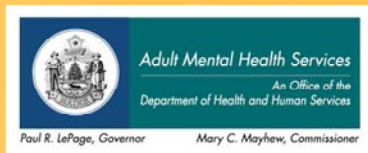


Transformation: Creating a Life of Resilience

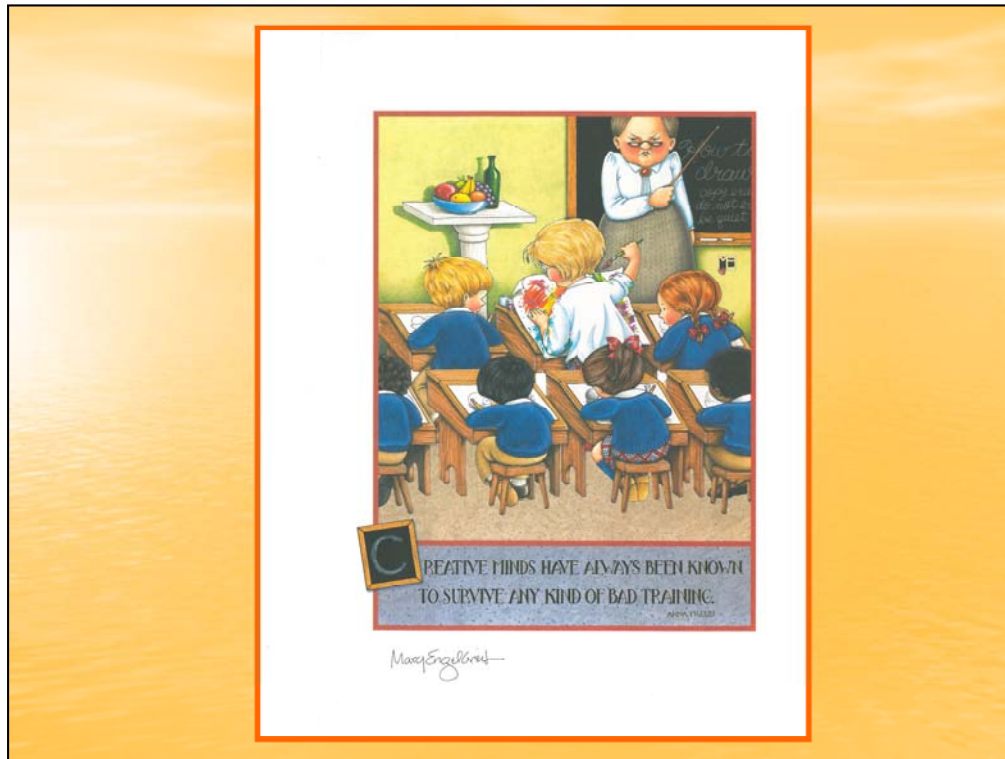
Kelly Staples
Recovery Training Coordinator
Division of Community Partnerships



Please Note

- The original version of this presentation included photographs from my family and my history. I have replaced those photos with other pictures I've found online. I don't believe this will take from the content, but if there seem to be discrepancies between the pictures and the verbiage on the notes pages – it would be because I've replaced the photos. I apologize in advance for any confusion this may create.

– Kelly Staples



I found this in a magazine recently and vowed to share in all of my trainings.

Who am I and why do you want to hear what I have to say?



What brought you to this workshop – and I’m hoping here that there are at least a few of you here who wanted to be here, rather than got STUCK here! Personally I would have taken Pat McKenzie’s workshop.

I’ve been working for the Office of Adult Mental Health Services for about 4 ½ years. Prior to that I created peer programming for a mental health organization. When I came to peer services, I really believed that I was taking training from Shery Mead to learn some skills to do a job and create a program. I never imagined that Intentional Peer Support would have such a profound impact on me and my recovery and completely change the way I relate in all of my relationships. I’m going to do this presentation through pictures of my journey. I’ve never done this before, and I’m not certain how this will turn out, so please bear with me and feel free to ask questions at any time.



I want to quickly introduce you to my children. Michael is the one about to get smore all over his head, Eric is the little guy on top and Alex is the one cracking up. Michael is headed to Afghanistan on Saturday as a United States Marine. Alex is completing his junior year in High School and Eric is 6 and will begin his second year of Kindergarten next year. Eric came to live with us three years ago and suffered much abuse and neglect in the 3 ½ years prior to that. If I hadn't experienced what I did in terms of maneuvering "the system" with the other boys and learning from my other boys, I'm not sure I could be half the parent I am to Eric. What has improved my parenting skills with Eric that the older boys have not been able to reap so much of, is my ability to stay in my own skin and mind and body when it gets hard. When the behaviors of my other boys were difficult, and emotional I fled either emotionally or physically. I am capable of riding it out with Eric, even in the most difficult of times and be a presence for him that he can rely on. I'm sad that I couldn't be that for the other boys and hope some day they'll understand.

Why Resilience?

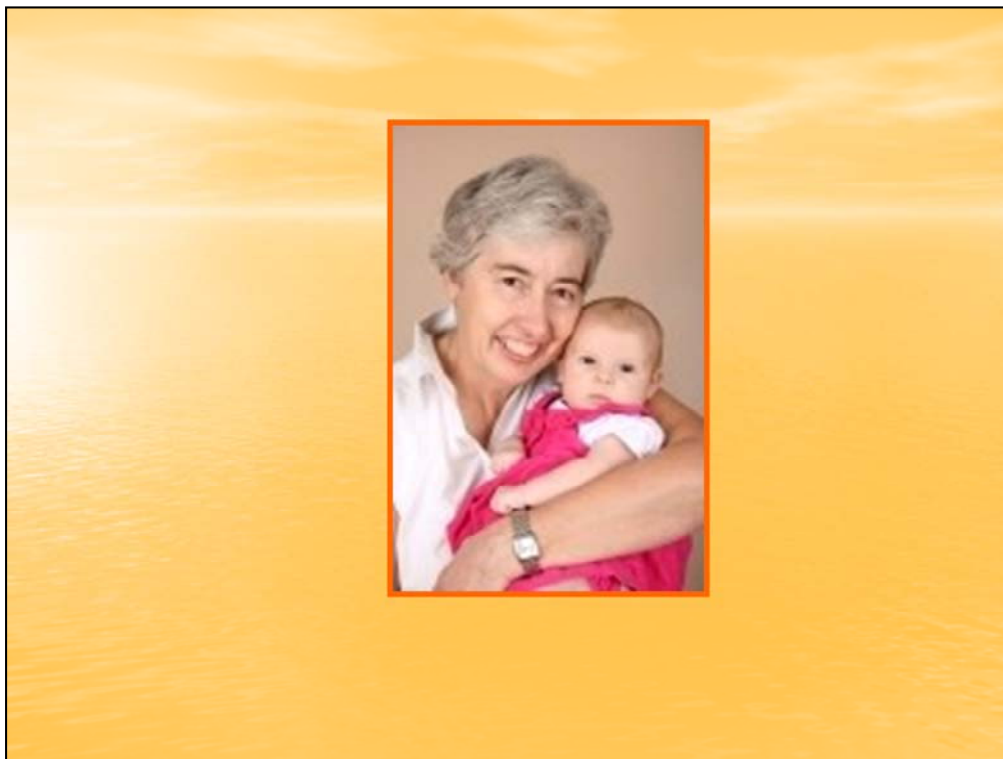


What I've learned during this process of creating Intentional Peer Support in Maine is that the children's system "gets it." The focus is on assisting children to be resilient. Can someone define resilience? (pause) I found: **"tending to recover from or adjust easily to [misfortune](#) or change."** This falls right in line with any trauma practice and beautifully with Intentional Peer Support.. I'm going to tell you a little bit about IPS and then demonstrate how the process of using the four tasks of Intentional Peer Support has helped me to move forward in my path of resilience.

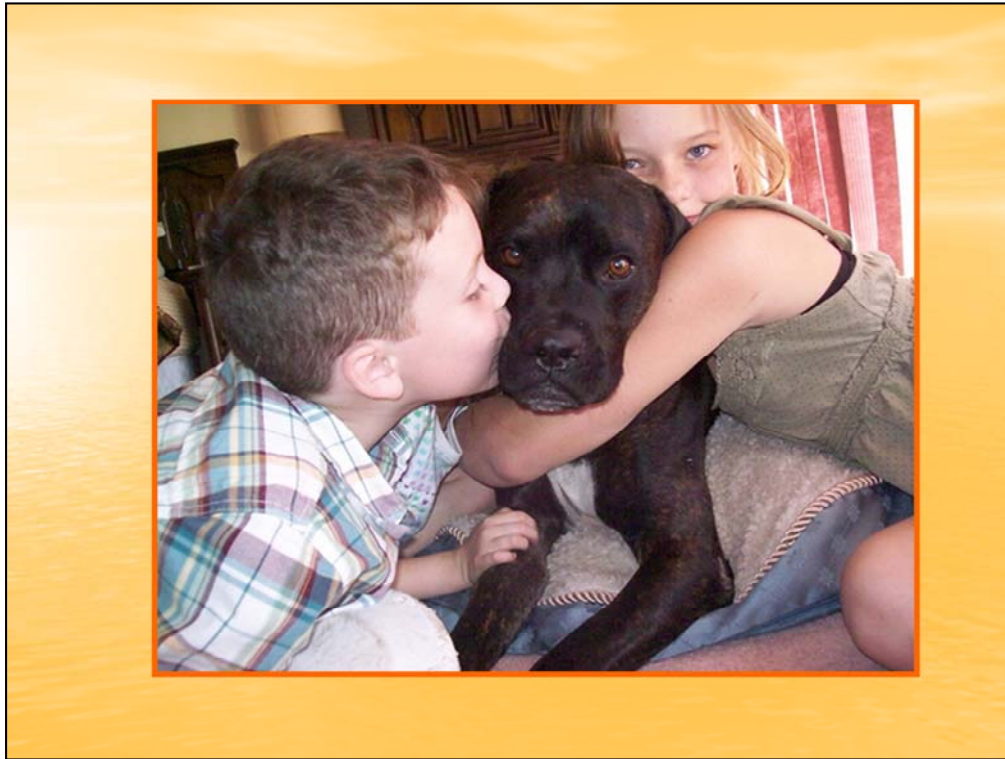
Intentional Peer Support & The Four Tasks

- Building Connection
- Helping Each Other to Understand how we've Come to Know what we Know (Worldview)
- Redefining Help as a Co-Learning and Growing Process
- To Help Each Other Move Towards What We Want, Rather Than Away From What We Don't Want.

In Intentional Peer Support we want to use the relationship between peers to help each other learn to “get through” whatever comes our way. We re-define our stories as “what happened” rather than “what’s wrong with you.”



Here I am –cute, innocent – simply adorable? Right? My job at birth was to love my mother. I failed. Instead, my grandmother – Nanny –seen here, adored me, and showered me with the attention she hadn't showered on my mother. We lived with my grandmother for the first few years of my life, my mother was a single teenage mom with a trauma history and a healthy dose of shame. She couldn't help be jealous of me and later admitted she had never loved me. It was actually a relief to hear that, because I always felt it. I think my brother's path was more difficult for him though, she did love him. But she abused him as much as she did me.



This is my brother and me at my Grandmother's house with a dog "Lady." We had two siblings born later, but two of us were treated very differently than them. Todd and I had a foundational difference though. I had people outside of our home that loved and believed in me.



Connection is so very important. How many studies have been done evidencing how important it is to bond with the mother after birth. How many children have had “failure to thrive” because they have not connected and bonded with someone? My brother made that connection with my mother –and he could do all those “warm and fuzzy cuddly” things with her, and at the same time she beat the crap out of him. An incredible mixed message that doesn’t make sense. For me, it made sense. I would spend a life time though trying to get her to love me, to prove to her that I was a good person, that I was worth loving. During that time I was “moving away from what we don’t want.” I was convinced that recovery was about lessening the pain of my mother’s rejection. And that despite whatever successes I had, if the rejection of my mother hurt, then I wasn’t any better than I was at age 17.

Fortunate for me, along the way, I wove a quilt of people who would grow to love and support me and show me I had value. My brother never really had that.



Priscilla, Myrtle and Mrs Kiernan – three non-biological women who showed me that I mattered. When I think of the difference between my brother and myself. Given that we were both raised and treated similarly, I had people from outside of our family that I knew loved me. “Mrs Kiernan” told me all about God and she took me under her wing at church, she gave me the title of third daughter and she always wrote to me wherever we moved to follow my father’s work and when I moved away to college. Priscilla knew the stories at my house, she gave me shelter. Weekends, school vacations, I stayed at her house whenever I could. She had a bedroom that was every school girls fantasy and I don’t know how she got away with it with her husband. I adored her family, they were a big French Catholic family, prone to leap into a combination of french and english at any given moment. There was fighting, but there was lots and lots of demonstrative love –something I never witnessed at home. Myrtle came later in life, I knew her as an “elder” at church. At 18 I joined the church choir and learned all about feminism from Myrtle. She was my mentor in many ways and the person I would call to gossip about church!

And just because it’s a small world – I have to mention that Myrtle and Marie knew each other from church, but Myrtle knew Priscilla because she used to purchase Fashion Two Twenty from her!



As time went by I added more women to my quilt. And eventually – some men! Verdi Tripp and “Grampa Bud.” Bud is Mrs Kiernan’s husband. I knew him growing up as Mrs. Kiernan’s husband. He was the Elmer Fudd looking guy that greeted people at the back of the church, following the service. And though I was 23 when she died, I had continued to refer to her as Mrs. Kiernan. She passed away the year Michael was born, knowing that if I had a girl, she would be named Marie. As you’ve seen, I never had a girl. However, when I was 18, I joined the choir and got to know Bud in whole new way. My son Alex’s middle name is John, after Bud, and he even has a small purple spot on his lower lip in the same spot Bud had one. Over the years we bowled together in summer leagues and I grew to view him as a father figure and a grampa for my boys. Unfortunately he never got to meet Eric.

Verdi is a whole other man. We loved to joke and maybe even share a dirty joke or two. Again, I’d been close to his wife Margaret most of my life, having met them at church. Did I mention that my brother and I were dropped at Sunday school so that my parents could go to Breakfast on Sunday mornings. What could be viewed as a rejection, was the best gift they could ever give me. Anyway, I’d always known Margaret, and she still talks about my Easter Bonnet and white gloves I wore every year. But Verdi I didn’t really get to know until I was an adult and I was running for the Maine legislature, but we’ll talk about that later. Verdi passed away a few years ago from cancer. He outlived all the predictions and always with a joke. It was great to have another man step in for a short while and treat me as a daughter.



And finally my professional mentors – Claudia Bepko, Karen Ludwig and Shery Mead. Through my relationships with them I have learned what I am capable of professionally. I've been challenged, and rewarded. They've each brought their individual squares to my quilt.

Worldview

Understanding how we've
come to know what we know.

Worldview begins early, Its all of those experiences we've had that tell us how to see. If I've always seen the world as a victim, I will relate to anyone in my world as a victim. If I've been raised to believe I can accomplish anything –then I will accomplish anything!

My culture was all about secrets. Going back generations, anything bad that happened was swept away and pity the one that shares the secret. When I was fifteen I found out that the man I'd been calling "Dad" was not my father. You'd like to think that this was presented to me by my loving parents sitting down and gently explaining this to me. But in typical dysfunction a relative showed up and shrieked "Its time Kelly knows" and my mother was shrieking about how she had "Made it to the hill and no one was bringing her down!" the relative didn't reveal what "it" was, but my mother told me that night. I learned all about her trauma history and truly felt badly for her and the shame she endured to protect the feelings of the wives of her predators. I was torn in half. I felt loyalty to my mother, despite the violent childhood I'd experienced, it made me understand her a little more and her pain. The other half of me wanted answers. "if he's not my father, then who is??" I worked to uncover the mystery. I would later find out that the girl in high school who looked like me – was my first cousin – Maine IS a small town!

Truth became very important to me, determining the truth at all costs. Its been to my detriment, I tend to give people closest to me the third degree about even the most insignificant moment in time!



They say a picture says a thousand words – you can probably make up a great story here, idyllic childhood visit to Santa’s Village, little girls says something wrong and gets backhanded . . . Pretty typical, right? I knew at this age that I was not part of this family unit. But the connections had begun, several of those women had already entered my life and were loving me.

A skill we need to learn in life is how to get through conflict. What my mother modeled for me was to stop talking to the people you have problems with. Repeatedly through childhood my mother would be “on again, off again” with her family. She would have the best of friends who would simply disappear from our lives. I learned from this that when you were angry, there was no choice but to walk away.

The worldview I was establishing was through the lenses of abuse, shame, and fear.



My 8th birthday. Holly Hobbie cake and baby sister due in two months. Birthday parties were an event to “get through” not to really enjoy. If there was too much giggling I was shamed. This is the room my mother would use to punish my brother and myself.

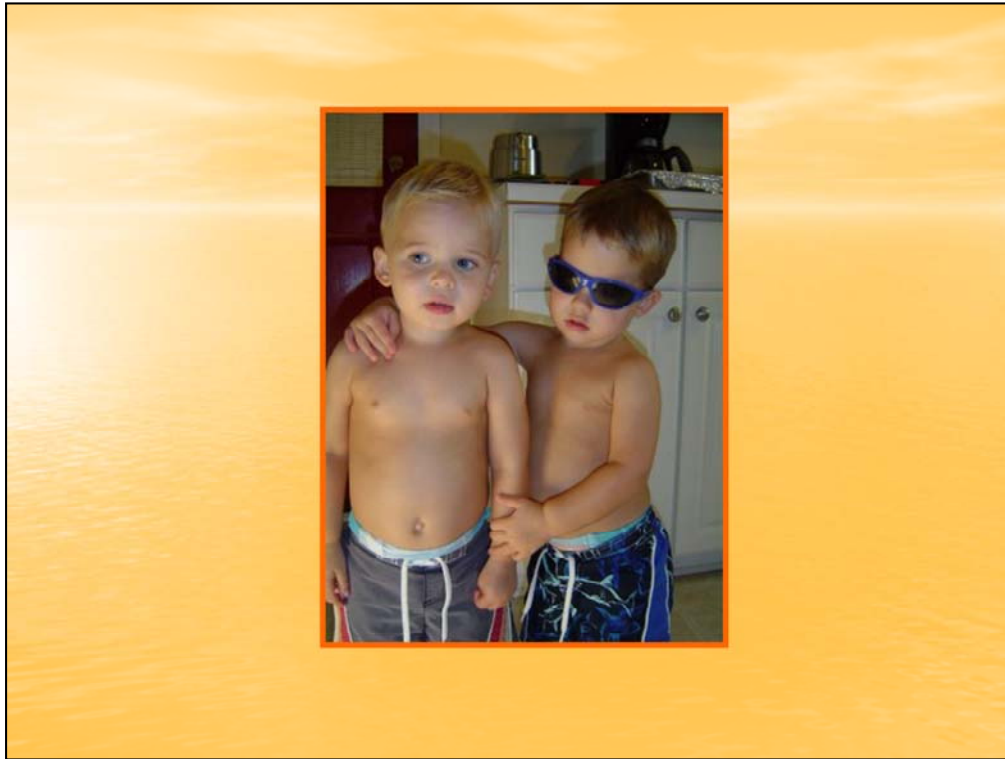


I left home at the end of my junior year in high school. I really intended it to be a situation where I would just be leaving a year early and that my relationships at home would be like if I was away at college, home for visits, holidays, birthdays. But my mother made it clear the night I moved out, I wouldn't be able to come home, ever. So I began my senior year in high school living with a distant relative. I ended my senior year in high school living with a man five years older than me, graduating by the skin of my teeth. I learned my senior year that you can get away with a lot when you have a trauma history and you're quasi homeless. But I did what I had to do to survive and I did graduate. This picture includes my little sister and my grandmother –nanny –and her cousin Ada. You'll may notice the absence of parents.

At this point I determined to prove to my mother that I was good. I hoped that she would see that she COULD like me and learn to love me. I went to great lengths to make this happen.

New Beginnings!

A child is born!



My babies. It seemed while I was growing up, reconnection happened for my mother around the birth of children, in particular my two younger siblings. When they were born, my mother hadn't been talking to her sister, and each time my aunt would go to the hospital, welcome the new baby and suggest they begin anew.

The therapist I was seeing during my first pregnancy suggested I send "pregnancy announcements" – I couldn't imagine they existed, but sure enough, Hallmark made them. So I sent out the announcements, just to a few people so if my mother "checked it out" there would others that would have received them. It listed potential names and due dates and other vital information. Soon after I spoke with my father, he still talked to me on occasion – and I told him I'd like them to be grandparents. He thought it was reasonable. I asked how my mother would feel about it, he said "you put a new baby down next to them, how can they help not fall in love." Let me count the ways!! When Michael was born via c-section I couldn't believe my luck – my mother worked in the local hospital operating room. So when he was born – I announced to the staff that this was the birth of her first grandchild. Hoping against hope that the next time any of them saw her they would congratulate her. Yes – I was trying to punish her in the only way I knew how and at the same time, hoping she would want to know me –and now there was a baby involved. And I repeated that story with my second child, Alex.

And when I went to their house and I brought my new babies, she left the room.



**If all else fails . . .
Try Again!**

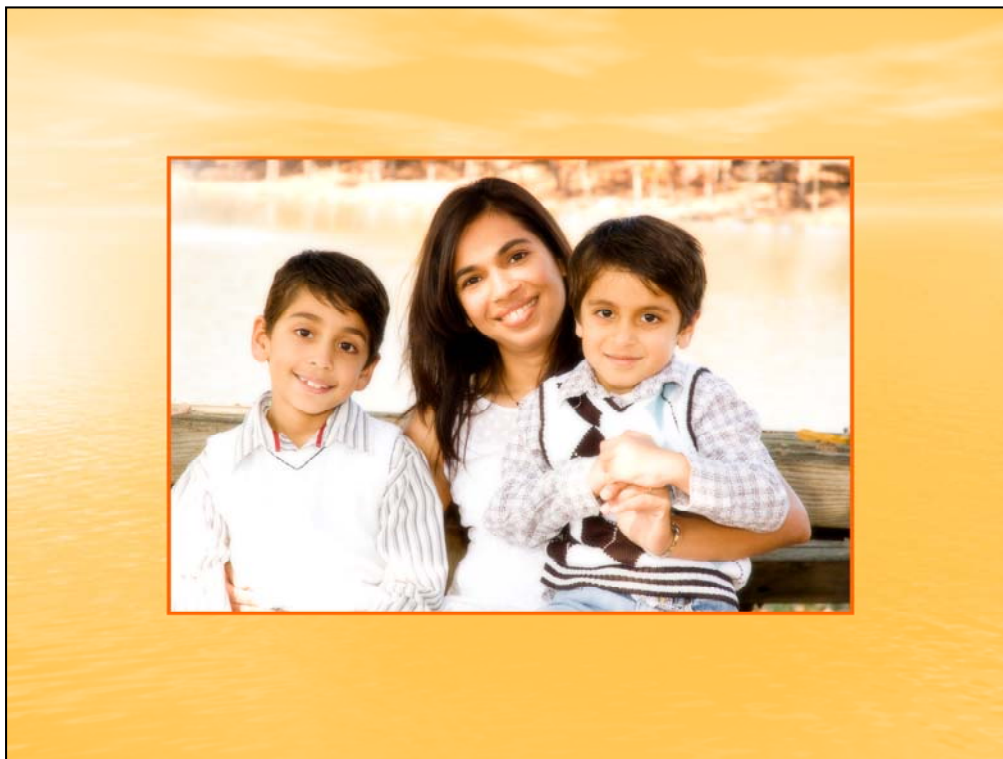


YEP! I ran for the state legislature. Did I do it to get my mother's attention –no? Did I at some point figure out it could – of course! I was a person in the right/wrong place at the right/wrong time – whichever way you choose to look at it. The town committee I was meeting with suggested I make a run. It was clear from the beginning I was a sacrificial lamb, running against an incumbent who'd been around for awhile. But it was fun and I was able to take a stand on a number of issues. At this point in my life I became an activist. I learned that my perspective, my worldview from whenst I came was valuable and could help to make changes. I attended a number of rally's in Washington DC and organized a few in Maine. I joined AmeriCorps and began national service in my local area and my feminist mind was growing. I'd been to college, I'd learned from some incredible women and men and now I was learning to apply it in my work.

But at the end of the day, I walked away with guilt and shame. I was sure that someday "they" were going to find out that I was a fake and a fraud and that I had no idea what I was talking about . That really, I was that little girl, scared and not worthy of a second glance.

Transformation and Mutuality

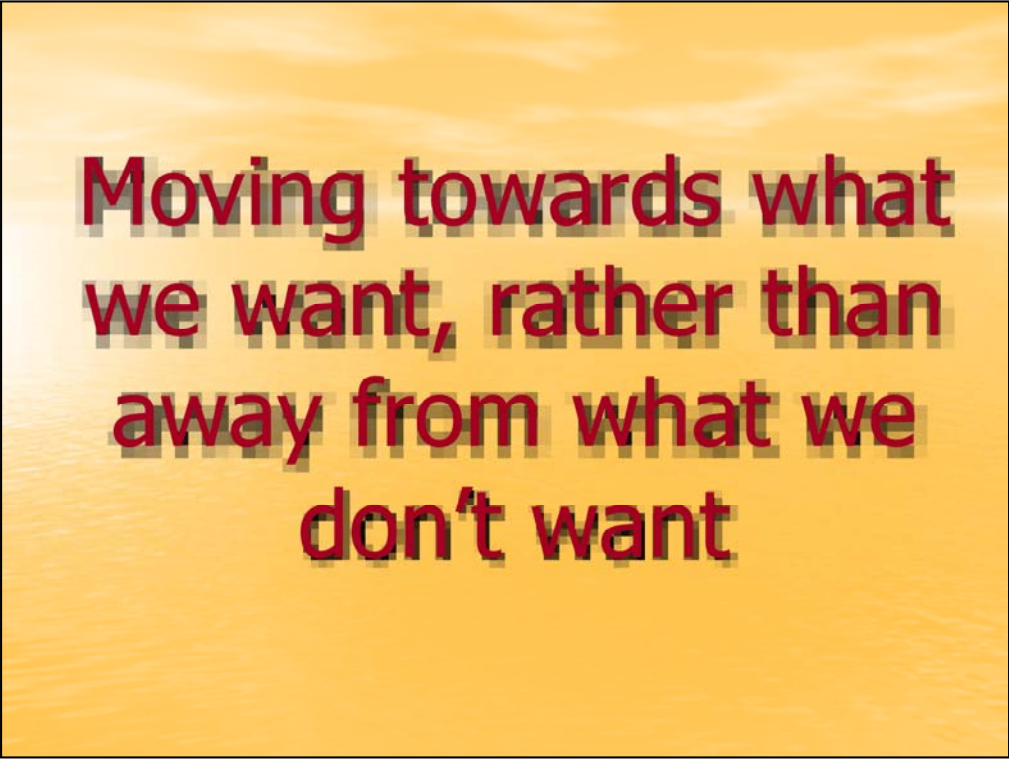
Redefining Help as a Co-
Learning and Growing Process



I share this picture because it was a turning point in my life. I took a writing class with Claudia Bepko once and she said “write about when recovery began for you.” I went home and I tried and tried to write and nothing came to me. My definition of recovery was “getting over, making things go away. When I was working with Claudia I wasn’t in touch with that part of me any more. I’d moved to a place in life where I was creating new ways of seeing. I was making new meaning from my stories. And then the word transformation came to mind. Shery had introduced me to that idea, that my life was ever evolving and changing and moving forward. So I thought about when that happened, and this picture came to mind –

This was a picture taken for the church directory in the fall of 1994. The boys were almost 3 ½ and 1 ½. The picture taken just before this one included their father. But that night I knew I was going to be asking him to move out soon. So I asked for a special picture with mom and then told the secretary to use this one for the directory.

That is when transformation began for me – when I began adding new experiences and hard decisions to my life. I had returned to college to study social work (before Michael was born I’d gone to college for three years to work on a degree in elementary education). I made a friend who was also studying social work and we gave to each other and took from each other and it was a shared experience. I edited her papers, she drove me around when I didn’t have a car. We took care of each other’s children. I began to offer a weekly dinner at church “supper with Kelly” - I would spend my day off from classes making dinner, people would come, share in the bounty, share fellowship and contribute to the next week’s meal. I was giving of myself. I was learning it wasn’t all about me. I wasn’t learning that I had something genuine to share that people appreciated, and they loved me for me. At the same time I began to move towards what I wanted in life.



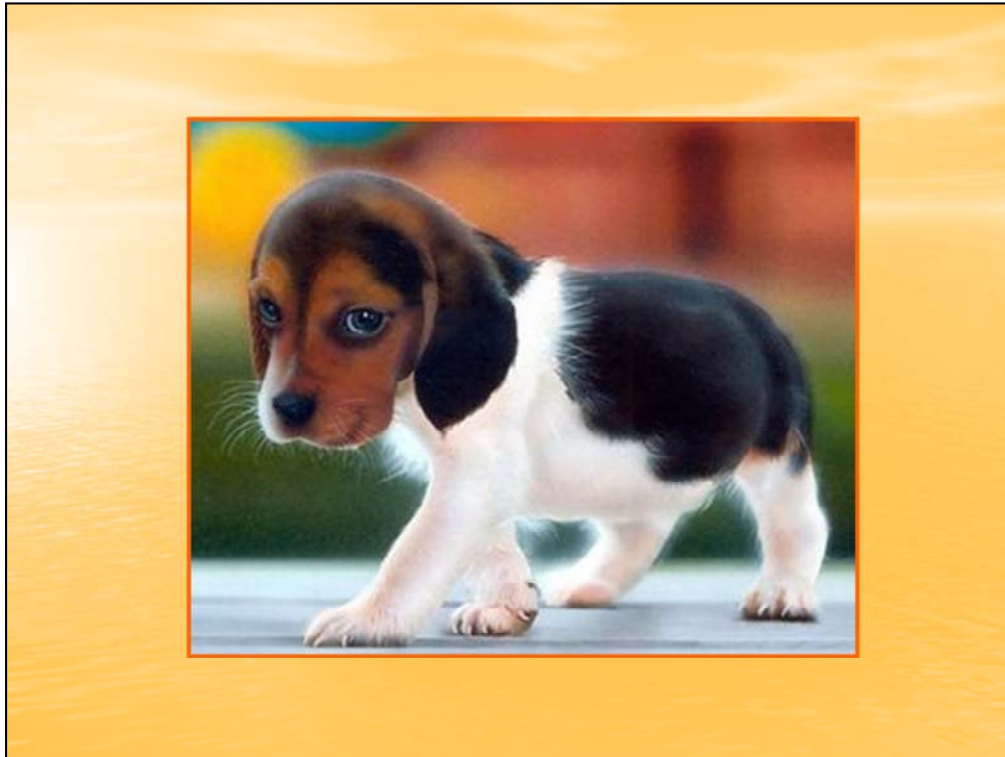
Moving towards what we want, rather than away from what we don't want

I began going to various support groups, first with female trauma as the topic and then body image. I met people with similar experiences who really understood me – peer support – before I knew what it was! Co-learning – we came together, we shared our stories, we challenged one another to make new meaning of our old experiences. Were we victims or were we survivors?

Looking back, during that writing assignment I realized that at this turning point, I had begun to add to my life, to create the life I wanted, rather than constantly thinking about – how I needed to “get over my mother.”

Historically every time I started a new therapeutic relationship and had to fill out the “why are you here” question, I always answered “to get over my mother.” I believed that until it no longer hurt that she rejects me – I wasn’t really better, I wasn’t fixed.

But looking back on that time I realize it was beginning, as I added things to my life, as I experienced successes, though the shame and fear that I was going to be found out still existed, I was spending less and less time thinking about how she didn’t love me. But I still had a ways to go.



Eric joined our family. I was his mother's birth coach and was the first non-medical person to hold him. I had contact with him from birth, but didn't begin to regularly have him come to my house until he was 2. He then began to come every weekend and eventually permanently move in with us. I can't imagine my life without him. That's important to remember . . .

The BIG 4-0

On my 40th birthday I went to church like any other Sunday, someone was very kind to bake 40 cupcakes, I blew them all out, had lots of well wishes and trundled my way home for some downtime before the evening festivities. I was alone and doing some journaling. I was writing about birth, what time I was born, the situation of my birth, and I wrote about my mother. And I asked the big question – how? How do you give birth to a child, and not love it? How do you not want to know it. Or should I say – her? Me?

And then the lightbulb – it is always going to hurt. It simply is not natural that the person who gives birth to you rejects and dislikes you. Sure we see it in nature, rescued animals who's mother's didn't know how to be a mother. But I wasn't rescued, the people who knew what was happening didn't step in to help. When some tried – DHHS came and mother threatened them so they left. I fended for myself, I found love elsewhere and at this point in time, it's not going to come from her.

And then the self-talk – so why can't you get over it, why aren't you over it after all these years? I remember in my 20's my friend's mother saying – why do you stick your face out over and over just to have her slap it again – after yet another attempt on my part to convince my mother that she should be in my life.

But it sunk in on my 40th birthday. It will always hurt. The difference is – it no longer knocks me down. The anniversaries – of the day I moved out, her birthday, her wedding anniversary – they all pass by and I no longer notice them or have strong feelings about them. Holidays and my birthday? I mourn a little, I acknowledge that there is probably a family celebration happening that I am not included in. but it doesn't knock me down, it doesn't stop me in my tracks.



**I've really moved
forward now!**

My 25th anniversary of no longer living with my mother happened last year. I knew it was coming, I knew it wouldn't bring the intense pain it had before, but I wanted to celebrate it. It took me 25 years, but I finally had it figured out. All those years I felt the power of her words "If you leave, you can never come back."

But 25 years later the realization that despite those words, I left. What had always felt like it was in her power and control. Had really been mine. I chose to leave and create new meaning in my life. It didn't happen over night and it didn't happen without a lot of stumbles. But it happened. So I wrote my mother a letter, I sent a card. It wasn't filled with venom it was a "here's what you've missed." I was kind, but it was a statement of my accomplishments.

When you've been abused, when you've been hurt, you believe you are bad, you believe you are worthless, you wait for the shoe to drop, you don't trust and it is a long hard process to move beyond that. It is a long process to figure out that you are loveable, that you are worth the air you breathe. I'm finally there.



So I celebrated on my 25th anniversary – celebrated the new meaning this experience had for me. If I hadn't lived what I lived I wouldn't' be who I am and I couldn't' give what I give. I spent the day with my three best friends. They even gave me presents.



We went to Popham - my favorite place in the world. I've always used Popham as my safe space in visualizations, and for a time I couldn't use it as my mother would invade the space. But I conquered and reclaimed it so it once again became my place of serenity, escape, peace.



This is me with my three buds – yes, matching pj's and all – this past January. One of us was needing support as they visited their child for parent's weekend at a therapeutic residential program. They were going to have to endure multiple groups and meetings with their ex-husband. It was an interesting weekend that came with conflict at dinner one night. One of us said something hurtful. One reaction was to comment on the weather. One reaction was to go to the bathroom and cry. One reaction was to become defensive and one reaction was to say "are we going to talk about this?" And we did, for two hours. It was not easy, it was not without pain, but we walked away hugging, crying and mugging for a picture outside the restaurant!

All four of us are divorced. Two of us by choice, two of us because of scoundrels! We have our similarities and we have our differences. Two of us lean far to the left, one of us leans far to the right and one flutters between the two. All of us have children, some of us have had a more difficult time raising them than others. We have had some tough experiences. If I had not participated in IPS, one of them I would for sure have run away from long ago. But I've learned to sit with discomfort. I've learned that when it gets hard, we are going to work through it, they are still going to love me. I have become resilient. We challenge one another, we say things to one another that we'd never say to others outside our circle of friendship. They were each my friends individually, but I brought them together for MY quilt and now we are all mistresses of mischief together.

**To learn more about
Intentional Peer Support and
the Training Program in Maine**

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