

Stories of Hope and Recovery

by Gia P. Koerner

I was born in Paris and raised in Italy in a very loving and caring family. I moved to the United States at the age of twenty-nine after my last visit to my illustrious Italian psychiatrist, who announced to me that I was going to be dead by the age of thirty! I still remember that night. I went home and told my dad, "I will be dead by thirty!" By that time life had been so bad that dying by thirty seemed to be a relief!

I graduated from college at the age of twenty-one and started working for my family business. I adored my father. He has always been such an inspiration to me, and working for him was all I had ever dreamed. I had it all planned: I would have this incredible career, continue the family business, get married and have two wonderful children.

Well, life doesn't always work out the way I had it planned. My father fired me. I never got the career. The man to whom I was briefly married committed suicide and I have never had children. Life has not been easy or without pain for my family, or me – that is why I decided to tell my story. In sharing it, my hope is that it will

help someone else avoid the path of destruction I chose.

My first episode of mania occurred at the age of twenty-three, and it was stress induced. I started to work too many hours and could not cope with the high demands of my job. During my first episode I lost touch with reality. My family got really scared. I started abusing alcohol and prescription medications. They helped me control the mania. At least that is what I thought!



Gia Koerner

This is when I met my illustrious Italian psychiatrist. He sat me down with my parents and told me I was mentally ill, there was no cure, I would have to be on medication for the rest of my life, and the illness was called manic-depression, now called bipolar disorder. I told him he was wrong and that I would prove him so!

In Italy, mental illness is not a popular subject. If you suffer from any kind of "emotional disturbance," (that is what we used to call it) you were considered weak and an outcast. There was no place to go for help. We would all hide in our houses, heavily sedated – that

was the cure. Shame, guilt and hopelessness are the common denominators if you suffer from a mental illness in Italy.

Although I did not accept the diagnosis, I was willing to try the medication for short periods of time. The side effects were always hard to deal with. I would feel better so I would stop! Plus, I was not mentally ill! Alcohol and tranquilizers seemed to be the best medication.

After the mania came the first big depressive episode. In those days my depressions were severe; I would stay home for months and never leave. This behavior devastated my family. They had no place to go, no one to talk to. My parents had lost a daughter and my younger sister had lost her big sister, her best friend. There was no NAMI or

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A message from the Executive Director

Launching NAMI's first member/donor newsletter this past October, *NAMI Voice*, was exciting for all of us. We truly have appreciated the feedback from you on our first issue. Your enthusiastic response and suggestions are very important to us.

As I look back over my career, few things have given me as much satisfaction as working with NAMI members to make a difference in the lives of persons with mental illness. It remains a great privilege for me to work with you to transform the mental health systems in America to



make recovery possible for all. We have much more to do.

During the last 25 years, I have seen tremendous strides in the scientific research on the genetic and biochemical causes of mental illness and how this knowledge can be applied in your community and mine. But I am also very alarmed that, despite this new research and evidence, most

adults and children are still denied access to the help that they need. An enormous gap remains between what we know about mental illnesses, and what

we as a country are doing to treat them. This is simply not acceptable.

The start of the new year is a time to renew our energy for the important challenges ahead. This newsletter offers stories of hope, recovery and action – stories of our collective and individual responses to those challenges. Thank you for all you have done and all that you will continue to do.

Mike Fitzpatrick

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Calendar of Events

Dates	Events
February 4-6	Leadership Institute, Washington, DC
February 25-27	Peer-to-Peer Statewide Training, Salina, KS
March 11	Unmasking the Mystery of Mental Illness Celebration, New Orleans, LA
March 22	NAMI Board of Directors nominations deadline
March 31	Convention super saver discount rate deadline
April 14-17	NAMI Support Group Facilitator Skills Training, St. Louis, MO NAMI CARE Training, St. Louis, MO IOOV Training, St. Louis, MO Family-to-Family Training of Trainers (English and Spanish), St. Louis, MO
June 18-21	NAMI's Annual Convention, Austin, TX

NAMIWalks for the Mind of America

Welcome 2005 and the third year of NAMI's signature walkathon event, NAMIWalks for the Mind of America! NAMI's national/state/local collaborative event started with twelve walks in 2003, held thirty-six walks in 2004 and there are over fifty walks coast-to-coast scheduled for 2005. These events will host tens of thousands of people all walking to break down stigma, to build awareness, and to raise funds for NAMI at all three levels. We walk so that we can



Mr. Brain, the clown

continue our mission to support, educate and advocate for all those whose lives are touched by mental illness.

NAMI Collier County, Florida is

entering their third year in the Walk program. The proceeds

from the Walk have enabled this NAMI affiliate to take over the direction of a local consumer-run drop-in

center in Naples and to enlarge and expand its services. The center is completely consumer-run and employs eight people. NAMI Collier County was able to buy a van, set up a kitchen to provide hot meals, and start a food giveaway pantry. The center has a reading room, a pool table, computers, and a television room. One woman called to say that the drop in center is "the best thing that ever happened to Naples", and "the saving grace for her son."

NAMIWalks made it all possible!

Get involved in a NAMIWalk in your area today, visit www.NAMI.org/NAMIWalks to find the NAMIWalk nearest you.



Team NAMI Rocks, on the move

Phoenix, Arizona	April 16
Collier County, FL	April 16
San Diego, CA.....	April 16
Knoxville, TN	April 23
Waukesha, WI	April 29
Memphis, TN	April 30
Maryland.....	May 1
Dallas, TX	May 7
Wilmington, DE.....	May 7
Franklin County, OH	May 7
Johnson County, IA	May 7
Topeka, KS	May 7
Portland, ME.....	May 7
Fresno, CA	May 14
Anchorage, AK	May 14
Greater Orlando, FL.....	May 14
Greenville, SC	May 14
Hamilton County, OH	May 14
Boston, MA	May 14
Jackson, MS	May 14
Albuquerque, NM	May 14
Scott County, IA	May 14
Queens-Nassau County, NY	May 15
Sioux Falls, SD.....	May 21
San Francisco, CA	May 21
Hartford, CT	May 21
Detroit, MI.....	May 21
Harrisburg, PA	May 21
Seattle, WA	May 21
St. Charles, LA.....	May 21
Nashville, TN	May 21
Charleston, WV	May 21
Portland, OR	May 22
Ventura County, CA	May 22
St. Louis, MO	May 28

NAMI Annual Convention, June 2005

NAMI on the Frontier of Recovery: Transforming the Mental Health System in America

NAMI travels to the Lone Star State for the 2005 Annual Convention to explore and celebrate the frontiers of recovery. New developments in research and treatment are making it possible for people with serious mental illnesses to live lives that were unimaginable just a few years ago. Effective advocacy on the local, state, and national levels — in such areas as housing, education, and criminal justice — is ensuring that social supports are in place for people with mental illnesses

to lead satisfying and productive lives as fully equal members of our society.

Much work needs to be done to transform the mental health system in America. But it is unmistakable that, at long last, things are beginning to change. At our 2005 Annual Convention, we'll both celebrate the strides we have made and map out our strategy to continue moving forward.

"NAMI Texas leaders are excited to host this year's convention in the capitol of our Lone Star State." said Joe

Lovelace, Executive Director, NAMI Texas. "Austin is a great town, known for its casual and playful nature sure to offer famous Texas hospitality to NAMI members and friends this summer."

Join us in Austin, Texas, June 18-21, for an experience you'll never forget. For more information on the NAMI convention — including program updates, hotel and travel options, and a registration form — please visit our Web site at www.nami.org/convention.

Leadership Alliance Corner

Congratulations to new members of NAMI's Leadership Alliance, a group of special NAMI friends who contribute an annual gift of \$500 or more. The Leadership Alliance provides several benefits, including an invitation to a special celebratory event at the NAMI annual convention.

Last year's event for the Leadership Alliance was a gala celebration of NAMI's 25th Anniversary at an exciting by-invitation-only dinner held during the 2004 annual convention in Washington, DC. These special friends of NAMI were honored at a lovely dinner

at the Sequoia Restaurant overlooking the Potomac River, followed by a nighttime driving tour of the national monuments.

The guest speaker, Ken Duckworth, M.D., NAMI's medical director, informed guests about current trends in mental illness research. Distinctive awards were presented to NAMI friends in attendance who had given \$25,000 or more to NAMI during our first quarter century.

We asked several donors what motivated their generous support. One donor's response was heartening since this is the perspective we encourage. Mike and Janet Susin, long time Leadership Alliance supporters,



Speaker, Ken Duckworth, M.D.

explained, "Mike and I believe in this cause and know personally the difference NAMI's work has made in the life of our family. We give at all three levels, national, state and local; because each

level of our organization has a unique and important role, every level needs to be supported." Thanks Janet, we couldn't have said it better.

A similar event will be held during our annual convention to be held in Austin, Texas in June 2005. To learn more about NAMI's Leadership Alliance giving club, or how to become a member, please call Linda Radcliffe at 1-800-950-6264, ext. 7970.

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other organization that offered help to families like ours.

The depression was so devastating I decided that death was the only solution. I overdosed and woke up a week later in the ICU – I had been in a coma! I could not believe I was still alive. I really thought I was dead.

I went on for years with highs and lows. The highs were as devastating as the lows. My denial would just grow stronger. I did not want to be a "crazy person," a "mentally ill" person. I was ignorant. I had no idea what mental illness was since I had no access to educational material, help, or support.

By the time I was twenty-seven, I had had two other manic episodes. The later one was the worst. The mania, alcohol, and pills landed me straight into the hospital, my first stay in a psychiatric unit. It took a week of heavy sedation to come down from the mania. At that point I had reached my

bottom and promised I would never use alcohol and pills together anymore. But I still did not want to give in to being mentally ill. Someone suggested I had a drinking problem and I should consider AA. I told her, "You are crazy, I am not an alcoholic!" I never drank when I was depressed, therefore I could not be an alcoholic! Today, I am in my fourth year of sobriety.

Once again after the mania came the depression. It was a catatonic depression. By then I had given up on life and found myself waking up from a second coma. I could not even kill myself properly. This time I was shipped to a state psychiatric hospital and I promise you there is nothing worse than an Italian state psychiatric hospital. They would come to my room once a day, talk to me for five minutes, and prescribe medication.

At the age of twenty-nine I moved to the States where I finally thought I was going to get some help or die. I was diag-

nosed with "chronic depression". I have not had a manic episode after the last one at twenty-seven but my depression has been recurrent. It gets a hold of me 3 or 4 times a year and they are hard times. With the passing of the years I have learned to live with the depression, managing it and trying to fight it with all my strength, although some days the best I can do is just brush my teeth!

Through the last decade I continued to play with my anti-depressants. I still believed in taking them only when I was depressed and still did not want to give in to the reality that I had a mental illness of any kind. I continued to use alcohol to medicate. In all these years of denial, I have not been able to keep a job and if it hadn't been for my family's help, I would be homeless and most probably dead.

After years of alcohol abuse, I finally went to AA four years ago and got the help I needed to stop

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NAMI Anniversary Events Raise Fun, Friends & Funds

NAMI Online Auction

Friends and businesses donated over 500 items and over 8,200 visitors shopped at the NAMI OnLine auction held during Mental Illness Awareness Week in October 2004. The auction, a 25th Anniversary event and a first for NAMI, enabled leaders and supporters from across the country to engage in fun competition while supporting NAMI. Shopping was done online in 'real time' through a virtual catalogue of items and lasted for 10-days.

"The auction was a blast," reported a winning bidder from Florida. "I like to travel, and I won several trips that I will take this year, all the while supporting NAMI and the work the organization embraces."

Clint Black Concert – On January 13, 2005, Grammy award-winning country music superstar Clint Black performed with opening act Little Big Town at the historic Ryman Auditorium



Clint Black

to a crowd of over 1,700. The audience of legislators, friends, fans, and supporters was wowed with an entertaining evening of singing and comedy that

raised funds and awareness in support of the NAMI mission.

"NAMI stands for dignity, support, and recovery and I stand with them," stated Black. "As a long-time NAMI

supporter, I was proud to be part of such a spectacular evening and to serve on the event committee," said Debbie Cagle of Nashville. "The music, company and dialogue combined for the most fun I have had out in a long time."

These events have raised tremendous awareness and funds in support of NAMI's 25th Anniversary. Next on the calendar is *Unmasking the Mystery of Mental Illness*, an intimate evening event, hosted by Mr. and Mrs. Walter C. Flower III and a committee of twenty-two patrons at the Botanical Gardens in New Orleans, Louisiana. For information on hosting or participating in a NAMI Anniversary Event, please contact Katrina Gay at kgay@nami.org or at 703-524-7600.

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drinking. Although my life got better, the depression was still there. Two years ago, I could no longer deal with the pain of living with the mood swings, the ups and downs, and, mostly, the black hole of depression. I saw a therapist who referred me to a psychiatrist. After a long consultation he diagnosed me as bipolar! At thirty-nine years old, I **finally** welcomed the diagnosis and the medication, I thought I would just take the meds and I will be fine.

As I have discovered, you are never fine once you are bipolar. My medications have stopped working more than once, and I have plummeted into these terrible depressions. No matter how hard I follow the doctors' orders, there are going to be

setbacks. The important thing is to learn how to survive them. I now lead a very serene and healthy life. Stress is my biggest trigger so I try not to get tired and stay on a steady routine.

I had heard a lot about NAMI and loved the NAMI website. When I decided to go to the NAMI convention in DC last September, I thought I had died and gone to heaven. All my life I had lived in guilt and shame because of my mental illness. I had denied it for twenty years and allowed it to ruin my life. I was finally in a place where I could claim my life back and where it was ok to be me. No one was going to judge me and look at me as anything less. For once in my life, I felt as a whole person and I was not afraid.

My experience with NAMI has empowered my life. It has taught me that I am not alone and there is help and hope. Since the convention I have learned to share with people that I have bipolar disorder. I do not hide anymore. Through my opening up I have made myself available to help other people that are affected by this disorder. I believe having someone to talk to who shares your same illness is one of the strongest healing tools.

I will end this story of my life here but my recovery is just at the beginning. I will not stop fighting this illness. I know there is still a long road for me to walk and that the road will be steep at times, but the secret is to never give up.

Double or Triple your gift to NAMI!

Many employers sponsor **Matching Gift Programs** and will match charitable contributions made by their employees. If your company has a **Matching Gift Program**, please request the appropriate form from your employer and include it when you make a gift to NAMI. Look for your employer on the list of over 300 companies below. Matching gift programs

can often double or triple your gift. Even if you gave a gift or renewed your membership in the last several months, you can still have your gift matched – just send us the form from your employer. Matching Gifts can also help you become a Leadership Alliance member (see Leadership Alliance Corner). For example, if you give a gift of \$250 to NAMI, and your

company matches with \$250 on your behalf, the total of \$500 will qualify you to become a Leadership Alliance member.

The following list is a partial list of companies that will match your membership and charitable gifts to NAMI. If your company is not listed here, please double check with your employer to see if your company matches charitable gifts.

Adams Harkness & Hill, Inc.	Computer Network Technology Corp.	W.W. Grainger, Inc.	Management	Progress Energy
ADC Telecommunications	CONRAIL, Inc.	Grantham, Mayo, Van Otterloo & Co., LLC	Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Co.	Provident Cos., Inc.
Adobe System, Inc.	Cooper Industries	Graphics Controls Corp.	MasterCard International, Inc.	Providian Financial
Advanced Mirco Devices, Inc.	Corporate Software	Greenleaf Enterprises, LLC	Mazda (North America), Inc.	Prudential Financial
Aetna, Inc.	CPI Corp.	GreenPoint Bank	McDonald's Corp.	Quaker Chemical Corp.
Albemarle Corp.	Cranston Print Works Co.	Grzenzbach, Giler & Associates, Inc.	McKnight Foundation	Quest Diagnostics, Inc.
Alexander Haas Martin & Partners	CSC Index	Grinnell Mutual Reinsurance Co.	Medical Consultants Network, Inc.	RBC Dain Rauscher, Inc.
Allegro MicroSystems, Inc.	CSG Systems, Inc.	Haemonetics Copr.	Mentor Graphics	Reader's Digest Association, Inc.
Alliance Capital Management, LP	Cyprus Amax Minerals Co. D & B	Hambrecht & Quist, LLC	Merit Oil Corp.	RealNetworks, Inc.
Alliant Techsystems	Danforth Foundation	M.A. Hanna Co.	Merrill Lynch & Co., Inc.	Reebok International, Ltd.
Altria Group, Inc.	Data Services Direct	Harris Corp.	Metso Automation	Reliable Life Insurance Co.
American Express Co.	David and Lucille Packard Foundation	Hawaiian Electric Industries, Inc.	Microsoft Corp.	Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
American International Group, Inc.	David L. Babson and Co., Inc.	Heller Financial, Inc.	Millipore Corp.	Rockefeller Family & Associates
American Stock Exchange	Demont & Associates, Inc.	Henry Luce Foundation	Minerals Technologies, Inc.	Rockefeller Group
Amgen, Inc.	Deutsche Bank Americas	Hillman Co.	Mitsubishi Electric and Electronics U.S.	RONIN Development Corp.
AmSouth BanCorp. Foundation	Dictaphone Corp.	Holyoke Mutual Insurance Co.	Mitsubishi International Corp.	SAFECO Corp.
AMSTED Industries, Inc.	Dominion	Household International, Inc.	Monsanto Co.	St. Paul Cos.
Analog Devices, Inc.	Dominion Foundation	Illinois Took Woods, Inc.	MONY Life Insurance Co.	Saint-Gobain Corp.
Andersons, Inc.	Doris Duke Charitable Foundation	Independence Investment Associates, Inc.	Morgan Stanley	Sallie Mae
Aon Corp.	Duracell International, Inc.	Information Technology Systems	Morrison & Foerster, LLP	Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, Inc.
Archer Daniels Midland	Eastern Bank	InfoSpace	Charles Stewart Mott Foundation	Sedgwick, Inc.
Aspect Telecommunications	Eastern Enterprises	International Business Machines Corp.	MTS Systems Corp.	Shaklee Corp.
Astoria Federal Savings	Eastern Mountain Sports	J.P. Morgan Chase & Co.	Murphy Oil Corp.	Sheldahl, Inc.
Atlantic Data Services, Inc.	Eaton Vance Management	Jeffries Group, Inc.	Mutual of America	Sherwin-Williams Co.
Autodesk, Inc.	EducationQuest Foundation, Inc.	Jefferson Pilot Financial	NACCO Industries, Inc.	Sifco Industries, Inc.
Avon Products, Inc.	Endo Pharmaceutical	John Hancock Funds	National Grid Cos.	SPX Corp.
AXA Financial	Energen Corp.	John Hancock Life Insurance	National Semiconductor Corp.	Staley, Robeson, Ryan, St. Lawrence, Inc.
Baker Hughes, Inc.	ERE Yarmouth	Johnson & Johnson Family of Companies	Network Associates	State Street Corp.
Bank of America Corp.	ExxonMobil	Juniper Networks	New Century Energies	STREM Chemicals
Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi, Ltd.	Factory Mutual Insurance Co.	Keefe, Bruyette & Woods, Inc.	New England Business Service, Inc.	Subaru of America, Inc.
C.R. Bard, Inc.	Fannie Mae	W.K. Kellogg Foundation	Newmont Mining Corp.	Sun Microsystems, Inc.
Barnes Group, Inc.	Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp.	Kennedy Associates Real Estate Counsel, Inc.	Nicor Gas	Susquehanna Investment Group
Bay Networks	Federated Home Loan Mortgage Corp.	KeyCorp	NIKE Corp.	Swiss Bank Corp.
BEA Systems, Inc.	Federated Department Stores, Inc.	Keystone Associates, Inc.	Nordson Corp.	3Com Corp.
Becton Dickinson & Co.	Feingold & Feingold Insurance	Koger Equity, Inc.	Norfolk & Dedham Group	TCF National Bank, Minnesota
Belden Wire & Cable, Co.	Fiduciary Trust Co., Boston	Lam Research Corp.	Northern States Power Co.	Teagle Foundation, Inc.
BellSouth Corp.	Fist Data Corp.	Lamson & Sessions Co.	Northern Trust Co.	Technometrics, Inc.
Bestfoods	First National Bank of Hudson	LandAmerica Financial Group, Inc.	Novell, Inc.	Temple-Inland, Inc.
Black & Decker Corp.	First Tennessee National Corp.	Lehman Brothers, Inc.	NSTAR	Tenet Healthcare Corp.
Blount Foundation, Inc.	FleetBoston Financial	Leo Burnett Co., Inc.	NVEST Co., LP	TENNANT
BMO Financial Group US	Ford Foundation - Legal Services	Levi Strauss & Co.	Old Mutual Asset Management	Tesoro Hawaii Corp.
Bonneville International Corp.	Fortis Health	LEXIS-NEXIS	OppenheimerFunds, Inc.	Tetley USA, Inc.
Boston Gear	Fortis Woodbury	Thomas J. Lipton Co.	Oracle Corp.	THAT Corp.
BP	Freddie Mac	Liz Claiborn, Inc.	Osmonics Inc.	Thomson Financial
BRAKELEY Briscoe, Inc.	Frederic W. Cook & Co., Inc.	Loews Corp.	Owens-Illinois, Inc.	Thrivent Financial for Lutherans
Brink's Co.	Freeport-McMoRan	Lojack Corp.	Palm, Inc.	Tomkins Corp.
Burlington Northern Santa Fe Corp.	Gannett Co., Inc.	Lubrizol Corp.	Pella Corp.	Transamerica Corp.
Business & Legal Reports, Inc.	Gap, Inc.	Lumina Foundation for Education	PespiCo	Travelers Express Co., Inc.
Cadence Design Systems, Inc.	Gartner Group	Lyondell Chemical Co.	Pew Charitable Trusts	Tyco International, Ltd.
CambridgeSoft	Gary-Williams Co./Piton Foundation	John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation	Pfizer, Inc.	Unilever United States, Inc.
Capital Group Cos.	GATX Corp.	Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation	Pharmacia Corp.	Universal Studios
Charles Schwab and Co.	General Dynamics Corp.	Maguire Oil Co.	Phoenix Cos., Inc.	U.S. Bancorp
Chicago Mercantile Exchange	General Re Corp.	Mallinckrodt, Inc.	Pioneer Group, Inc.	U.S. Borax, Inc.
Chicago Tribune Co.	Gerber Products Co.	Manulife Financial	Pitney Bowes, Inc.	UST, Inc.
Chubb and Son, Inc.	J. Paul Getty Trust	Massachusetts Financial Services Investment	PJM Interconnection, LLC	Verizon Corp.
Cingular Wireless	Gillette Co.		PLATINUM technology, Inc.	Virginia Power/North Carolina Power
CIT	Glenmede Corp.		Plymouth Rock Foundation	Wachovia Bank, NA
CITGO Petroleum Corp.	Goodrich Corp.		PNC Financial Services Group	Washington Dental Service
Citigroup			PNM	Washington Post Co.
Citrix Systems, Inc.			Pogo Producing Co.	Winn-Dixie Stores, Inc.
Colonial Mangement Assoc, Inc.			Polaroid Corp.	Wordsworth Books
Commonwealth Fund			PQ Corp.	Xtra Corp.
Compaq Computer Corp.				