

Speaking from Experience Living with Bipolar Disorder USA

Transcript for Chapter 1 of 9: Diagnosis

Jan –

At first, I just started to have bouts of depression. And I would go from... about to...ya know feeling a little bit, ya know euphoric, right? But I didn't know that back then so I started on a journey and first I thought, ok maybe it has to do with my cycle. And I went and got help hormonally. And then I also changed my diet... ya know, no sugar, no caffeine, no alcohol, all of that, with exercising. And then I went into therapy because I thought maybe I need to deal with that. And then that wasn't working. And then I switched my career. I went from doing marketing, graphic design and I went down and worked in the outdoors. I was living on a 2,000-acre ranch in Santa Fe, New Mexico. And I was lucky enough to be working with...doing outdoor, ya know, it was with ropes courses and stuff. I just went for it. And was lucky enough to work with a clinical psychologist who was training us for...because we were doing management consulting and stuff...anyway. And she basically said you're clinically depressed. I had no idea what that meant.

Todd –

My mother was schizophrenic so my entire childhood was taking care of her. It was...I wasn't sure what was going on but when I was about 5 or 6 I remember realizing that there was something wrong with me too. There was no middle ground. It was always...I was really happy or really sad or really angry or really elated. There was never any real balance.

Nadine –

My school days and my early life were marked with a lot of strong discipline trying to get me to behave like other people do which I ...ya know, I laughed inappropriately, I cried inappropriately.

Alexandra & Thomas -

I'm not sure when it began because for that there was drugs...I mean, there's been a number of deaths, triggers, of post-traumatic things of mine and it all began at 5 years old so it's hard to say when the mental illness really began.

Tom –

I'm a person that has a diagnosis of bipolar disorder with recurrent depression. And I did not have a diagnosis until I was 38 years old. The reason why I was diagnosed at that time and my initial diagnosis was depression was that I had a very acute onset of depression. And I went from a space of about...during a space of about three weeks to living a normal family life with a good job and so forth to being on the floor in a therapist's office saying I was very depressed and didn't feel like I could function.

Avonelle –

When I really starting recognizing that there might be some mental disorder going on...ya know, I realized that my interpretation of incidents were a little different than other peoples'. And although I was confident that my interpretation was correct, it did make me question whether or not my interpretation was everyone else's reality.

Tom –

Some of the early signs that I had, when I was younger and didn't have a diagnosis is I had a period of lowered mood following the break-up of an important relationship when I was about 19. And then I also noticed when I was in college, I was getting by on a very low amount of sleep. When I look back on that now, I realize that that was probably a sign of mania. I was getting by during one year of college on about 4 hours of sleep a night.

Avonelle –

I don't really remember my 30s because I was super high half of it and super low half of it. I have little snip-shots but that's how extreme I was and I was hospitalized I think probably like 3 or 4 times as a result of my depression or my mania.

Alexandra & Thomas -

I remember lots of hospital visits that always seemed to end the same way. She would come home and not really be able to come out of bed for very long. Three and a half years. And I remember a lot of medication switches.

Todd -

In 1998, I took a bottle of iron steroid pills and tried to end my life and I was diagnosed Bipolar I. So that was the real... the first concrete diagnosis.

Jan -

There's different diagnoses. Bipolar I is...because not every person that's bipolar gets way low and way high. Some people do. Bipolar I is a person gets more of the highs and may not come down as low. For myself, I'm Bipolar II and what that is is I don't really get much of a high but I get deep depression. So, actually there are different stabilizers for those two conditions.

Nadine -

A lot of things changed for me when I was told that I had bipolar. I felt that there was an answer, there was like an a-ha moment of "so there's something we can do about this." I had struggled to feed myself, house myself and my daughter, get through high school...like I had a horrible time getting through high school and early adulthood. And later in life, after my daughter was raised and I had done a few things and was told that I was bipolar, I felt like I could do something and actually change my life.