

## **Maintain my mental health on a daily basis - no bargaining, no debating, no negotiating**

by Lily in California

At the age of 35 I had a full-blown manic-depressive breakdown that brought me to a complete non-functioning state. I was then a mother of two. Much earlier, the first signs of bipolar disorder began to appear; my first experiences with it set the tone for what was to come.

Even though I had a master's degree in Marriage, Family, and Child counseling and knew what was happening to me, I could not stop it. My express descent into the world of bipolar disorder was devastating. My struggle with madness, suicide, and hospitalizations forever impacted my world, my life, and the lives of the ones I love the most.

My manic stages were filled with forbidden happiness and grandiosity. My journey into the underworld has been terrifying and each return has been painfully outlined by sorrow and adversity. The stigma associated with mental illness was too demanding. My depression often came with psychotic features and there was delusion, paranoia, and the urge to kill myself. The first medications I was on didn't work for me. I was often over-tired and unable to work or even take care of my family. I discontinued the medication every time, and every time I experienced hospitalizations.

It wasn't until 2001 that my present therapist referred me to my present psychiatrist who has helped me recover from my last breakdown and continues to help me stay hospital-free. My doctor has found the right combination of meds for me. He's a brilliant doctor who makes bipolar disorder manageable. My commitment to staying healthy is great. Every night I line up my medication bottles and take them religiously. One helps me stay delusion and paranoia free. I take another to stabilize my mood and another to also help me with the depressive side of the disorder. No matter what happens, I never skip taking my meds. It is just that I have to maintain my mental health on a daily basis - No bargaining, no debating, no negotiating. Even with an illness that is punctuated by depression, delusion, paranoia, and several suicide attempts, ultimately I feel my life is full of joy, passion, and love. I have just finished writing a memoir called Gardenia, which discusses my own experience with bipolar disorder, stigma, and wellness. I am as healthy as I can be with the help from pharmacology and ongoing psychotherapy. I hope this story will help many others suffering from this disorder as I have been helped.