



Bipolar Disorder

A STORY SELDOM TOLD

So, a story seldom told is one I write today, which if you read as fast as I do and get distracted as much as me, might take a few turns.

I was diagnosed with Bipolar (rapid cycle), at 13 years old, although the signs had been there for quite a while before this. Later in my life, I was also diagnosed with ADHD and Asperger's syndrome (a double whammy). If only I'd known this much earlier, it would have explained my brain and behaviours to me. Now I

understood that I wasn't crazy and that it wasn't just a case of not fitting in. I had real issues.

SCHOOL STRUGGLES

During my school years, my violent temper meant I was always in fights and found school really challenging. I could never get things right and was labelled a problem child. However nothing changed when I was diagnosed - the fights continued and my schoolwork went down the tubes. My last fight was the final straw for my school and I was "kindly"



asked to leave in grade 10 and the school gates closed behind me, telling me never to return.

This was the first of many failures in my life, and although it

was difficult to find other people with similar stories, I eventually realised I wasn't alone in my journey.

THE NEED FOR UNDERSTANDING

You see, the road to walk with any mental illness is not easy, and judgements comes so quickly from people not knowing the truth, nor what it entails, yet the understanding comes from within. It's all about knowing your own problem and illness and how to better control and deal with it.

As any person with Bipolar knows only too well, going on and off medication your whole life is a cruel cycle. You get some meds from the doctor which make you feel so good that you feel you don't need them anymore (obviously all from the voices in your head), then you hit the low, and you go back on the meds like a merry go round, thinking it will never get better than this.

I can't say I'm normal, I'm not but I can function just as well as the next person. By keeping my disorders a secret I've proved for the most part that I'm able to continue as a "normal" person.

I must tell you writing this is a big deal for me as those of you reading this are the first people outside my family to know my story. For 26 years I have kept my little secret and for good reason. People (friends, the workplace etc) don't want to know about mental illness, nor understand it. Welcome to the mentally "challenged". Tell someone you have bipolar disorder and they think you're about to start a campaign of mass murder, tell them you're on the autism spectrum and they wonder how you can cope and work without having a permanent carer. I just want to say – F*** IT – try understanding me, and help me support others with the same feelings. Although it's taken me 20 odd years to understand and accept my conditions myself, I feel I can make a difference in spending time with those who

don't feel as comfortable talking about it as I do now.

So, if I had to describe my life from the start I'd say it's like a wild rollercoaster, no warning of the start where you can see yourself going up slowly until you hit the top - man that feels great up with the birds, and all of a sudden down you drop, how far and how fast, with the measure of a really great rollercoaster being when it hits the end of the track.... and you go backwards.

THE WORKPLACE

I've had more jobs than I care to remember, some of which I've just walked out of. I've been fired for various reasons, admittedly some were not my fault (again another wonderful thing you keep hearing - nothing is ever my fault) and some well, I guess I just didn't fit in. But if I had to start blaming everything and everyone I would start with – I'm bipolar – it's an unfortunate trait as we just can't keep a job, My Asperger's means I'm not a people person, which is why I've kept it to myself. I don't blame my bipolar disorder and I won't start now.

Over and above all this I have major rage issues. 20+ years ago when I started as a chef that wasn't a problem, chefs were grumpy with foul tempers and worse vocabulary, and didn't have to care about anything but themselves. Unfortunately, that was the only place it was accepted, and luckily I was given the nickname of Ramsey.

Having bipolar disorder it's really difficult managing being depressed or at another level on top of the world, balancing this with a work life, one word that describes this is "masks". You become the great pretender - no-one ever knows what you're really going through. My advice

would be to tell everyone you have a disorder but that your disorder does not have you. Tell them you're on 15 tablets a day, and most importantly educate the uneducated. Assure them they have no reason to be scared of you, but when you're sitting at your desk and the tears are pouring, maybe, just maybe a friendly hand on your shoulder would go a long way. Let them really see you, everything will be ok, you don't need to hide anymore and they don't need to be afraid.

I've been on my meds now for almost 10 years and had to come to terms with the fact that I'll be on them for the rest of my life. This was a hard realisation to come to but I guess it had to happen. With my wife I've had to learn that simply relying on my meds doesn't give me a free pass nor are they the answer to everything and a promise of an uneventful life. It's extremely hard work. Sadly, recently I tried to commit suicide and my wife saved my life. I can tell you the only way I got out of that hospital was because of my family, and if that is what I have to hang onto for the rest of my life then I'm richer than most people.

So to sum it all up – life happens. This means knowing who and what you are and actually understanding yourself, and accepting it all. Life gives hard knocks, and so we go up and down to become better people. All I can say, it's HARD, and even HARDER with mental issues. I understand, and I can compare cards and quotes and everything in between. However, living with these masks, makes us stronger, better heroes – but actually living this life can be amazing!

