

## Family and support groups help mother with life long battle with Bi-polar

by Deb in Pennsylvania

Mental illness has affected my life in more ways than one, because I have not been able to hold a full-time job since 2003. Because I have some very severe mood swings, and I can't handle stress because it sets my anxiety off. I really wanted to go back to work; therefore, I decided to try it and I was there one day had an anxiety attack. I had to quit.

A lot of the guys I was dating before I was properly diagnosed were jerks, because I was craving attention; therefore, I would basically just go out with anybody. I was working when I started to have major problems, I had an anxiety attack on the job and ended up in the hospital. While I was in the hospital they fired me, but I was thankful, because I finally got the help I needed. I was 18 years old when my illness started to affect me. I had a major psychotic episode, I was hearing voices, having hallucinations and delusions etc. therefore I was admitted to a local community hospital where I remained for a month. I was released and stopped taking my medications. I quickly relapsed and was hospitalized two more times within a year. The diagnosis was schizoaffective/schizophrenia. But this was a misdiagnosis because in 1995 my parents and I went for a second opinion and this is when they found a brain tumor that was resting on the auditory nerve of the brain which was causing hallucinations, voices, and delusions. Once the tumor was removed I no longer needed the neuroleptics. In 2003, I was properly diagnosed with bipolar, post traumatic stress disorder and anxiety disorder.

I do have medical insurance coverage. I have medicare/medicaid and I am very thankful I do because without it I would not be able to afford my psychiatrist, my medications, or the hospitalizations. The form of treatment I have received is I see a psychiatrist every two months, I attend support groups, I am taking a class on Recovery Training, I completed the Peer-to-Peer education course in Chester County and I have really been educating myself about mental illnesses and how they affect people differently.

I am a full-time housewife, I take care of my keeshond who keeps me on my toes. I am constantly busy doing something or other. I am married, and I have two stepsons. The highest level of education was 12th grade, but I furthered my education in computers and business. My hobbies are making different arts and crafts, volleyball, swimming, bike riding, computers etc. My interests are learning more about mental illnesses and computers.

My life now is very hard to deal with sometimes, because I am never sure one day to the next how my mood is going to be. Before I met my husband and we got a keeshond, I was very depressed and unhappy. I have attempted suicide 13 times.

I still get depressed to a point of the thoughts of suicide but my mom, dad, my husband, stepsons and the support groups help me through. The one thing I would like to change about how people think about mental illness is, we are just like everybody else, you just can't see the pain we go through. We are not crazy. We just have an illnesses and we need a tune up every once in awhile. We cannot control our moods or illnesses and we sure as heck do not wish to have it. But we try very hard to lead a

good life.

The things that have been most helpful to me to cope with my mental illness is the Face It Recovery project, the support groups, educating myself about my mental illness and NAMI.

The one thing I would like to say is mental illnesses are not easy for the support people or the person with the illness or illnesses, but if we keep fighting the battle we will eventually win the battle and maybe all the stigma that is attached to mental illness will someday be all erased and hopefully we can save peoples lives before they commit suicide. I lost my friend to bipolar and it is very painful to lose someone you care about. So hopefully someday we will be able to convince the victims of mental illness that suicide is not the answer, because the victims pain may have ended, but the people who loved them or cared for them are still suffering, because they are gone.