

Introduction

*“The Mind is its own place,
and in itself can make a heaven of hell
and a hell of a heaven.”*

- John Milton

My Journey

Meet Yourself in the Middle is my personal account of living with Bipolar Disorder. The book recounts a five year period of my life during which, I experienced three major depressive episodes, and two manic episodes, each resulting in hospitalization. While reading my story, you will travel through three countries, seven cities, and into the depths of the wayfarer’s mind during the highs and lows of manic-depression. You will follow my anguished journey through a smorgasbord of psychiatric medications and psychological interventions. Come with me on the journey. Go with me on my path to recovery, and learn how my journey continues drug free, and asymptomatic of Bipolar Disorder.

Even if you are not personally affected by depression, bipolar, or anxiety, you will likely discover a little piece of yourself in my story. Much of what I cover throughout my narrative is universal and impacts all people in today’s modern world. I’ve thrown in a little humor along the way to ease the burden of seriousness shrouding the topic of mental illness.

My mother and I co-authored *Meet Yourself in the Middle*, the result of which is a story told from two very different points of view: 1) My viewpoint from inside my Bipolar nightmare - a personal account of what it’s like to live with depression and mania. 2) My mother’s perspective of watching me, her only daughter, decline into Bipolar disorder, and my associated suffering.

Depression in Modern Society

Diagnosis and treatment of depression has reached epidemic levels. It is unlikely that any of us escape the effects of this disease. Even if we have not suffered from depression personally, we all know someone who has been affected, or who is still suffering from this mind-crippling plague. Approximately 19,000,000 Americans have been diagnosed with depression. Additionally, there are many undiagnosed people who suffer in silence. I know of this from first-hand experience, as my father was just such a person. Search “depression” online, and close to 10,000,000 replies appear. These numbers, while staggering, are just an indication of the epidemic proportion of depression in modern society.

Many definitions of depression exist, however, it is basically a state of mind wherein one experiences a deep, unshakable sadness, and diminished interest in all activities, and the outside world. Depression is formally diagnosed, by the medical profession, when a patient's morose feelings persist for more than two weeks preventing one from functioning in top form at work or socially. Doctors call this *clinical*, or *major*, depression. Psychiatry defines depression as a chemical imbalance in the brain, which causes nerves in the brain to function improperly. My personal definition of depression is a complete lack of joy or worthiness in all areas of one's life.

Depression has become such a socially prevalent illness that millions of adults and children take antidepressants to manage symptoms of the disorder. Somehow, it has become normal that people are unable to find joy and happiness in their lives. This physical experience we call life has reduced many to such tremendous amounts of pain, and despair that they reach uncontrollably for medication to numb their pain. Medication, while a resource, is not the ultimate answer. In order to fully treat depression, we must discover the root unhappiness and imbalance inside of us to reach fulfillment and happiness. Such healing will provide longer-term contentment than medication ever will.

Healing Thyself

My experience shows that focusing attention on ways of avoiding and preventing the disorder altogether is more productive than treating symptoms when they appear. For each individual, teachings, techniques and tools to achieve balance and happiness will be different. My story demonstrates the change that happens inside when you reach for joy, freedom and growth in your life.

Just as a dark room is void of light, depression is void of joy. Much in the same way that you would eliminate the darkness of a room by flooding it with light, my story offers ways to eliminate the darkness of depression by flooding your mind with new thought patterns, thus, bringing about a more harmonious way of living and feeling.

Telling My Story

Sooner or later we all have to come face to face with the question of who we are. We are not our body, we are not our mind, and we are not our emotions. So who are we? We are, in fact, much more than we can imagine. We are spiritual beings having a human experience, rather than the converse. When we begin to see beyond the world of form and into a realm of infinite possibilities, we begin our long journey home. We wake up from our long slumber, and start to heal our lives.

It's kind of ironic that I consider myself to be a quick learner, and yet I was pretty slow on the uptake to heed most of the lessons provided me during the dark period of my life! I have since connected the dots and now offer this story to you.

Inside Bipolar

The very nature of Bipolar is a paradoxical phenomenon. Depression and mania are contradictory states. They are a complimentary pair, showing up as major imbalances in the psyche. When a person is within normal range there seems to be a balance between the extremes. In my case the imbalance was so significant that it caused a flip from one end to the other resulting in extreme polarity (aka Manic Depression). Mania feels amazing, euphoric and joyful. Depression feels: heavy, dense, dark, and painful.

Some say that mania occurs when a person is standing in both the physical and non-physical dimensions of the universe at the same time. I can attest that manic feelings are: blissful, joyful, omniscient, and omnipresent - a connection with all that is. I have since come to know that these manic qualities can best be described as a sense of ultimate knowing and awareness, however, words can only express the actual feelings in a much less dramatic way than what occurs during most typical manic episodes.

Depression is the ultimate misalignment with self. With depression, the mind takes over, and creates noise that keeps one stuck in a downward spiral of negative thinking. Nothing, and I mean nothing, inside depression is enjoyable. Instead, everything is lacking and painful, emotionally and physically. During my depressive episodes, I felt as though I was surrounded by rolling black clouds of doom - completely hopeless and helpless.

Throughout my experiences with Bipolar, I talk continuously about noise in my mind. In the manic state, these thoughts were fun and adventurous, and gave me lots of energy—so much energy that I stopped sleeping for days. The noise manifests in one's mind and makes rapid-fire connections between events and people. Filters that we normally use to process the world have disappeared, and all data simultaneously enters the brain at one time, continuously until the mania ends. Everything is much more intense, like drinking pure concentrated soda flavors without adding carbonated water. Mania causes a feeling of being totally connected to everyone, and everything, both exciting, and overwhelming at the same time.

The noise occurs quite differently in the depressed state. Here it shows up as repeated, circular thinking that is inescapable. It is like listening to a broken record that is stuck on a section of track that is full of negative words and energy.

These negative thoughts attract other thoughts that are negative, and the downward spiral continues. There is no sense of connection to current events. Everything appears as a memory with all the outcomes of the memories being pitiable. No one likes to hang around with the “Neg Head” in the crowd. Imagine realizing that the negative one is you and there is no escape! Sleep lets one escape for a time, but when you wake up the negativity is waiting. There is no relief in sight, no reprieve, no hole in the noise for a smile, a joke or a song. - just more of the same, negative noise killing your spirit, will, and desire. The only real escape seems to be to take a vacation from oneself.

There are few personal accounts from inside the experience of Bipolar. Usually, anyone who has recovered will not want to recount their journey, which is tantamount to re-living it. Even if someone wanted to; the internal chaos of the disorder renders it difficult to recall details of the experience. The illness itself impacts memory, recall, and ability to see clearly. In addition, psychiatric drugs further impair function, rendering detailed accounts a scarcity.

When I felt myself tumbling into Bipolar disease, I did not consciously decide to write a book of my adventures. Unconsciously, though, I knew that I was embarking on a grave journey that I should document. I kept detailed journals during the five year period of my Bipolar episodes; thus, a complete account of what actually happened, and all of the nuances are available for me to share. While traveling through the chaos surrounding my descent into mental illness you will marvel at the miracle that allowed the journals to survive intact. Included throughout the book are some of the actual pages taken from the aforementioned journals. In addition, there are copies of some of the letters exchanged between my mother and me, shedding light on the darkest areas of my journey through madness. From these letters and journals, for myself, and for the benefit of others affected by the Bipolar label I offer the following book.