

Thriving with a Second Chance

by April in Georgia

My Bipolar disorder has been the dictator and ruler of my entire life up until about three years ago. As a child, it destroyed my self-esteem, isolated me, confused me and eventually, consumed me. As a teenager, the black cloud seemed to get thicker; however, the common misconception was she's a teenager.

Classic Moodiness. This too shall pass. I knew something was wrong, off, not quite right, a little weird....but I couldn't identify the root cause. I knew I didn't want to be this way. I didn't want the negative, dismal thoughts. I didn't want the destructive behavior. But it seemed as if I was pre-programmed for self destruction and there wasn't a thing I could do to stop it. It was easier to fall into the role of the Difficult Child than scream for help in my constant state of confusion and pain. I had my first full blown episode at the age of 19, which resulted in a pregnancy and an unwanted, abusive marriage. After the birth of my child, the Bipolar was agitated even further by a severe bout of post-partum depression. It was then that I began a spiral downward that destroyed the majority of my adult life, not to mention the lives of those who came in contact with me.

I was diagnosed with Manic-Depression around the age of 23 after a 10 second question session by a doctor I had never seen before. He prescribed medication. I took it for about a week, but stopped because I had a headache from it. It became a vicious cycle of manic episodes, suicide attempts, collapse, and doctor visits.

I was put on several medications over a period of about 6 years. I barged through life with no concern whatsoever for my destructive choices and their effect on my family and loved ones. I ended up losing four children and two marriages due to my reckless and self-abusive Bipolar behavior. I was hospitalized twice. Because there were no support groups or educational avenues regarding my condition, I ceased taking meds altogether.

I became estranged from my family, I abandoned every adult responsibility to my name, I wrecked my car, I tried to kill myself, I blew all of my money and moved halfway across the nation on a whim with nothing but a duffel bag and .62 cents in my pocket. Three years ago I had the worst episode of my life. I walked out on my career, my husband, became a Meth addict, and eventually became homeless and penniless.

After waking up four days after a failed suicide attempt, I realized I was here for a reason. I realized that no one was going to help me but ME. So I crawled home with my tail between my legs...and there was my husband who never stopped for a minute believing in me, supporting me, loving me. We began a healing and recovery process that has resulted in me getting my life back....and I took it back with a vengeance. I claimed full responsibility for damage I had caused and the pain I had inflicted for so many years. I mended relationships, built burnt bridges and regained my confidence. I have made a remarkable recovery. I am also aware that I'm the exception to the rule.

Because I feel I've been blessed with a second chance at life, I have made it my life's calling to Mental Health Awareness and Education. I buckled down and started learning everything there was to know about Bipolar.

Someone very wise once told me: In order to defeat the dragon...you must first learn

his behavior. And that is the approach I took to my Bipolar. As cliché as it sounds, knowledge IS power. We can't just sit idly by, criticizing those with a mental illness, expecting them to just snap out of it. I feel that with power comes a great sense of duty and obligation. I feel like I have power over this disease. And because of this, I feel that I could help others just like me. To let them know that they are NOT alone. To help empower them with education and support. To expose my life and soul as an example for success. If I chose to do nothing with my recovery....then everything would have been in vain. I am no longer ashamed to say, I have Bipolar. I am no longer ashamed to say, I've made irreversible mistakes. I am no longer ashamed of ME. It's people like me...the artists, the writers, the outcasts of society, the misfit children hiding behind the tag of Difficult...that make this world such a colorful and fascinating place to be.

Just try not to over-look us. Try not to stereo-type and cast judgment. After all, some of the most brilliant minds of our time were minds just like mine. The Bipolar mind. A mind I'm proud to say is MINE. "I shall seize Fate by the throat; it shall certainly not bend and crush me completely." -- Ludwig van Beethoven: Composer, Genius, Bipolar