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## Eliminate Prejudice and Discrimination by Connecting, Educating, and Changing the Way We Think

### Internalized Oppression No More!

Consumers of the mental health system have long been subjected to discrimination, segregation, and subjugation. However, the enormity of the resulting oppression can only be seen once the effects of these conditions are visible from a wide geographical and situational perspective.

Oppression is defined as “being kept from opportunities that are available to others: the idea of unfairness—someone being limited in terms of rights or access; to weigh or wear down in mind or spirit; causing discomfort or distress” (Schmidt, 1994). Oppression is not a one-time act; it is the result of continued discrimination against a population of individuals. It is perpetuated by the internalization of the discriminating beliefs among the oppressed individuals.

For the individual, this can result in the belief that one’s dreams and goals are no longer obtainable and life becomes about existing rather than living. For many this also results in the belief that others need to take care of us and that we know longer know what is best for our lives; creating a dependency on the addictions and mental health system.

We have come to recognize that these barriers are a result of the widespread oppression, pervasive prejudice and bigotry toward persons labeled with having mental health conditions. We have also come to acknowledge that these barriers are not the direct result of having a mental health issue and are therefore, not addressed by traditional mental health service providers. Indeed, mental health professionals often reinforce such barriers.

A significant number of people have felt victimized by the very system that was created to assist and support them. The opportunity for people to critically examine the system and to see their mental health issues as only one piece of their lives rather than as a definition of themselves is essential to an individual’s journey of recovery.

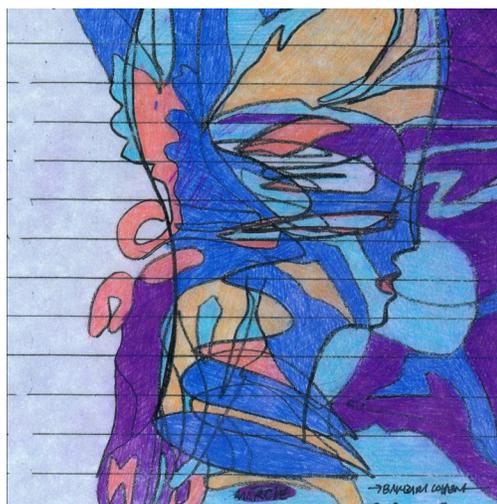


Image courtesy of  
**Spark of Brilliance**

## Myths about the Rainbow Community

By Keehan Koorn

One way that prejudice and discrimination are spread around is through myths. Myths about minorities can be accepted without much thought, whether they are about race, individuals with experience of the mental health and addiction system or sexual orientation. Myths hurt. Myths tell us as minorities that we are not understood and that people do not care to try to understand us.

Many of us assume that the people we meet are heterosexual and presenting as the gender that they were raised (cisgender). The Rainbow Community is made up of everyone who does not identify as cisgendered; whether they are homosexual, bisexual, asexual, transgender, genderqueer, etc. The Rainbow Community has faced much discrimination and is still widely misunderstood. I want to debunk some myths about sexual and gender minorities that have hurt me and people I love. It is important that what gets passed around is knowledge, not myths!

- **Same sex couples raise messed-up, confused kids.**

Some people are afraid of same sex parenting for various reasons. One belief is that a child needs one mother and one father. Think about it—if single moms and single dads can raise healthy, happy kids, why not two moms or two dads? Another belief is that same sex parents make their kids gay. Think about it—most LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans) people are raised by opposite sex parents, and that did not make them straight. The fact is that kids raised by same sex parents do as well on various measures of adjustment and development as the kids of opposite sex parents.

- **LGBT people are mentally ill.** Homosexuality was considered a mental illness in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* until 1973. What was eventually recognized is that same sex attraction is not a mental health disorder, but a natural variation in how people experience attraction. Gender dysphoria (feeling intense, persistent discomfort with your assigned gender) is still a mental health diagnosis, although it is a controversial one. Transgender people (who identify with a different gender than they were raised) who are comfortable with their bodies are not identified as experiencing gender dysphoria and therefore do not have any mental health labels.

Being a member of the Rainbow Community does not mean you experience a mental illness. However, those who identify as such are more likely to face mental health challenges, such as depression, anxiety, and are more likely than heterosexuals to make a suicide attempt. The takeaway message is this—people's attraction or body image does not make them mentally ill. However, if they have been bullied, harassed, discriminated against, or otherwise made miserable by intolerant people, then their mental health will suffer.

- **Bisexuals are just confused gay or lesbian people.** A lot of people believe that bisexuality is a stepping stone towards identifying as gay or lesbian. Bisexuals are often seen as “just trying it out” or “just confused” because that is the path for a few gay and lesbian people. However, bisexuality is not just a phase. It is a sexual orientation in its own right.



- **Gay people can choose to stop being gay.** I still hear the phrase “lifestyle choice” bandied about by people who do not understand the difference between attraction and behaviour. Certainly it is true that there is a “gay culture” and everyone, whether gay or straight, has the choice to engage in sexual activity, to be celibate, or to live some other way. Behaviour is the lifestyle choice. Who you are attracted to is not a choice—have you ever tried to change your attraction to someone? It is maddeningly out of our control.
- **Sexual behaviour determines sexual orientation.** I have heard people say, “If I participated in sexual activity with someone of the same sex, does that make me gay?” Believe it or not, sexual orientation is NOT determined by who you are intimate with, it is about who you are attracted to. Some straight people engage in same sex activities. Some gay men and lesbians have been married to the members of the opposite sex and have had long-term relationships while still considering themselves homosexual. Your sexual orientation can ONLY be determined by YOU—how you feel, and how you want to be known by society.

(Sources:

American Psychology Association. 2011. “Answers to Your Questions About Transgender People, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression.” <http://www.apa.org/topics/sexuality/transgender.pdf>

American Psychology Association. “Answers to Your Questions For a Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality.” <http://www.apa.org/topics/sexuality/sorientation.pdf>)

## Spring Cleaning: Not Just for Your Home

### By Kayleigh Hilborn

Spring; a new season and a time for new beginnings. When we think of spring cleaning, we tend to think about cleaning out our closets and reorganizing our homes. However, spring cleaning is not just for our physical environments, though it can be a great place to start.

#### House and Home

If there is clutter in our lives, in our cars, homes or work spaces, there is likely clutter in our minds and bodies as well. Taking control of the physical clutter can help better manage and decrease our internal clutter.

Take a look around your home and the spaces that you live in. Consider the following:

- Where do I spend most of my time?
- How do I feel in this room/space?
- Do I feel comfortable, am I able to relax? Do I feel inspired, motivated? Do I feel clear minded and able to function?
- Does the room/space serve its intended purpose?
- Is there too much clutter (visible or hidden in closets and drawers)?
- What is the most bothersome thing about the room?



#### Health

What we put into our bodies directly affects our overall wellbeing. If we are eating a bunch of junk food (fast food, processed items, etc.) we are likely to feel tired, irritated and lack the energy to feel motivated. When we do not take care of our physical health, we may experience more aches and pains, coughs and colds, as well as prolonged pain and suffering.

*Continued on page 7*

## ASK REEVES

### By Paul Reeve

Last year while helping an individual, I was quite surprised to find prejudice at work in a governing professional body.

The person was working as a professional and took some time off to deal with a period of depression.

On their return to work they were reported to the authority that oversees the profession. The authority said they were required to be examined by their designated psychiatrist and would be required to follow any treatments prescribed.

By way of background, the person had been performing their work duties very well for more than 10 years, and had also been managing and supervising staff. There had been no disciplinary actions taken against them at any time and their employer was most pleased with their work performance.

The person contacted me and I asked if this was a standard procedure with staff that was off work for any medical conditions. As the answer was no, I stated the action being suggested was discriminatory based on a disability under the Ontario Human Rights Code.

I recommended contacting the Human Rights Commission.

The Commission agreed with the person and initiated an investigation.

The professional body fought this at a hearing and lost.

The Human Rights Commission determined that a person cannot be required to subject themselves to any medical intervention. Further, this set precedence for all future situations so that no colleagues would ever be subjected to this discriminatory practice.

My initial surprise was based on the expectation that the staff in the professional body were well educated and should have had a better understanding of this issue. It showed me that prejudices can run deep and people can be easily blinded by their own beliefs.

If something does not seem right, trust your intuition and fight for your rights.

If you have advocacy questions or you would like to submit to "Ask Reeves" contact Paul Reeve, Advocacy Coordinator, directly at 519.763.4014 x 202, toll free 1.888.255.2642 x 202. If you do not see your questions in print, please note Paul responds to all questions on an individual basis.

## Lessons in Change: A Marketing Perspective

By Mikayla Goving

For many of us, making changes in our lives can be very challenging. Everything from moving to a new home, to living a healthier lifestyle takes a lot of time and effort. For many of us, making changes within ourselves, such as reducing negative thinking patterns, is even more challenging. When we want to then start championing change in our communities or the society at large, that challenge can become even more overwhelming and lead many to back away from trying. So where do you start?

Lessons from the world of marketing can help with the mission of social or community change. The purpose of advertising a service or product is to change how people talk, perceive or react to whatever it is you are telling them about (Godin, 2013). For example, let us take a look at a company trying to sell a new type of shampoo. In order to be successful, they want their ads to encourage potential buyers to ask their friends “Have you tried that new shampoo?” and then maybe even try a sample, even if they have been using the same shampoo for years.

In order to make social change, it is also the goal to change how people talk, perceive or react to the issue at hand. Gandhi’s constructive programs for nonviolent approaches to social change use elements similar to what we see in marketing—interactive ways of communicating open us up to changes in how people talk about the issue, which can then lead to changed perceptions. In addition, developing neighbourhood associations and promoting harmony between different groups in the community can improve the ways we react to each other’s differences (Martin, 2006).

As noted in Gandhi’s work, change is often most effective on smaller, neighbourhood scales. The same goes for marketing. When running mass media campaigns, the challenge is in ensuring that almost everyone is exposed to the advertisement. However, with today’s changes in technology and media, reaching everyone is nearly impossible, leading marketing

professionals to target specific audiences (Godin, 2013). Therefore, the person selling the shampoo would need to decide who is likely to use their shampoo and advertise accordingly.

In order to translate these lessons into our desires to reduce issues of discrimination and prejudice in our lives, we need to think about who in our communities do we want to change? Is there a particular individual, organization, position of power, or set of people with shared world views you wish to see change in? Once you have decided who you would like to focus your efforts on, there are a number of questions it is important to be clear about:

- What do they already believe?
- What are they afraid of?
- What do they think they want?
- What does it seem like they actually want?
- What stories have resonated with them in the past?
- Who do they trust and pay attention to?
- What is the source of their urgency—why will they change *now* instead of later? (Godin, 2013).

Once you are able to answer these questions, you are then able to tackle the issues and hopefully make a difference. Knowing and understanding your audience and where they are coming from is just as important as having all of the information that promotes your cause. Change can be difficult and slow, but if you are able to focus your efforts, success may be closer than you think.

(Sources:

Godin, Seth. (2013). “You can’t change everything or everyone, but you can change the people who matter.” [http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths\\_blog/2013/02/marketing-is-about-change.html](http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2013/02/marketing-is-about-change.html)

Martin, Brian. (2006) “Paths to social change: conventional politics, violence and nonviolence.” Eolss Publishers, Oxford, UK. <http://www.bmartin.cc/pubs/06eolss.html>)

### Please Don’t Box Me In

By Keehan Koorn

I am more than the sum of my labels.  
How dare you judge me by things that I’m called.  
I always do the best that I’m able.  
Attempting to box me in leaves me appalled.  
I have GAD\*. Does that mean I can’t sing?  
I’m bisexual, I can’t wed, wear a ring?  
I have purple hair, so you say I’m not hired?  
I don’t believe, so I can’t be inspired?  
I’ll do all these things with or without your blessing  
But your labels are binding and really distressing.

\*Generalized Anxiety Disorder

### Free Yourself

By David D.

Can’t you see  
You are under lock and key  
It’s all the rage  
To put your mind in a cage  
Don’t demand, let your mind expand  
Don’t emulate, let your mind create  
Just Free Yourself

## Internalized Oppression No More!

Continued from page 1

The Cycle of Oppression has the following components (Schmidt, 1994):

### Stereotype

- A preconceived generalization about an entire group without regard to their individual differences.

### Prejudice

- A conscious or unconscious negative belief about a group of people and the individual members that comprise it.

### Discrimination

- Prejudice plus power—acts perpetuated against one less powerful group by a more powerful social group.

### Oppression

- Systematic subjugation of a group of people by another group of people with access to social power—maintained by social beliefs and practices.

### Internalized Oppression

- Target group “buys into” the stereotypes that are taught about themselves, tending to act them out, thus perpetuating the stereotypes, thereby reinforcing the prejudice.

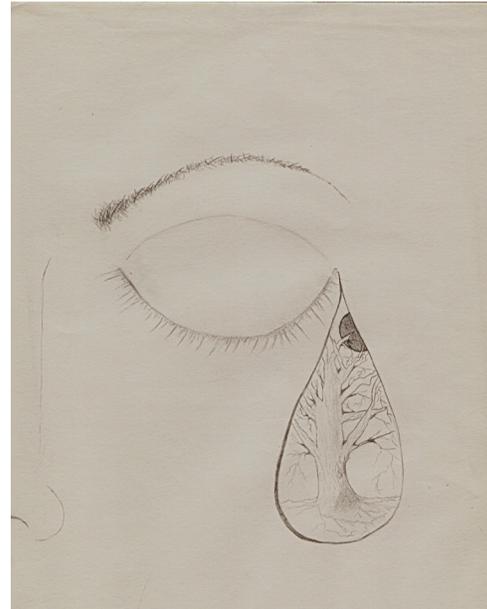
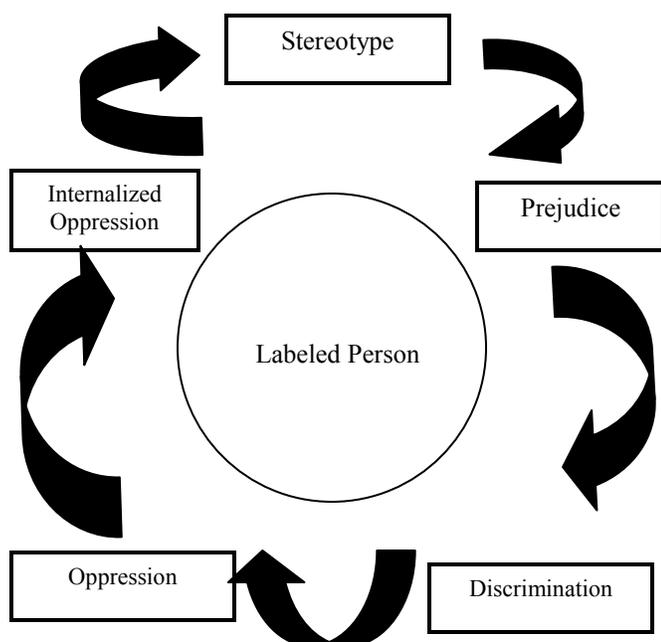


Image courtesy of **Spark of Brilliance**

Internalized oppression is not the cause of mistreatment. It would not exist without the real external oppression that forms the social climate in which we exist. Once oppression has been internalized by a person, little force is needed to keep them in a submissive state. In the attempt to reframe the context of a mental illness diagnosis and internalized oppression, it becomes important for consumers of addictions and mental health systems to explore the realities of recovery.

It is so important for individuals to become aware that hindrances in their lives are not necessarily a direct result of their mental health issues. It is important for us to begin to see that we are the experts of our own health care needs and that we have a right to be in the driver’s seat for our own journey. Only once we understand internalized oppression and its negative hold on us can we break the cycle within our lives and fully embrace our hopes and dreams...our recovery journey.



(Sources:  
 Deegan, Patricia (2004). “Presentation of Patricia Deegan – Holiday Inn, Cambridge, Ontario” <http://www.patdeegan.com>  
 National Empowerment Centre (2006). <http://www.power2u.org/>  
 Ochocka, Nelson, Rich Janzen, and John Trainor. (2006) “A Longitudinal Study of Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Initiatives: Part 3-A Qualitative Study of Impacts of Participation on New Members.” *Journal of Community Psychology*. 34 : 273-83.  
 Schmidt, Sheri. (2006). “Cycle of Oppression.” <http://allies.tamu.edu/Did%20You%20Know/cycle.htm>)

## Reaching Out - Tools for Recovery

### Changing Negative Thinking

We all have the potential to be affected by negative thoughts and biases. These thoughts can be directed outwardly to a particular group or person we have had bad experiences with, or inwardly at our own challenges or traits perceived as less than ideal. It can take time and effort to break bad mental



habits. However, with some helpful strategies and persistence, you may find that your glass is half full.

**Rephrase “all-or-nothing” thinking.** This type of thinking leads us to see our circumstances or the world around us as black or white, leaving little room for anything in between. Life is often lived in the gray, so being able to think in the middle may help us find options we otherwise would not have realized.

“All-or-nothing” thinking involves viewing things in absolute terms, such as *perfect, terrible, always, never, impossible*. What is something you have thought about as an absolute, and how might you rephrase that thought?

Example: “I don’t like where I live now, but if I make friends with my neighbours I might like it better” instead of “I will never like living here.”

**Avoid overgeneralizations.** When we over generalize, we believe that if one bad thing happens, then everything else will be bad as well. This can affect both views of our life as well as our beliefs about other people. From an internal perspective, examples of overgeneralizations are “He never listens to me” or “Everyone thinks I am a failure.” In addition, we may have had a negative experience with an individual from a particular cultural group, and so we start to believe that everyone in that group will be the same.

Words that most often relate to over generalized thinking include *always, never, should* or *everybody*. It can be beneficial to avoid these words and rethink our situation. Are there overgeneralizations that effect your thinking? How might you change that thought?

Example: “Some Canadians play hockey” instead of “All Canadians play hockey.” “You never listen to me” can be reframed as “In the past, I have sometimes felt that you were not being attentive to what I had to say.”

**Being Happy vs. Being Right.** Many of us can be very stubborn about certain topics. We defend our views with negativity and conflict instead of considering another’s point of view. Sometimes, in order to be happier, we just need to let go and open our mind.

**Avoid jumping to conclusions.** It can be easy to get carried away with what we expect is going to happen. Instead, take a minute to centre yourself before making up your mind. Ask yourself “What is the rest of the story?” There may be something you are missing.

**Change your mental filter.** Unfortunately, it seems there will always be negative people and circumstances in the world no matter how positive we try to be. If you let your guard down, pessimistic thoughts can become habit and shape the way you view the world.

By being more attentive to the positive thoughts, people and circumstances, we can begin to change our mental filter. A long bus ride is a great time to finish reading a book, and a burnt roast might be a fun chance to try out a new restaurant you have been eyeing.

**Stay away from *should*.** Using *should* is one way of negatively critiquing ourselves. “I *should* be making more money; I *should* be a better friend; I *should* be in a better place.”

When you should on yourself, you are saying you or where you are in your life is not good enough. We can be meeting our needs and still desire to earn more money; we can be a good friend without being a perfect friend; and we can enjoy where we are while still striving to bring better things into our lives.

**Avoid taking things personally.** Not everything is about you, and not everything is about me. Sometimes this is easier to say than to believe. When someone’s actions towards you are less than ideal, it is important to remember that you may not know where they are coming from. Sometimes people are dealing with their own challenges, causing them to come across as insensitive, or judgmental.

**Celebrate!** Bad days and obstacles are inevitable. When good things do happen (and they will), take the time to embrace and enjoy those moments. Even the seemingly small joys in life can become the brightest lights.

“Like attracts like. Positive thoughts and happiness create more of the same” (Blackwell, 2008).

(Source:

Blackwell, Alex. (2008). “10 steps for transforming negative thoughts into positive beliefs”. <http://www.thebridgemaker.com/10-steps-for-transforming-negative-thoughts-into-positive-beliefs/>)

Send along your comments about a recovery tool that assisted you on your recovery journey, or a recovery related question to:

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Or Email: [editor@self-help.ca](mailto:editor@self-help.ca)

# Spring Cleaning: Not Just for Your Home

By Kayleigh Hilborn

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To start spring cleaning your health, you could try a few of the following:

- Cut back on junk foods (sweets, fast food, processed foods, etc).
- Increase your water intake.
- Cut back on caffeine and alcohol.
- Increase fresh fruit and vegetable intake.
- Be aware of what you are eating and how you feel after you eat it (a food log or journal may help).
- Add physical activity into your daily life—Health Canada recommends 60 minutes of physical activity each day (2011).

### Relationships

Unhealthy relationships leave us feeling drained. They affect our physical and emotional wellbeing; they can cause stress, headaches, tense muscles, sadness, and more. For many, this is likely the most difficult area to work on. People are in our lives because we care about them or have an obligation towards them. It is difficult to examine these relationships and recognize the ones that are unhealthy. Take some time, be honest with yourself and take a look at the relationships in your life. We cannot expect people in our lives to change, but we have a responsibility to ourselves to be mindful of the people we surround ourselves with and the roles that they play in our lives.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I feel respected?
- Do I feel safe?
- Do I feel that this is a mutually beneficial relationship?
- Am I able to express my emotions?
- Am I able to spend time with other people?
- Are my boundaries respected?
- Are my needs being met?

Take some time to reflect on your answers. If you answered no to any of the questions, what can you do to change the answer to yes?

### Work Life

Our work lives affect our personal lives. We may feel stressed, tired or overwhelmed by work and may carry that home. This can lead to tension with loved ones, issues sleeping and decreased self esteem.

Take some time to identify some of the challenges you may be dealing with in your work life.

- Do I question my career choices?
- Do I feel a need to chase my passions, to contribute more?
- Am I dealing with any conflicts at work?
- Do I struggle with what to do next?
- Do I feel fulfilled?
- Am I using my skills and abilities?
- Do I feel out of balance?
- Is my work consuming my life?

Clarifying the challenges in your work life is a great first step to your spring cleaning. It can also be beneficial to list the things that you can control versus the things that you cannot in order to avoid unnecessary stress.

Spring is a time for fresh starts and renewal. Take some time this spring to clean up your life and further progress along your path of recovery.

(Sources:

Bailey, Victoria Joanna. (2001). "Spring Clean Your Life." Best Health Magazine. <http://www.besthealthmag.ca/embrace-life/life-and-work/spring-clean-your-life>

Health Canada. (2011) "Be Active." <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/maintain-adopt/weights-poids-eng.php>)

## Words for Eliminating Discrimination and Prejudice

Z	D	I	S	D	I	V	E	R	S	I	T	Y	J	N	E	C	C	N	E
A	I	T	R	O	P	A	E	N	E	S	R	N	H	M	W	O	Q	R	Y
D	I	S	C	O	V	E	R	Y	T	H	U	T	B	L	E	U	H	I	E
I	E	U	Q	D	S	T	R	E	N	G	T	H	I	R	N	R	J	G	A
T	G	F	W	Y	G	B	C	Q	T	H	H	S	O	S	K	A	L	H	R
T	N	S	D	R	S	S	E	N	N	E	P	O	D	P	L	G	T	T	I
N	I	N	D	I	V	I	D	U	A	L	I	T	Y	T	E	E	P	S	T
G	B	A	F	H	A	C	C	E	P	T	A	N	C	E	R	Z	E	A	G

- Acceptance
- Courage
- Discovery
- Diversity
- Hope
- Individuality
- Openness
- Rights
- Strength
- Truth

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The views expressed are those of the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Self Help Alliance.

## For Your Inspiration

### Journal Writing

Write about a time you witnessed discrimination, and reflect on your reaction to it.

Write about a time you were left out because of who you are.

Has there been a time in your life where your first impression of someone was wrong? What did you learn from that experience?



Zora Neale Hurston from *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters* (2007)

I know there is strength in the differences between us. I know there is comfort where we overlap.  
~ Ani DiFranco

Judgements prevent us from seeing the good that lies beyond appearances.  
~Wayne W. Dyer

Until they feel what we feel, they will never fully understand the own hell they caused.  
~ Shannon A. Thompson

Sometimes, I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me. How can anyone deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It's beyond me.  
~ Zora Neale Hurston

I arrived in Hollywood without having my nose fixed, my teeth capped, or my name changed.  
That is very gratifying to me.  
~ Barbra Streisand

The moment a little boy is concerned with which is a jay and which is a sparrow, he can no longer see the birds or hear them sing.  
~ Eric Berne

Prejudices are the chains forged by ignorance to keep men apart.  
~Countess of Blessington, Marguerite Gardiner

## Write to the Editor

### We Want to Hear From You!

Send along your articles, images, letters to the editor, comments or views about topics in this newsletter or other topics related to the mental health system. Please note that any items submitted may be edited for space and other needs of the "Changing Lives Newsletter."

Please send your items to:  
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