

GLENN KOONS CERTIFIED PEER SPECIALIST SCHOLARSHIP

WINNER: 2013

The Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumers' Association and the Mental Health Association in Pennsylvania are pleased to announce **Lynn Kelly** of Connellsville, Pennsylvania as the recipient of the *2013 Glenn Koons Scholarship*. The funds associated with this scholarship will cover the registration cost for the Certified Peer Specialist training this fall.

Thank you, Lynn, for speaking with us about your life and your wish to give back.

LYNN'S STORY - IN HER OWN WORDS

I am an alcoholic who suffers from bipolar disorder. Until two years ago, when I was 53, I had gone most of my life without an accurate diagnosis. I worked as a quality assurance specialist for Sony and traveled the country for my job and was able to function and hide my illness, self-medicating with alcohol when I was manic. Then two years ago, after a difficult Easter, I took a bottle of vodka to a nearby lake, called my brother in Florida to apologize and say goodbye, and attempted suicide.

Thanks to my brother's resourcefulness and my niece's fiancé, who is a police officer, local police were able to find where I was and rescue me before it was too late. In that moment, my recovery began.

I was hospitalized and later connected with help in my community, including therapy and meetings. Through these supports, I met Kathy, a certified peer specialist. Kathy brought me back to life. As someone who has lived with mental illness, she knows where I've been from personal experience. She's helped me regain confidence and shown me how and where to access supports to help pay the bills, get food, and enroll in social security. I was so overwhelmed with getting through the day-to-day, and not having an income for the first time since I was 14, that I'd lost my ability to feel joy and hope. Kathy has helped me find it again. She has also inspired me to take the darkness I've experienced and turn it into light for other people.

I believe that God puts me where God wants me and puts people in our lives for a reason. I was at that lake to eventually meet Kathy and find my path to helping others. Being a peer support specialist is my way of thanking people who have been there for me.