March Member of the Month Natalie Conrad cont':

The first is that I am proud to be a mom: a working mom, a stay-at-home mom, the single mom, a stepmom, a godmom, a returning-to-college mom and now a grandmom. This has been the hardest job I have ever taken on. Here are 2 of my most difficult and rewarding times as a mom:
My youngest, who is also named Natalie, was born developmentally delayed, with no other diagnosis. They did not know the extent of her delay and if she could ever live on her own. Intensive therapy and many years of special education and speech therapy ensued. She now not only lives on her own but drives, will finish her AA degree this year's and works 3 jobs including one as a respite worker for other children with special needs. I am so proud of her.
Our second to youngest son nearly died from spinal meningitis as a junior in high school. Once he came out of the traumatic brain injury coma, he had several issues to overcome. He had to relearn how to walk, talk, and think. Even though he was out of high school for 6 months, he proudly walked across the stage and graduated with his class. I am amazed at what he has overcome.
Raising a blended family was hard at times but our family is now beautifully blended and solid to the core and I am blessed to have 5 granddaughters (and my first grandson on the way).

The second thing I am proud of is that I am a mental health advocate. I have made a suicide attempt and have lived with chronic depression for decades. Though my mental illness cannot be cured, I know I have tools for recovery when I relapse. I also know that there are many others like me who are silently ashamed like I used to be. This is my focus now. I am working to deliver the message that having a mental illness is nothing to be ashamed of and that we must have parity in treatment of mental illness, both medically and socially. We must have more mental health resources (varied and affordable) available in my lifetime.

The following is my favorite quote. It speaks volumes and has pulled me up many, many times. May it help you someday as well.
"And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom."