about me is that I have endured a lot of emotional hurt and pain over the years as well as not being afraid to admit that I have dealt out my own fair share of emotional hurt and pain to my family and close friends. Let me tell you that if I had the ability to build a time machine and have the opportunity to go back in time and redo what has already been done I would but I can't. All I can say to those people who I have hurt is that I am very sorry from the bottom of my heart and I hope that you can find it in your heart to forgive me and give me another chance.

One final thing that you do not know about me and this is something that I have kept hidden from a lot of people including my family and close friends for a long time. The secret that I have kept from my family and close friends is that one of my biggest fears in life is that one day I am going to wake up all alone without my family or close friends to help me get through the calm and rocky seas of life because I have made one too many mistakes.

In closing, this morning, I would like to take a moment and share some advice with you that also comes from the article that I cited with you at the beginning of my sermon, this, morning. The advice comes from the section of the article called, “**how to cope day – to – day.**“ Here is the advice that I want to share and end with today. These are well known essential steps to take once you have found out that a loved one has been diagnosed with a mental illness. The five essential steps are:

**1. Be able to accept your feelings - Despite the different symptoms and types of mental illnesses, many families who have a loved one with mental illness, share similar experiences. You may find yourself denying the warning signs, worrying what other people will think because of the stigma, or wondering what caused your loved one to become ill. Accept that these feelings are normal and common among families going through similar situations. Find out all you can about your loved one’s illness by reading and talking with mental health professionals. Share what you have learned with others.**

**2. How to handle unusual behavior – Outward signs of mental illness are often observed as behavioral. Individuals with mental illness may become quiet or withdrawn. Sometimes, people with mental illness may burst into tears or have outbursts of anger. After treatment has begun people with mental illness may experience anti- social behavior. When in public these behaviors are very difficult for people not only to accept but understand why someone would be acting the way that they are.**

- 3. Establish a good support network – seek support from family or close friends. If you cannot talk to your family and friends about what you are going through seek a self-help or support group.**
- 4. Seek counseling - Therapy can be beneficial for both the individual with mental illness and other family members. A mental health professional can suggest ways to cope and better understand your loved one's illness.**
- 5. Take time out – It is common that the person with the mental illness becomes the focus for the family and other members of the family may find it difficult to pursue their own interests.**

**Finally, I would like to take a moment and thank both Pastor Ken and Pastor Diane for allowing me the opportunity, this morning, to share a part of my story with you about what it has not only been like for me but what it has also been like for my family and close friends to know someone personally who is living with a mental illness on a daily basis. I am not sure where I would be today if I did not have each and every one of you in my life and I thank you for always sticking by my side through the calm and rocky seas of life. I am looking forward to learning more about each and every one of you as we share our stories together as mental health Month here at Shadow Rock begins to unfold next Sunday during the 9:00am education hour. I would now like to invite Pastor Diane back up to the pulpit to help us tie everything together with some final remarks, this morning.**

**If you would like to read the article in its entirety you can view it by copying and pasting the following link:**

**<http://www.nmha.org/go/information/get-info/mi-and-the-family/recognizing-warning-signs-and-how-to-cope>**