



Speaking from Experience Bipolar Disorder

Transcript for chapter 3 of 9: Impact on lifestyle

Carole (21 years since diagnosis): I found that there were a lot of losses. For instance, I lost my home, I lost custody of my children, I lost friends, I lost members of my family.

Eva (6 years since diagnosis): My day to day life was always unpredictable. I always knew that there was a sense that at any time, I could become manic – Which was my worst fear – or depressed.

David & Donné (2 years since Donné's diagnosis): I'll give you an example; recently we had a very stressful situation going on. As a consequence of that, I wasn't getting as much sleep as I needed – and I do need a lot of sleep. And once anyone with bipolar has a lack of sleep; you're heading towards a manic episode. It'll trigger a manic episode. So, it was very stressful, lack of sleep, and suddenly there were little warning signs. Very, very tiny warning signs that, hang on, you go without much more sleep and have much more stress, it can quickly tip over into mania.

Eva: When I'm becoming manic, I don't just wake up one morning and I'm really manic. It starts with, what they call, hyper-manic. If it can be curbed at that stage, often you can prevent anything really, from going wrong.

David & Donné: I know that my 'up' phase has certainly affected decisions I've made in my life – whether they've been good or bad. I'd be in a stable job, for example, for 9-10 years and then suddenly, as I said, I met the father of my two kids and I was off living in Vanuatu. I wouldn't have done those exciting things, I guess, if I hadn't have been manic.

Carole: Although it's very hard when you're on a high to realise that you are. And you become quite irritable when people tell you that what you're doing isn't quite appropriate. However, this nurse that I particularly like came to work one night, for night-duty, wearing red and black. Suddenly those colours just sort of bounced at me and they absolutely terrified me, to the point where, she was walking towards me and I had to put my arms out in front of me and say, "no no don't come near me". Eventually, they settled me down. The next day, I kept seeing people in red and black.

David & Donné: I've only experienced one, what I'd call, psychotic episode with Donné. It was back in June, just before she went to hospital. That was one of the most scary things I've ever experienced. I had no idea what I was facing. The behaviour was so irrational and so way off. This thing of colours, as she mentioned, colours assumed personalities. Red could mean evil, it could be of the devil. Or, it could be happiness. It just depended on the moment and the situation, whether it was safe. Black was another one. Black and red were two colours that were particularly significant.

Bill (6 years since diagnosis): I thought I could tackle anything, but of course you can't. You've got to be brought down to a level where you see reality again. There's the unreality down below, and the unreality up the top. You've got to reach this level, I know in my life I always look for the balance. Mental, spiritual, social and physical. You must have a balance



in life. If you get out of kilter with anyone of them, you're in trouble. I enjoyed life, I suppose, when I was high because people see you as a bit more happier than you were. You're not happy when you're down. When you get to a level, you feel happier still.

Eva: I don't think there are that many things you can't do with bipolar. As long as you're careful, as long as you monitor the effect it's going to have on you. If you're taking medication, it depends what medication you're on. I don't have much alcohol. I have maybe one standard drink per night, when I go out. That's enough for me. I never get drunk. I find I have the natural highs anyway, so it's ok.

Margaret (Eva's mother): I guess your life changes enormously when you have anyone who's sick, particularly when you have someone who has a behavioural disorder. Or, who has an illness that affects their behaviour in such a drastic way, as manic depression. I was bringing up two girls, and Eva's older sister is four years older than her. I suppose there's another problem, which affects lots of families, which is that your life inevitably becomes centred around the person who is ill. But, at the same time, you've got to think of the other people in the family.