



The Art of Recovery



About the Keynote Speaker: Jennifer Ayers-Moore

9TH ANNUAL MENTAL HEALTH BENEFIT LUNCHEON – MAY 13, 2010

Jennifer Ayers-Moore is the founder and chair of the Nathaniel Anthony Ayers Foundation and sister to the Nathaniel Ayers, subject of the book and film *The Soloist*. She is a passionate, outspoken advocate for the artistically gifted mentally ill. Her journey began over 30 years ago when her charming, intelligent, talented, and handsome brother, Nathaniel, developed schizophrenia, forcing him to drop out of Juilliard. Ayers-Moore witnessed, firsthand, the toll mental illness takes on its victims and families.

Ayers-Moore's mother Floria never gave up trying to help her son, and Ayers-Moore became her emissary, writing letters and making contact with anyone who would listen to their family's plight. She became her mother's ally, accompanying her when Nathaniel was probated, committed to mental institutions or admitted to hospitals for treatment. Through journal notes, Ayers-Moore documented the pain the family underwent. Whenever she could, she continued to keep up with Nathaniel.

Ayers-Moore recalls her mother wanted to open a home for the mentally ill and to help other families. So, for two years, a mentally ill woman, whose family had abandoned her, lived with the Ayers. Baffled by her mother's actions, Ayers-Moore asked why she was helping her when they had Nathaniel. Her response: "I am doing for her what I want someone to do for Nathaniel."

After Ayers-Moore's mother died, Nathaniel disappeared, ending up homeless and on Skid Row. Ayers-Moore never lost hope that she would one day hear from her brother. When she received a call from *Los Angeles Times* journalist Steve Lopez that he had befriended Nathaniel and wanted to write a series of articles about him, Ayers-Moore was delighted. Eventually, Lopez wrote a book, *The Soloist*, and a movie, bearing the same name, was produced.

Not wanting the book and film to come and go, Ayers-Moore founded the Nathaniel Anthony Ayers Foundation as the manifestation of her mother's dream. The foundation is establishing an Artist in Residence program, a symposia for mental health consumers and caregivers, and an advocacy initiative to "Stop Stigma." Consistent with her mother's hope, Ayers-Moore's ultimate goal is to open "Nathaniel's Place" in cities around the nation as havens for the mentally ill, where emphasis is placed on using the arts as a vehicle for treating the individual rather than just the disease.

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About Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network (ADMHN)

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