



**Canadian Mental
Health Association**

Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge
Mental health for all

Steps to Recovery

Sheri's Story

Written by Sheri

Getting Started

My recovery process started in 1972, I was 3, when the daughter, (a teenager), of a family friend, molested me for three years. But my healing process actually began in March 1990. That's when I gained a 2nd chance at life by having brain surgery for Epilepsy.

In a final attempt to control the multiple seizures I was having, we decided to try one last treatment. This was an extreme option of brain surgery, and we didn't even know if I would qualify. But we signed up for whatever was in store, and that landed me in surgery on March 28, 1990.

The surgery turned out to be a huge success. In the months and years that followed, I remained seizure free. I was on no medication. Yet I was unhappy and my head was a mess.

For most people, emotions are something not thought about, just experienced and let go. For me, emotions were a new thing. If I experienced any emotions before the surgery, I would seizure. Now, able to experience emotions without seizing, I didn't know what to do with them. They were new and often overwhelming.

On top of this I was remembering more things vividly. Things I did want to remember and things I did not. The things I did not want to remember had come up before, but I had shoved them back down again under seizures and medication. Now I had no cloud of medication or haze of seizures to block things. Now I remembered clearly. And it was scary.

I couldn't heal and be at my family home. We had no privacy in matters. We were a very sharing family. So I moved back to London, Ontario in 1993. On top of going back to school and gaining a few credits, I volunteered at the hospital for a time. And I started searching out various Psychiatrists. I just called offices and asked about coverage, fees, hours and location. London is a BIG city after all!

In the end I found a man who believed in the same faith system as I did, a huge plus. He was a good doctor for the time I had him. He was my doctor the 6 of 8 years I was in the city. But he tried to teach me things that were beyond my understanding. I understand them now but back in the 90s I did not.

That's how I got started in the recovery process. Second chances are out there for the taking, you just have to be brave enough to take that one step and move beyond here into hope.



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Doing the Work

Once I got into counselling and therapy, things seemed to take on a life of their own. Through the teachings of my doctor, I gained new confidence and understanding of mental WELLNESS. I was learning about boundaries and how my family lacked them. It's understandable that while I was sick my parents had more control over me. When I started to take that control back is when things got rocky for all of us. I was no longer this compliant, quiet, easy-going girl. I had opinions and a voice. I was trying to figure out who I was apart from my family, especially mom who had looked after me so closely. I was seen as defiant and anti-family. But I wasn't. I was simply pro-Sheri, pro-self-discovery and I was enjoying the process.

But there were bumps along the way. I was raped at 26 years of age. To this day I trust no landlord or superintendent. I spent time in a psychiatric ward a few times. In these spaces I learned that it is the nurses who can advocate for you. Be kind to them. They are the backbone of these wards. Something else I was introduced to was medication. A lot of people frown on medication but if I take it for seizures why would I not take it for depression and mental well being too? Some medications worked, some reacted badly and some work great! I'm on a decent dose of medication that keeps me pretty much stable along with regular counseling.

It's when I moved back closer to home and family that even more doors were opened to me. Through the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, I was given 12 sessions of counseling with a trauma therapist. It was through him that I got connected to the Canadian Mental Health Association Peterborough branch. After some interviews, forms filled out and so on, I was put on the waiting list for subsidized housing with CMHA.

I was not supposed to get housing for 2 to 3 years, but by some miracle I got into housing in one year, in 2006. Through the Peterborough branch of CMHA I have utilized the Trustee program, Case Management, Peer Supports, Safe Beds, the new HOPE Learning Centre and more. One area I really matured in was reaching out and making friends. I have made more legitimate friends since moving here than I think I have had all my life. These are true friends, good times, bad times, through the storms kind of friends.

Going through the recovery process is not easy, with emotions going from highs to lows. It can be lonely and tiresome. But it is so much more than worth it when you have the right support system in place. People you can trust and turn to when the world seems to crowd you out.



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Coping with memories, nightmares and flashbacks, I utilized the skills I learned in therapy and through various programs at the hospital and from CMHA. Things like deep breathing, journaling, mindful meditation, or I got involved in one of my hobbies – crocheting, painting, playing piano, etc. I was fortunate to have a counselor who worked with me for 7 years. He was, by far, the best person I'd ever had for a counselor in all my years of therapy. When his practice left the hospital, I was sad, but not totally surprised. He'd been there a long time.

I'm about to turn a new corner and I'm looking forward to seeing what it has in store. Look out future me, here I come! I'm expecting good things!

Moving On

I didn't think I was ready and prepared to write this portion of my story, but my counsellor just retired from his job. I was blessed and fortunate enough to know him for 7 years as my therapist. I never really have not had a counsellor so I'm in unfamiliar territory.

I find myself utilizing my hobbies a lot and using the apps for mental health I have on my phone. My hobbies are the type that keep both the hands and mind busy. Things like crocheting, painting, writing poetry, plastic canvas, journaling, collaging, and scrapbooking. And of course, playing piano. I still call 4 Counties Crisis when I need someone to talk to. I have friends and family I can most often turn to.

I'm still blessed with a psychiatrist and I'm sure if I need more counselling, it will be recommended. The CMHA Peterborough is still there with psw and subsidized housing. That and a whole host of on going programs for clients.

It is a huge loss for me to lose my counsellor, especially this one. But my world 🌍 is not going to stop spinning because I have lost his counsel. I'm going to take all he taught me and use it in my life, apply it to daily living and make my life as easily manageable as possible. I will use the skills and tools he instilled in me and I will be kind to Sheri just the same as I am kind to everyone else. Because everybody deserves to be treated with respect, kindness and love. You and I are no different.

Now turn to the person closest to you and tell them they deserve to be loved, and you're glad they are here. I am!