

## Understanding trial & error and what it means not just to exist but to be alive

by Cynthia in Michigan

I was 48 years old and in the Autumn of my life. No longer flying below the radar, I was struck as if by lightning. For many years our father told us we were Greek's with a type A disposition and it was easy to believe by our energy and enthusiasm. Unfortunately, we were hypersensitive and were agitated easily. Gatherings were often noisy but they were stormy too. My depression began about the time my father became ill. I had no knowledge of the darkness that was about to engulf me.

Caring for loved ones is very difficult. I cared for my mother and my father and while my father declined I did, too.

After my father passed away, my brother came back to steal the family money. My mother, deeply connected to him, fought me as I attempted to keep him at bay. In this period of heightened stress and circumstance, my dog died, my two daughters got married, and we moved. Rather than rejoice, I was solemn and withdrawn. I entertained the notion of suicide, I was secretive and unsuccessful.

Fortunately, I made an appointment with a psychiatrist. She was a pair of boots in a river of mud. She called it for what it was after cognitive therapy and 18 months of medication failures: Bipolar Disorder. My response was, "Who? Me?" It couldn't be possible. I organized the chamber of commerce and was the first female Rotarian in our town. I had hobbies and responsibilities. Finally, I read about her Bipolar Disorder, it was manic-depression and in truth every word screamed me. Seven years of excellent care and my insurance company pulls the carpet out from under me. One-hundred-and-twenty visits should have cured me. But my chemistry keeps changing and there is no cure. I should have had a heart condition; they would have been good for at least a million dollars. Before my diagnosis, I never knew the phrase Bipolar Disorder or manic-depression or even stigma. But life has been a lesson in survival and I have learned how very fragile it can be. I understand trial and error and what it means not just to exist but to be alive. I continue to work with my psychiatrist. Medication intake is very difficult due to my sensitivities but we continue as partners; she is the teacher, I am the student and then, I am the teacher, she is the student and we have a pact. Overall, life is better. Slowly I begin to rebuild the social network I left behind. I buried my brother, care for my mother, have a wonderful husband, daughters and now grandchildren. It is been better in the knowing, I have learned so much. My gallery of experiences I have written to share. My psychiatrist pushes me along, often holds me up, and says that I'm a life force and I smile, for if there is a life force in the room ... it is she.