

Journey of Hope 2017
Tammy Helenske
Artist Statement

This is my second year participating in Journey of Hope; my initial experience was life changing. I submitted as an artist. During the reception, I was moved by the strength of those who struggled with mental illness. Shortly after I joined Stop Stigma Sacramento and became a Stop Stigma Speaker. I started sharing my struggles with mental illness and with the support of the stop stigma community I found my own voice.

I am currently a Master of Arts student at Sacramento State University. In my work, I integrate traditional art with new media art in the form of contemporary installation and social practice art. At times my work creates environments that recreate my experience of living with schizophrenia.

When I was given Laura Bemis's original story I connected with the challenges she has to face and the struggle to find a positive connection in this world. A few weeks before the show Laura re-created her story. I found value in both stories and decided to integrate them into the piece.

Survivors Journey represents the challenge of trying to create a "normal" life when faced with multiple obstacles. Fences can represent security and safety. When living with a mental illness it can be difficult to create a safe place. Having a "normal" life is illusive. From the outside our lives may look broken but for us it can be a formation of a lifetime of hard work.

Laura's story is scribed into the redwood; it may not be easy to read or understand. This process is analogous for what it is like to communicate to others what life is like having a mental illness. The placement of the wood is designed to either keep others out or keep someone in. I appreciate Laura's courage to share her story and I am honored to be the artist representing her work.

Tammy 'Tam' Helenske

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