

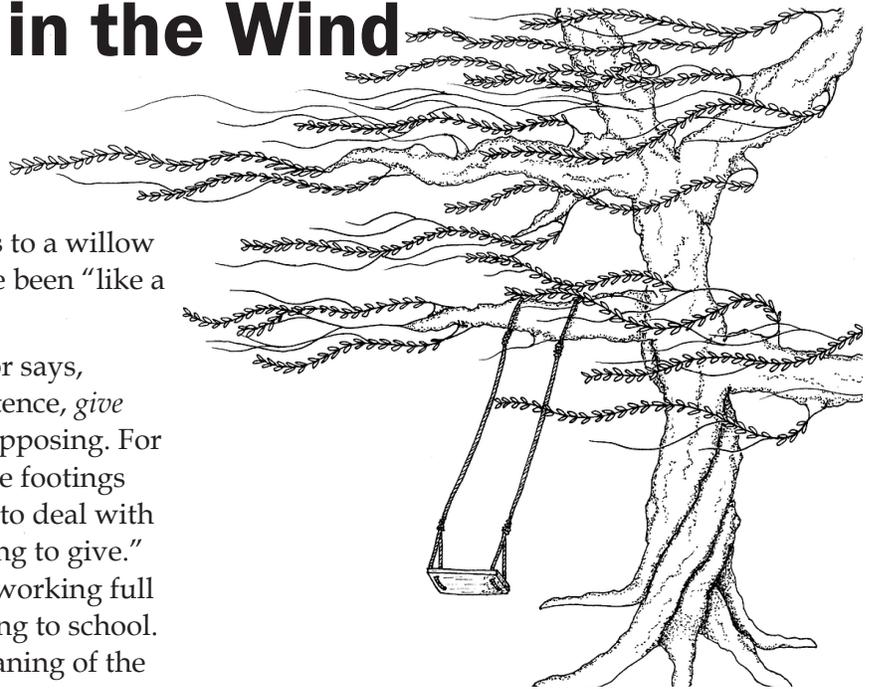


Like a Willow in the Wind

James Leveritt

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. The title is a simile. What happens to a willow in the wind? Discuss a time you have been “like a willow in the wind.”
2. In the fourth paragraph, the author says, “Something had to give.” In this sentence, *give* means to let go, to stop resisting or opposing. For example, an engineer might say, “The footings of that bridge are not strong enough to deal with the rushing river. One of them is going to give.” Or a parent might say, “I can’t keep working full time, taking care of the kids, and going to school. Something has to give!” Use this meaning of the word *give* in a sentence.



Describe what you see in this illustration. Image by Brick-Bard from pixabay.com.

Regular High School Not Right for Me

My journey to getting my GED began more than 20 years ago. One day, when I was 16 years old and sitting in math class, the high school guidance counselor called me to her office. She informed me that my school was joining with some other schools to form an alternative classroom. This alternative classroom would be for kids who, for whatever reason, did not function well in a normal classroom. They gave us the option to get a GED instead of a regular high school diploma.

Mental Health Problems and Addiction

During this time in my life, I suffered from mental health issues that were affecting me academically, and I had just recently started experimenting with crystal methamphetamine to help me cope with day-to-day life. I did not know what was actually wrong with me back then, or that there were better ways to treat my symptoms.

At 21, I figured it out and put myself in therapy, but I was still suffering from a secret drug addiction that impeded my steps in treatment. When putting myself in therapy I made

a fatal mistake; I convinced myself that I was the exception, that the mental health system wouldn’t work for me. For years, it didn’t.

Something Had to Give

After struggling for years with severe depression, anxiety, panic attacks, bipolar disorder, and split personality disorder, I knew I couldn’t keep going like this and something had to give. What gave was me, like a willow in the wind.

If I could convince myself that the system wouldn’t work for me, like I had done in the past, why couldn’t I now convince myself that it **WOULD** work for

me? Therapy helped. It made a big difference to talk to someone who just listened and did not judge. I also tried medication, but that

did not work for me. Instead, I started meditating and using aroma therapy, and completely

What gave was me, like a willow in the wind.

reprogrammed my brain from “I can’t” to “I can.” These practices helped repair the damage from years of mental illness and drug abuse.

What Do You Tell Yourself?

I also realized that a major reason I had failed to get my GED 20 years ago, was that I had told myself I couldn’t do math. That is why I failed to get my degree for over 20 years. This time, I applied my “I can” method. It may have taken me four tries on the test, but in the end, I claimed victory!

With God’s help, I defeated an addiction to methamphetamine. I defeated my rage and depression. I learned how to do math and got my GED. I would now say to anyone who doesn’t have a high school diploma, instead of telling yourself “I can’t,” tell yourself “I can.” It makes a world of difference.

AFTER YOU READ: In the fourth paragraph, James says, “What gave was me, like a willow in the wind.” What does he mean by this? How does it change things for him?

James Leveritt is a student in the adult basic education program at South Arkansas College in El Dorado, AR. Now that he has his GED, his goal is to become a chef. He has taken the first step toward that goal and enrolled in the Culinary Arts program at South Arkansas Community College. He says, “My journey continues.”





Positive Self-Talk

James says he reprogrammed his brain from “I can’t” to “I can.” What do you say to yourself to give yourself encouragement? How does that work for you?

