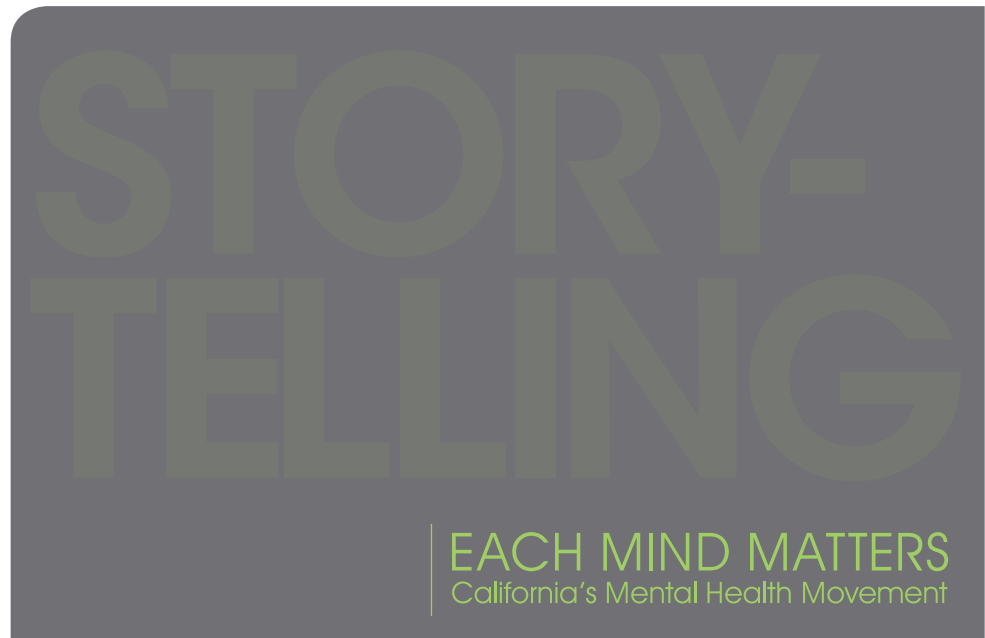


Mental health is a misconception to many people. People discriminate depression as just a phase or a feeling. I myself thought that same very thing, but depression is more than what any of those myths really tell. It's like a disease only it isn't contagious. The symptoms of depression can be insomnia, irritation to big or small situations, the mind to consider suicide as the only option left, and so on. People who haven't been through this situation say that only "other people" get the symptoms of depression. Statistics show though that about nine million children in the U.S alone have emotional problems, but not even half of that number is seeking help. Both children and adults can experience different mental health issues.

Sometimes people are just afraid to admit that they have a mental issue. They think that there may not be a resolution or people won't listen to their story. That's all just a lie. Treatment is available and a full recovery is possible. This is the reason why we have mental health professionals out there. There are programs filled with people who care about your recovery and want to see a positive outcome in you. The Hmong people need another voice. Not just them, but everyone in general who suffers from a mental illness. There is a resolution, and there are really people out there who will pull you back up on your feet. You aren't alone, and with the simple act of speaking up, you can receive help and feel empowered once again to be free from your own mind. Take my word for it.



This program is funded by counties through the voter-approved Mental Health Services Act (Prop. 63). It is one of several Prevention and Early Intervention Initiatives implemented by the California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA), an organization of California counties working to improve mental health outcomes for individuals, families and communities. CalMHSA encourages the use of materials contained herein, as they are explained in our licensing agreements. To view the agreements, please visit: calmhsa.org



PA XIONG'S STORY OF HOPE: RECEIVING HELP FOR MENTAL DISORDERS

by Karissa Lee

What is mental health? Mental health is a disorder of the mind, which the person may or may not be aware that they have. Mental disorders can affect in various ways such as mood disorders, eating disorders, addictive disorder, etc. I can only hope that my story of dealing with a mental disorder, depression, will encourage those suffering to speak up and ask for the help they need.

I had lost almost everything that I treasured deep within myself at a very young age. My mother and father had died due to an incurable illness. That left my siblings and me in the hands of our new caretakers, which of

course, was family. They weren't the ordinary family you think. They were cruel, heartless, and evil. They worked my siblings and me from sunup to sundown while they feasted in our absence. I had no one to turn to; no one I could trust. Step by step, day by day, I endured the hardship and learned life the hard way.

I didn't know though, that the situation I was suffering from was far worse than I had imagined it to be.

As years passed, I met a man named Bliu Yang Lee. We then decided that we should marry and spend the rest of our lives together. Years ticked by again and before we knew it, we had raised twelve, beautiful children. Three sadly though, had left us early because of diseases that spread like wildfire and were untreatable. It was about 1972 during the Vietnam War. We ran for our lives in fear of being caught and taken away. With such a large family, you could only imagine the anxiety of how to keep everyone under your wing. We had to hide in the jungle and travel to our next post by night to avoid any soldiers. Sometimes at night I would think of everything I had endured as an individual, and would only build more walls inside that I didn't want anyone to break through. From losing everything as a child, to now trying to keep you and your own family alive, it felt as if everything inside me had just mashed up into one, huge problem. I didn't know though, that the situation I was suffering from was far worse than I had imagined it to be. I discriminated it as just a phase and thought I would soon get over it with time's hand.

When I heard the news that my family and I could come to America, I didn't even think twice about my answer. If it meant escape and a new life for my children, I was 100% in. When arriving to America, we first settled

in Denver, Colorado. It wasn't long though before we moved to Fresno, California. We lived there and still do to this very day. Day by day my symptoms of depression worsened without me even noticing it. I didn't know how to cope with it. It was like being a prisoner of your own mind. I tried to find things to do that would allow me to breathe and feel alive instead of sulking around all day. Soon though, I realized that my feelings inside me weren't going to leave. I finally reached out for help from an old relative who worked with the Fresno County Mental Health Department. After filling out paper after paper, I was assigned to a mental health counselor. She referred me to take medications to help me cope with my depression. All I can say is that seeking help was so incredibly nerve wrecking. I knew the smallest amount of English, and was afraid to share my thoughts to people I had never met before. I thought that all doctors were the same back then. Even when I was diagnosed with a depression disorder, I didn't fully believe I had a mental illness. I still thought it was only my feelings and not an emotional disease. The more I continued with my treatment though, the more my life had improved.

The effect of my medication and the mental exercises I was doing really did improve my life and help me to forget all my troubles.

I actually enjoyed going out into public and making new friends. I began to be more optimistic about life and understood that since we only had one life; there was no more time to waste. I'm now more educated than ever about my mental disorder. I know understand that it really isn't just a feeling. It isn't crazy to seek for help like how other perceived it to be. The effect of my medication and the mental exercises I was doing really did improve my life and help me to forget all my troubles.