

Am I Bipolar?

The answer to that question is yes. You might ask, how did I know? When did I know? When did I get help? First of all, I have lived with it for decades and did nothing about my illness until I was 42, a long time to suffer. It took a tragedy in my life for me to assess my behavior and make changes.

For many years I was hypomanic, with no signs of depression and had unusual energy, commonly known as euphoria. During my bouts with mania, I would spend thousands of dollars on cars, clothes, musical instruments, etc. In fact, my wife at one time calculated how much I spent on automobiles, and it was to the tune of 600,000. I attribute my professional success to the support my family provided for me and my bipolar illness. The illness has been a double-edged sword. One may ask what do I mean when I say my illness was a double-edged sword? Being hypomanic allowed me to be creative and have endless energy. The downside of the manic behavior is the temper outbursts, inappropriate behavior and narcissistic tendencies.

I firmly believe if not for my family support, proper medication, spiritual beliefs, exercise, music, and proper counseling, I would not be here today writing this article on my journey to recovery. I wish that I had received the proper help before the age of 42, I am now 72 years of age, and as many say, better late than never.

In 1989, after experiencing difficulty in my personal life, and experiencing the highs and lows in my personality, with the help of my wife, I admitted myself into a mental health ward. At that time, I was diagnosed with Bipolar 2 disorder. I am very acquainted with the 4 levels of bipolar illness. I guess you can say that the illness wasn't as bad as it could have been. Having bipolar 2 has less frequency in unacceptable behavior. There is, also, a level of bipolar whereby euphoria and depression may occur more frequently. To be exact, more than four times in one year is considered to be what the profession explains as rapid cycling. There are more people affected with this illness than any other illness known to man. The research suggests that 40% of our population suffers from mental illness. Not only is a person with the illness affected, but husbands, wives, children, friends, and family members can suffer as well. There are many people who think anyone who is bipolar is crazy. Most people don't realize the illness is manageable and is no different than people who have other medical issues. Many people are unfamiliar, uninformed or both with the illness and think that it's a disease. That is a misnomer. It is my intention and mission to help anyone with the illness and to explain what it is and how to deal with it.

There are 3 main nonprofit organizations that are equipped to assist anyone who needs guidance and assistance with the mood disorder. These organizations all have support groups throughout the country. They are DBSA (Depression, Bipolar Support Alliance), NAMI (National Alliance for Mental Illness) and my organization, IAMH (International Alliance for Mental Health). They all publicize their meeting dates and locations on the internet. The stigma associated with bipolar is commonly known, and it can be very difficult for many who live with the illness to cope on a day-to-day basis. The people who describe it as a disease, categorize it as one who is crazy but it's not. In essence it's an illness. The stigma associated with the illness is fierce. For example, two of my family members would be embarrassed if my service animal was to accompany me to a restaurant, or a function, in fear that they would be embarrassed if asked why I had a service animal.

If I were asked what single important recovery tool is best to continue managing one's illness, my answer would be proper medication. When starting a medication, it may or may not be the correct, "cocktail," for you. However, trial and error is the only way one can find the proper medication. For example, when I first started taking medication for my illness, it was lithium, and it was not working for me. I was constantly tired, had no energy, became lethargic and had a loss of appetite. After several months of unsuccessful results, my therapist prescribed Wellbutrin. I continued with that medication for several years, but eventually it was no longer effective, which is not uncommon. Approximately 11 years ago I changed therapists, and she prescribed Lamictal, which I believe was a game changer and attributed to my success in managing my illness. The other four therapists I had were not effective but could have been for a multitude of reasons.

Finding a good therapist is one of the most important things you can do to be successful in therapy and to remain healthy. I would like to share with you my experience with my therapists. In the last 30 years I have had 5 therapists and only one was my saving grace. The other 4 therapists were ineffective. However, in all fairness to the profession, you can't always blame your therapist for being unsuccessful in your recovery. I can vividly remember how I was in denial, and not interested in getting better but knew I needed help. Thank God I found the right person to help me, and at that time I was ready to get help.

It is a known fact that Bipolar can be hereditary. Research has shown that the illness can skip generations. For example, although never diagnosed, both my parents' personalities suggests that both of them showed signs of the illness. In fact, from what I have been told, one or both of my grandparents exhibited signs of the same illness. One of my children has the illness and has done nothing about it. My family has attempted an intervention with no success. One thing I can tell you, if you are not ready to surrender to the illness you are dead in the water. **MAKE A DIFFERENCE AND GET HELP.** Go to my website and check it out IAMH.org.

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