**I earned my master’s degree this month.**

**By Eric Smith ~ December 2021**

***I earned my master’s degree this month.***

***My road to this achievement has been full of challenges, and I refused to be defeated by them.***

***I became addicted to drugs, was diagnosed with serious mental illness (SMI), dropped out of high school, failed out of my first attempt at college, and was a psychiatric inpatient.***

***In 2013, my first semester back pursuing a university degree, I made the honor roll with 2 A’s and 1 B.***

***I told myself if I could make the honor roll once, I could do it again.***

***The following semester I earned all A’s, and kept working hard to give school my best effort.***

***I earned an A in every class from the time I was an undergraduate sophomore through my final semester as a graduate student.***

***54 consecutive A’s.***

***No matter who you are, you can rise up to your potential.***

***The reason I advocate as hard as I do for people like me with SMI is because I know firsthand how much better life can be with proper treatment and care.***

***I am not suggesting all people with SMI are guaranteed happiness and success with proper treatment and care, but an absence of proper treatment and care will almost certainly guarantee an absence of happiness and success.***

***The rest of my life will be dedicated to making sure people with SMI in need of treatment and care will be able to reclaim their lives and pursue happiness as I have done.***