

## **Living with Bipolar Disorder in a Normal World**

Being Mentally Ill presents many interesting scenarios. There are times that one tries to keep up with those around him and there are times that those around him can't keep up with him. Then there are times that one doesn't know what direction they are going.

I had a couple of appointments this week with regards to my Mental Illness. I knew that things were "right" but not severe. I just wasn't feeling the way I thought I should be feeling. When this happens anxiety builds as well. After a therapy session and a psychiatrist's appointment, we discovered that I had begun what is defined as a Mixed Episode. The clinical definition of a Mixed Episode states that one is entering both into a hypo manic episode along with a depressive episode. In an effort to educate I will share what this has been like for me.

First and foremost I have no idea how I will be feeling the next hour of the day, let alone the next day. I can get a flood of great ideas, but don't have the physical energy to carry them out. I also get an idea and by the time I sit down at my desk, have completely forgotten what the idea was. This goes on non-stop 24/7. Sleeping has been an issue even though I am exhausted and because my defenses are down; my sleeping is haunted by the flashbacks and worry of the present and future. To say that this is exhausting would probably be an understatement.

Additionally, it is very hard to articulate what it is like to be in such a strange phase. One minute I am laughing the next I am near tears. One minute I am optimistic, the next fearful. All the while, I am trying as hard as I possibly can to control these moods.

Mixed Episodes are dangerous for many reasons; including the highest rate of suicides happen during a Mixed Episode – when depression meets the courage of hypo mania to follow through with such a desperate attempt. I am fortunate enough to have caught this episode before it escalates to that extreme.

As I sat in the doctor's office, I looked at him with complete frustration. "What can I do to prevent this? What more can I do to control these episodes – since being home I have felt a million different ways and I feel as though I am doing all that I know how to do!" My doctor replied, "Cory, when will you understand that this is your illness and it is not your fault. You are doing what you can do – you realized the symptoms, you made a list of how you feel and gave it to me and now we address it with a medication therapy that can stabilize you. Nothing external caused this! Your illness will always exist no matter what you do. We will treat it as it comes, there is no cure all."

I guess that is supposed to be comforting, but it isn't. It is yet another realization that my mind has its own agenda and it can change direction on me without my consent. It is another reminder that I have a life-long illness. Another reminder that I will battle this part of me that has been so destructive forever, no matter what I do.

On the way home, I was thinking to myself, I just want to lock my bedroom door and curl up in bed until this passes. My moods affect everyone because no one wants to see someone they care about go through these changes. Plus it is frustrating – one minute you acknowledge an address one mood, then the next minute you are looking at something different.

Living with Bipolar in a normal world is strange because it is another entity, an unwelcomed guest in what I try to make a peaceful life. It is not exactly empowering as a 38 year old man to say, “My mind just doesn’t feel right, I just need to be alone or do my own thing.” It is embarrassing to not be able to commit to anything from day to day because who knows how am going to feel tomorrow, next week or the next month.

One of the reasons that I write this is because lately I have been reading a lot of case studies and the one thing I have found purely frustrating are the statements made by those around the consumer. Excuse statements. Statements that in the past I have heard made about me: “He is just using Mental Illness as an excuse; he is lazy, etc...” Ironically, it is those that make those statements that are giving the excuse for not caring and not taking on their responsibility for helping to maintain the illness rather than worsening it!” I have nothing to make an excuse for. In fact, I look at my life and can’t wait to start living it again more fully. Most of what I read is simply true of the symptoms and life of a Bipolar person... People don’t want it to be so, so they judge and simplify something that is quite serious. This makes a person suffering these symptoms feel very inadequate and even guilty for something that isn’t their fault.

The other reason I write this is to educate people on the fact that no matter how “in control”, “talented”, or “determined” you may be – you must stand constant guard of the illness. I know how frustrating it is to have an illness that is not treated as an illness but as a character flaw, laziness, or a weakness. I am very fortunate to have many people that do not label me with these pathetic labels. But I assure you I have plenty in my life that do. You cannot

concentrate on those that don't understand or care or don't take your illness with any validity. You must concentrate on you and what you need to do to stabilize your illness. It is real, it is serious and it is something that can kill you just as easily as Cancer. There are people in the world that do know that and understand it. Surround yourself with those that do and do not allow those that don't to simplify you or your illness because their ignorance.

So, how are we treating the Mixed Episode? We have started a 5 week medication therapy to address, directly the episode. At 6 weeks blood work will be done to see where things are. I started a journal of feelings and symptoms on Day 1 of the new medication therapy and hope to see progress throughout the next 5 weeks – but if I don't, I will have a journal of what has happened and this will give my doctor and therapist the information they need to further treat me.

Communication with your treatment team is essential. They are mental health professionals, not mind readers – you must give them the information necessary to treat your illness.

Last but not least. It is times like this that I become even more compassionate with those that are suffering with mental illnesses. It immediately puts my priorities and heart in the right place and that place is to do all that I can do to help bring awareness, education and compassion to the cause with mental illness. You as a consumer are not alone, you are not forgotten and you are no less a person than anyone else. I am you in mental illness and you are me – while we cannot cure the disease, we can cure the ignorance that surrounds it that makes our lives more painful than it needs to be.

God Bless,  
Cory