

Sharing knowledge helps reap emotional, mental and physical strength and lightens load

by Yolanda in Florida

At the age of 21, my doctor delivered devastating news and diagnosed me as suffering from bi-polar disorder. In my early teens, I experienced episodes of pure misery, which could quickly turn into extreme jubilation. In those early years though, I only understood the depression side of the disorder. After all, how could extreme exuberance be connected with an illness?

Born the fifth of seven children, each of my siblings have fought the affliction to varying degrees. This was an inheritance from our father who was diagnosed as bi-polar in the early 1970's. The source of the mental, physical and emotional hardship I endured daily stems from a genetic imbalance of serotonin and other natural chemicals found in the brain. This debilitating disorder initially surfaced when I was a freshman in high school. It quickly took control of my entire life. I was often miserably depressed and suffered through great bouts of hopelessness. Typical teenager and parental problems were exacerbated, and I felt no hope for a positive future, so after my 15th birthday I decided to leave home and strike out on my own. Over the years, I experienced chaos that seemed to be cyclical in nature. Every three months, depressive and/or manic episodes would rear their ugly heads and throw me into the depths of unimaginable struggle. In 2002, I was 38 years old. My life felt very out-of-control and I made the scary decision to admit myself to a mental hospital. This happened twice that same year. I was frightened initially with fear of the unknown and the different person I might become once I emerged. The first stay was for the minimum of five days so that the doctors could observe and evaluate my condition. The second visit was ten days long. This was especially difficult as it was during Easter break and I was not able to be with my two young children. Several psychiatrists and physicians closely monitored my condition. Achieving stability and medication experimentation were the goals of both visits. Severe fatigue, short-term memory loss, acute insomnia, uncontrollable trembling and a weight gain of 30 pounds were the most prominent side-effects of the new drugs I was prescribed. These experts also added several more labels to my mental state. Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Self-Injury Disorder and Social Anxiety Disorder. Not being able to complete simple tasks, obsessive skin picking and shying away from social settings has made my life unbearable at times. In the hospital, I learned that educating myself on these illnesses was paramount to my recovery, and I have received incredible empowerment from the following books: *The Bipolar Disorder Survivor Guide* by David J. Miklowitz, PhD; *You Mean I'm Not Lazy, Stupid Or Crazy?!* by Kate Kelly and Peggy Ramundo; and *The OCD Workbook* by Bruce M. Hyman, PhD and Cherry Pedrick, R.N. Since 2005 I have been functioning at a tolerable level and daily vacillate from barely surviving to simply coping...and every once in a while...overjoyed with tons of energy and focus, I have accepted the fact that I will need to be medicated for the remainder of my life. The vision I hold for my future though is positive.

I want to be a flourishing wife, mother, writer and business owner. I must constantly gauge life events, so as not to get overwhelmed. If a high level of stress is triggered, it may result in me becoming bedridden for days. Finally, I have found that public speaking opportunities and through writing articles, I am able to sow seeds of hope

and understanding to those whose lives have been wounded by mental illness. Sharing my knowledge with others enables me to reap emotional, mental and physical strength, which in turn lightens my otherwise very heavy load.