

Tired of the mental illness label detracting from the person

by Susie in Wyoming

I was born and raised in Southern Illinois, right outside of St. Louis. I really can't tell you when I first noticed my depression/Bi-polar illness. But from high school, which was 1972 and on, I have abused alcohol and drugs and overdosed several times which required hospitalization.

I never really fit in with the kids in high school. I got into the wrong crowd and experimented with drugs and alcohol heavily. I slept around a lot with everyone. My self-esteem was low, but it is when you run around with these people. Was it due to my condition? I feel now that it was. I joined the service in 1979 to get away from everything. I was 21 at the time. Then I realized the drugs on base we're worse than they we're at home, and I got caught up again. We went to the beach one weekend and partied hard. I went out and laid in the van trying to sleep the drugs/alcohol off and was raped by fellow service members. I tried to fight it off and only made it worse. I never reported it because they threatened me.

I am trying to get benefits for the rape now, but VA doesn't believe me. After the rape, my life had no meaning and I fought through it with my good ole standby, drugs & alcohol. I felt it was the only answer I had to deal with my problems.

While in the service I decided to marry my NCO. My parents begged me not to do it, but feeling I was an adult I went ahead and did it. We got out of the service and moved to Montana. While we we're there my best friend Cindy was raped and murdered in Texas. My life fell apart. I dealt with this on my own. My husband gave me no sympathy because he didn't like her.

I should have listened to my parents. This man who swore he loved me beat me, raped me and messed around on me. I put up with this for 15 years. I had two daughters from this marriage. Amber, who now is 26, and Ashlea is 25. Through this marriage I was in several psychiatric hospitals -- always being treated for depression. The problem was I never felt any better when I was sent home. I was thankful that my Mom was there to take care of my daughters. In 1994, I finally had the guts enough to file for divorce, but I overdosed on my pills. My daughters were in the house at the time. My friend came over and called the ambulance. They pumped my stomach and sent me to a private hospital. I spent 3 or 4 weeks there. I really can't remember. While I was there, I had 6 sets of shock treatments. For once, I felt better. I was released to my Mom and I stayed with them. All I can say is that I felt so much better.

I raised my daughters and life looked good. I started writing to a guy in Wyoming and we hit it off right away. Yes, now I see it was too soon, but I didn't see it then. He flew me out to meet him and we decided then that we would move in together. I went home, packed up and moved out to Wyoming. We got married in February 1995. My youngest daughter came with me, but my oldest refused because she was mad at me for my overdose. I can tell you right now that having bi-polar is HELL!! It has ruined my life and tore my family apart. I have two daughters who refuse to talk to me. I have three grandchildren who don't know me. This problem has caused me several times to cut.

My second marriage was going good, but I never really told him about my illness. I had hoped it disappeared. Well, in 2001, 3 days after 9/11, I cut myself. Why, I don't

know. I really don't remember it. I had my rights taken away and was sent to the State Hospital. I spent two weeks there and was told then that I had Bi-Polar. I finally knew what I had.

The only downfall was that I gained over 50 pounds. They took me off of the meds, but now I am still fighting the weight. It's a never-ending battle. Again, life looked good. But in 2003 they found a non-cancerous brain tumor that had to come out. So in August of 2003 I had the surgery, and I also suffer from blood clots. It is so hard handling all this. It puts me over the edge. I have ended up in the VA Hospital in Sheridan, Wyoming twice. The last time was this year from January to April. I was out of control. I decided to divorce my husband and move back to Illinois with my kids. It was the worse mistake of my life. Everything I had, I threw away.

I lasted not even two weeks and ended up in the VA Hospital in St. Louis. I spent a week there and called my ex-husband. He started to cry and I asked him if I could come home and he said, yes. He bought me a plane ticket and I flew home. We got remarried in May of this year. I am lucky. I have a husband who loves me and supports me. He has looked on the internet to find out about Bi-Polar. I have promised my family and husband that I would not cut anymore, which is hard. When I get stressed that is the first thing that comes to mind. My moods flare so bad. I don't even know who I am at times. I want all this to stop. I have no friends because when people find out what I have they go the other way. I didn't ask for this, it just happened, but people don't see it that way. I run into this all the time. I hate this. I am a good person. Why can't they see this? I am so tired of having a label put on me. So it's just me, my husband and our dog George.

We like to fish, so during the summer months we are always out on the lake. We live close to Yellowstone Park, so we go for drives there. I do a lot of crafts like make blue jean blankets at Christmas time for gifts. I am on SSI. My doctor feels that I can't work due to the stress. My husband is also on SSI so we live month to month. Only our priority bills get paid. We both get free medical care through the VA, which we are thankful for. I have to pay for my meds but it's not very much.

I talk to my husband a lot and pray a lot, and I have learned to take one day at a time. I am working really hard on letting go of the past. That subject is what makes me want to cut more than anything else. I think about my daughters, and I want to cut. I think about the assaults and I want to cut. That subject runs my life, but talking helps so much.

I am 50 years old fighting a illness worse than cancer. I was told last month they want to do a series of shock treatments on me again. Two weeks worth and then one a month. I want to do them. My family says no. They are afraid of the outcome. They worked before. It is my hope that they will work again.

I have a lot of soul searching to do. I would be flying home by myself and they are worried about that too. Just don't give up. I have finally found a doctor who knows about Bi-Polar.

Through all this, I must have had 7 different doctors. There is a rainbow out there somewhere and I am not going to give up. I will find it.