

Our Stories—Allie Rice

Allie Rice is the younger of Mary Finnegan's two daughters. She graduated from South Kingstown High School in 2005. In the eleven years before she graduated from college in 2016 Allie achieved far more than the course work required to attain the BA in Arts Degree that she received from the University of Rhode Island. As she was about begin the exciting time of life when an adolescent really starts to spread her wings she was faced with incredible challenges. In the first year that she was living away from home at Carnegie Institute of Technology Allie began to experience symptoms that would lead to an eventual diagnosis of schizo-affective disorder. Anyone who is familiar with mental illness knows that a diagnosis rarely comes easily. And far more difficult is the search for the treatment that will help mitigate the symptoms. And that is to say nothing of the debilitating symptoms themselves.

Allie traveled this long and difficult road while never giving up on her desire to finish college. She tried a second college, this time in Maine, but found that she needed to have the support of her family close by. She returned to Rhode Island and eventually went back to school at the University of RI. It took eight years for her doctors to find the treatment that works for her and she has been faithfully following that regime for four years now.

Yet she still does have limitations. It is important that she has supportive people surrounding her and it is important that she takes care of herself. Allie lives with her mother and stepfather, Russell Stokes. She is thrilled that her sister Sarah and her family have recently relocated to Wakefield from Baltimore and live only minutes away.

Allie is a volunteer at the South County Art Association. She helps with mailings and she recently participated as a behind the scenes runner at the Art Heist, their major fundraiser—this year held as a very successful online affair. She is a member of the Print Shop at SCAA, relief printing being her favorite form of art expression.

Last year Allie was an enthusiastic participant in the workshops at Harvest Acre Farms. The mission at HAF is to provide a healing and caring environment of productive activities that will inspire hope and contribute to the health and well-being of individuals living with mental illness and allow them to achieve their full potential. Programs include working in the greenhouses, woodworking and painting. Products made in the workshops are sold at the Farm Store. Last year Allie assisted in a HAF booth at the UUCSC Holiday Fair. Largely dependent on donations, HAF has unfortunately been unable to continue operating during the Pandemic.

Allie likes to crochet but only knows one stitch and has a lot of unfinished scarves. She loves to attend services and programs at UUCSC. She plays Garage Band virtually with her father in Vermont. She believes that it is important to talk about her illness and she has a few things she would like to say to others who may be facing similar challenges to the ones she faces daily.

Dealing with a mental illness takes a lot of patience. Don't do anything drastic; tomorrow is a new day and things may look different. Keep going; don't give up. It is important to make plans and have things to look forward to. On her list recently: brushing up on civics and following the issues; getting to the Print Shop to do some work; and having dinner with her sister and her family. Allie hopes that people at UUCSC will feel free to talk to her about mental health, art and maybe even unfinished needlework.

Elizabeth Donovan, October 2020