

Speaking from Experience

Bipolar Disorder

Transcript for chapter 1 of 9: Diagnosis

Carole (21 years since diagnosis): I was in a serious depression for about fourteen to fifteen months. It wasn't until after that time - around about that time after fourteen months - I actually went onto a high, and that's when the diagnosis was established.

Eva (6 years since diagnosis): I was fifteen when I first got my diagnosis of Bipolar Mood Disorder. But I had symptoms, I suppose, before that - both depressed and manic if you like.

Margaret (Eva's mother): In fact, Eva's initial symptoms were picked up by people who taught her. I think that although it was frustratingly long for us, it seemed a long time, I think in one sense Eva is lucky that she was diagnosed at a younger age than she might otherwise have been.

Richard (18 years since diagnosis): I first probably found out when I was about twenty-one, when I was in the last year of an Economics Degree at Melbourne University. Now, I'd had quite a few times before then in my life when there had been periods where I had just been very, profoundly sad - that's probably the best word I can use to describe it. I mean, even as far back as the age of thirteen. It wasn't like I was a lonely, only child. I had three younger brothers and I played quite a bit of sport at school. You know, it wasn't like I lived an isolated existence.

Bill (6 years since diagnosis): The first major one, knowing that I had bipolar, was in 1994... '94, after Anne died. 1995, 1996, 1997 - I had three... four of them. Each had the same thing. I was always fearful that I was going to get another one. And it did come.

David and Donné (2 years since Donné's diagnosis): I mean, initially for me, to be diagnosed with a mental illness, when all my life I'd had this determination that that doesn't apply to me - having seen what my own mother had gone through, and my grandmother - so having that knowledge was a really hard one to come to terms with.

Richard: Well, I think it was Easter, so it would've been April or May in 1984, that I ended up spending some time in hospital. And then I started seeing a specialist, a psychiatrist. It wasn't actually that hard, and it didn't take that long, before I started getting some, you know, some sort of diagnosis. So it wasn't a long time. But I think maybe it would've been a good idea if something... if I'd found a way or somebody had found a way to maybe make something happen that maybe four or five years earlier.

Carole: Nothing was working. I had attempted twice to commit suicide. And I was a very lucky girl actually, to be here today. So when I actually got the diagnosis, I felt relieved.

David and Donné: In a lot of cases, the person who is manic can be taken to a psychiatrist and appear to be completely well. You can pull it off.

Margaret: One of the first things that happened was that it was suggested that I should see a psychiatrist on a regular basis, for analysis of the problem. I took that to mean that I was



suspect number one in my daughter's illness. And that was really quite hard because I had to go along with it, I had to say, "Yes, yes, I will do anything."

David and Donné: There are people I've spoken to who have Bipolar One, and that's what we're talking about here, who remained undiagnosed for many, many years and suffered greatly because of it. And they were treated incorrectly - they were given drugs for Schizophrenia, for example, which of course is not effective.

Margaret: When I think back, another thing that strikes me is how much information you need for a correct diagnosis with a thing like this.

Eva: I remember I used to get a pain in my chest, and for some reason I used to think that this is the pain I get when I hate myself, when I know that I hate myself. I didn't think any more about that, but they were very negative feelings about myself and everything that was going on. And then I just came out of that eventually. I couldn't go on like that. I welled up and all of this emotion came out. And I started crying in the middle of a school play.

Margaret: It was so cyclical. Her behavioural changes went in a cycle, which suggested to me that there was something bodily wrong. In fact, I had good reason to think that it was in some way hormonal, because she had the psychosis when she reached puberty.

Eva: It was a major relief to receive a diagnosis, a name for all of these troubles and for this behaviour. I guess in a sense it was like having, not an excuse, but you felt that there was some justification for your behaviour.

Carole: With Bipolar illness, you actually have very long periods of wellness and so I at once, from being given that diagnosis, felt relieved but then sort of take on that burden of slowly getting to recovery. And for me it has always been a very slow recovery.