

Bipolar disorder can ruin lives, destroy hope, smother potential, and even kill. It can also be a gift. Through my first hand experience with bipolar disorder, I have not only overcome adversity, I have learned to utilize my tribulations to improve my life and expand my insight. Through periods of seemingly unbearable pain and hopelessness, the support of my family and friends gave me the strength to keep going, to get up every morning, to believe in a future I was not always sure I wanted. I believe that all things happen for a reason; I have overcome the struggle of bipolar disorder and plan to use my experience to help others in the battle against mental illness.

By ninth grade, I had already been suffering from chronic clinical depression for years. All of my youthful memories were jaded by a sense melancholy; although surrounded by friends and family, I constantly felt completely alone in the world. Through junior high school and my sophomore year of high school, I suppressed my emotions, afraid that admitting my overwhelming depression would cause others to see me as weak. My health became jeopardized by various disorders, including acid reflux disease and severe migraines. Within a two-year period, I passed over five kidney stones.

Weekly trips to various doctors left me feeling anxious over my health, not to mention hopeless in response to the lack of any effective treatment. The severity of my depression increased steadily, until I no longer could sleep, think clearly, or even cry anymore. I had been on antidepressants for about a year when I began to experience antidepressant-induced anxiety. I became even more withdrawn to the point of becoming suicidal. Despite my complaints to my therapist and psychiatrist, I could not get my medicine changed. After months of forcing myself to push on and just trying to get through the moment, let alone the day, I attempted to take my life. Although I realize now that there was hope, at the time I felt that death would be less painful than life.

I spent a week at the local hospital as a inpatient, devoting my days to therapy and recovering both mentally and physically. My life is far too precious to give up, but I needed help to come to the realization that I can not only survive, I can live. Through extensive therapy, I was re-diagnosed as bipolar and given a new antidepressant along with a mood stabilizer. Following my hospital stay, I completed two weeks in the Partner's Program participating in group therapy. Although I became quite anxious over the work I was missing at school, I was determined to follow my recovery plan and to conquer the disorder that almost conquered me. I successfully completed my time at Partners just before Christmas and received the best gift of my life: total appreciation for my family. I returned to my junior year with a new found determination to make the most of my education and my life.

Since my initial recovery, I have experienced a few relapses into depression and anxiety and I have come to recognize that there will always be bad days. However, there will always be good days, too: a realization that gives me the strength and motivation to pursue my goals. Next year, I will enter a college in Pennsylvania as a psychology major. I hope to use my experience and insight into mental illness to help others find the path to recovery that I have found through my struggle. Although bipolar disorder leaves permanent scars, it has also left me with confidence, perseverance, hope, and appreciation. Life to me is not a given; it is a gift, and I would not trade my experiences for the world. The struggle of my high school years as a bipolar student has taught me that the best way to overcome adversity is to appreciate it.