

## A fight using resourcefulness and determination

by Angela in North Carolina

My strength is derived from my passion for advocating for those who suffer from mental illness as I have shared their pain. I am a highly-motivated individual who chooses to use my own mental illnesses as an asset rather than a liability.

I have been diagnosed with 4 illnesses: Borderline Personality Disorder, Major Depression, ADD, and Bi-Polar. These diagnoses came at different stages in my life. I think it is important to state that I am always in my own recovery. My greatest desire is to be able to educate others, reduce the stigma, and give those that are suffering the hope and the resources they need to get on track so they may be able to function as normal as possible. I believe that mental illness can manifest for different reasons. There's no clear cut answer as to why it happens. It could be brought on by heredity, environment, or a chemical imbalance in the brain. My father and brother have suffered over the years. For me it started when I was 6 years old. At that age I was molested by a 16 year old male. He was our babysitter and the abuse happened several times. As a teen, I felt like something just wasn't right. I couldn't concentrate in school and always did poorly. My family life wasn't what I would consider good. I was told at the age of 22 I had a severe case of PMS. I was treated with an anti-depressant. This helped for a while. When I was 27 I was diagnosed with major depression. I had a breakdown when I was 30.

I was married with two small children, ages 6 and 3. As a result of the break down my husband and I split and he was awarded custody of our kids. I was hospitalized three times in just four months. At that time I was diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). BPD is a very complex diagnosis. I will do my best to describe it. BPD is a mental illness that affects a person's mood, self-image and relationships. Symptoms of BPD can include intense mood swings, a pattern of unstable relationships impulsive or self-destructive behavior, to include suicidal thoughts or attempts. That was the first of several nightmares in my life. When I was 35, I was diagnosed with ADD. I thought...hmm...that explains a lot! When I was 38 I had another breakdown and it was determined I was Bi-Polar (also known as manic depressive). Bi-polar is a mood disorder where someone alternates between states of deep depression and extreme happiness. Manic symptoms may include feeling too happy, can't stop talking, irritability, uncontrollable energy and insomnia. Once I didn't sleep for 4 days. Depression symptoms may include: not being able to get out of bed, sleeping much more than usual, uncontrollable crying, and ignoring daily responsibilities. I always describe it this way...I was in a deep dark hole at the bottom of the earth. If someone were to ask me ok...you have a choice here...we can cut your arm off and as a result you will never go through the depression again. For me...that's a no-brainer. Having one arm would've been much better than the nightmare of mood swings I was experiencing.

Over the years, I have been on at least 20 different medications. Often, it takes a few attempts to find a medication that works and even when you find one you may have to adjust the dose every now and then. I have been hospitalized 7 times in the last 10 yrs. My last episode was over 2 yrs ago. As a result, I lost everything...my job my apartment, and had no money. It was the worst time in my entire life!

My life has been anything but stable until the last yr and ½. However I am proud to say

I have NEVER felt better! I fought my way back using resourcefulness and determination. It takes me a few months to feel normal after an episode. My motivation comes from my children. I would not do anything to hurt them, so in those dark days I kept going because they need me. I like to explain it like this...when suicidal it's like I am in a burning building, not much chance of survival. Off in the distance outside a window, I can barely see my boys and they are crying out to me, "Mom we need you."

Some contributing factors to continuing recovery:

- Regular exercise... this is one of the most important ones.
- Healthy diet
- Structured life style
- Taking meds regularly
- Keeping doctor appointments and therapy sessions
- Do things you enjoy on a regular basis
- Avoid unhealthy relationships
- Educate yourself on your diagnosis

I am sharing my story to let others know that with the help of organizations like MHA who provide resources to those who suffer or to those that want to help someone suffering, I went from wanting desperately to die to feeling alive and positive about my life.