

## UNDERSTAND THAT YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND

“I don’t understand Tony anymore.” These were the words of Texas Supreme Court Judge Robert Maurice Campbell in 1978.

Judge Campbell had the intellect, education, experience and wisdom to give him superior understanding of anything that came before him. In this case, his superior understanding concluded that he did not understand.

How do you think I felt upon learning that my brother had made this statement shortly after he delivered me from the hospital where I had received psychiatric treatment?

Actually, it was the most comforting statement I had heard. It stands through this day as the most profound insight regarding the life of people who, like me, live with conditions called depression or any other mental illness.

My brother Maurice and I had developed love, understanding, and empathy during a lifetime together. Somehow he now realized what I already knew. While we had much in common, I was living in a realm where he and I had not walked together. Much of me was coming from where he had not been and neither of us understood it. There were experiences and feelings about which brothers Maurice and Tony could not communicate.

The first and most important understanding for one to have regarding people with depression and other mental health issues is to understand that you do not understand. This is an important realization to those of us who have the condition and those who care about us.

There are real reasons why one does not understand. First, the personal experiences of those who live with normal health do not lead to an understanding of those who live with abnormal health. Secondly, many of the ideas that are passed along in our society are false, misleading, and dangerous.

There are real values in understanding that you do not understand. It prepares you to move forward toward understanding, and it enables you to make better use of what you do know. You become less critical of yourself

when your efforts to help do not work out, and you are less judgmental of us when our response and conduct are not what you expect. You also learn to avoid making unrealistic demands of us, like “snap out of it.”

If we who have mental health problems are well enough to be responsible for our attitudes there is an additional benefit. Our realization that neither we nor you fully understand should make us more forgiving, more cooperative, and less instructive toward you who are helping us. My fellow sufferers, let us always strive toward that.

Very importantly, this realization should cause all of us to seek out professional help when we are dealing with serious mental health issues.

I am fortunate to have an immediate and extended family who know that understanding and caring do not have to be delivered in the same package. Their caring both preceded and exceeded their understanding. Subsequently, time, experience and study provided the knowledge they needed.

They and I are coming to understand my condition as I seek to understand how my condition impacts their lives. This has been a major component in my rise to a functional level while there remains within me the condition that seeks to prevent it.

Perhaps there will come a time when we shall understand fully, but now we only “see through a glass darkly.” While this is true, “I do not understand” reveals profound understanding.



































































