2. Describe any personal or external barriers and how you have overcome or dealt with these barriers.

I have 7 years into my current recovery. I grew up and spent most of my life in Southern California and was treated for the first three years of this recovery by a world famous medical university center. I had developed Tardive Dyskinesia, rarely chatted and was pretty much affectless. But four years ago, I moved to a mid-sized city in Texas. A small clinic, over-worked psychiatrist talked to me, looked me over and changed my life for the better! First, we got rid of the nasty medication that caused twitching. Every appointment started with a chat, then we continued to reduce medications and change to a better one.

I have a wonderful therapist who has taught me invaluable tools. The first time I realized, I was in the grocery store on a Friday afternoon, by myself, and hadn't abandoned my cart I might survive this world! Anxiety used to be attached to my body like an unwanted, uninvited guest. Now, it's an occasional companion. In fact, the little pest has been around yesterday and today. I got hurt at work, and the questions were flying at me and I had to 'go to the bathroom' so I could take a breath and think.

Externally, I live in the 'closet'. I am becoming more and more involved with my local NAMI office, but even the executive director gets concerned when I started tugging at pulling off the chains of stigma. I have some gifts, that can get me into trouble. I'm tired of the 'white lies', I'm smart, I've studied the law, I know my rights, I possess the gift of pen & paper. I have days where I'm ready to just say to hell with it! But there is a great tension of who is going to actually be the first one to step out of the shadows.......oooohhhhh spooky.

3. Describe your support network and positive influences, and how you find balance and stability.

I have a loving family and I love them, but we cannot find a happy medium to MY choices for needed support in living with Bipolar Disorder and my desire to publicly give back. I've mapped out my own support network. I have my NAMI family, they know all there is to know and love me anyway. I met Dr. Daniel Fisher once, and heard him talk about 'leaving your hat at the door.' I've really taken that to heart and am trying to make changes in my life so as not to miss wonderful people who come into my life, instead of thru it. I have to open my mind, shut my personal opinions down, look and listen. I might find more & more wonderful friends to include. Those friends may lead to more support to shut down ALL STIGMA.

Positive influences - not to sound conceited, but I try to start with me. I spent so many years being my worst enemy. I try to look in the mirror and find that little detail of wonderful. My maternal relatives are positive influences. My grandmother raised us kids when my parents divorced, so my mother could work and be the single mother to raise her family. My aunt live across the country. I wish I knew more, hopefully will one day, but I do know she suffered for years when mental illness was something of a trial and error. When Aunt Marty found out I had a diagnosis, she burned up the phone lines talking to me, wishing she was with me, wanting to check out my doctor. Unfortunately, she slipped away in her sleep. I hope she's watching over me. To find balance, I have to make sure I take care of me. At least once a month, I ignore my phone, computer, social media, and the news for at least 24 hours. I have to disconnect.

4. Do you have a motivational word and/or favorite book?

I love to write longhand. It is also soothing for me when my mind is spinning. Maya Angelou once wrote, "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." And Martin Luther King, Jr., did tell us, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." My favorite book has no paper for pages, or ink for print, nor batteries for the e -reader. My book is what I observe in the world around me.

5. What is your message of hope to others living with bipolar?

Hope and patience. It took over 7 years to find the right medication combination for me and I have lived on this rollercoaster for 15+ years. As long as I don't spin in circles, I know I have the hope that at the top of this ride, it's going to get better. I'm not 100 % myself, but I'm 1000 times better. I hope to show and share with others it can be done, with love and support.