

The Story of A Headbanger

I was 30 yrs old The first time I hit my head. I remember it clearly despite the concussion and the blood. I have a severe mental illness, I'm Bipolar. After saying things the mental health worker didn't want to hear and I was somewhat honest about, I found myself on suicide watch. Being kept in a cold dirty cell naked in a smock on suicide watch is torture in a slow unique sort of way. My frustration was already very high because of my situation and it was only getting worse. I kept thinking I missed "chow" because they would only give me a ham sandwich with a couple little cookies. I kept getting this meal over and over. By breakfast one morning I was yelling at them that they can't only feed me this. What if I'm in here for weeks, it's inhumane. The staff would only say that this is the protocol and they are following it. I simply lost it. My frustration reached a level it usually never gets to. I was staring at the window on the door and instinctively just started banging my head violently on the window in front of a couple Correctional Officers. That just seemed to fit. There was nothing I could do or say to these guards and all my coping mechanisms had been stripped from me. I just started banging heads.

This happens a lot and is maybe a little normal in light of the situation but then something happened that changed my life forever. As my body was whipping my head into the window, I lost my aim and I hit the edge. I hit where the window meets the door. There is no window frame just a sharp edge on the door.

containing the window. It felt different. It hurt different. That's all it took because my forehead split wide open and I was bleeding badly all over the cell. Before I knew it lots of staff were at my door trying to get control of the situation. I got a fresh meal.

Before long head banging itself became its own coping skill. A very negative and painful coping skill. I had very bad episodes of hitting my head. I've even knocked myself out. I continued to run into frustrating situations I couldn't handle and many times hitting my head would solve the problem better than if I didn't. It's as if the blood pouring down my face with severe cuts all the way to the skull on my forehead shocks their conscience and causes them to treat me better, like a human being.

On one occasion the nurse didn't give me my medication in the morning. I asked her to when I saw her because she missed me. She refused and I ended up hitting my head pretty bad. Hitting my head really hard on sharp edges you find on a cell door cuts through my flesh to the skull. It's like cutting into an avocado and the butter knife bounces off the seed in the middle. I ended up going to an observation cell and asked to speak with a mental health worker. Maybe they could help me get my meds. This CO (Correctional Officer) told me that there are a lot of people in this facility with mental health problems and I'm not special. I didn't think I was special, I was just the only one in an observation cell needing to speak with them. It never happened. They just took me back

to my cell. The next day it happened again and I hit my head again. This time was worse and they gave me stitches instead of steri-strips. The same CO came to talk to me and said, "were going to have you talk to mental health." I was so frustrated because he could have just done this yesterday. When the mental health worker came and talked to me she said, "why didn't you just ask to speak to me yesterday, I could have seen you then?"

I have hit my head so much I have lost count of how many times long ago. I would guess I've done it 18-20 times a year for a couple years. I ended up going to a Mental Health facility within the Department of Corrections and the doctors changed my meds. Therapy and medication has helped me get control of my headbanging. I went over a year without hitting my head. I really thought I would never do it again. Sometimes I would think about how I used to hit my head and it would make me cringe. I didn't think I could do it again even if I wanted to.

I was preparing to go to a halfway-house after some time and I was taking a psych medication that requires weekly blood draws to stay on it. It's definitely a high maintenance medication and I didn't want to be on it at a halfway-house. So I changed my medication. It was a bad idea because soon after that I had a manic episode. I didn't sleep for days. After a while the idea popped in my head that maybe I could just change my mattress out. I went to

ask the sergeant and he was an asshole to me and I snapped for the first time in a long time. I forgot how easy my forehead splits open and it bled really bad like the first time. I got my mattress changed. I went to medical and I had so much scar tissue the nurse practitioner couldn't stitch it up. I ended up going to the hospital and the ER doctor was able to. Now I go to the hospital each time. My meds were changed back and I finally stopped headbanging again. My scars are horrible. I'll be on that medication from now on.