

I don't remember the day I was diagnosed with Bipolar 1 disorder. You could chalk it up to me simply being forgetful. I mean, we as human beings experience so much in our lifetime, but can only remember so little of it. But I remember that day, but not which day it was. Because after that day it seemed like the days blended together. A slow, cancerous apprehension rising like the oceans was slowly swallowing up every piece of land until everything was beyond shadows. I remember the doctor's face as he told me the diagnosis, feeling like my ability to choose in life was taken from me and more. It felt devastating.

I was in highschool, and struggling with the horrible effects the disorder was having on my life at the time. I attended school online, having switched over from another school due to prior issues. When I was first diagnosed, I hoped maybe if I treated the source of my Bipolar disorder, then maybe everything would go back to normal. Like treating a cancerous tumor. Of course mental health is a lot more complicated than I thought it was. And my issues weren't going to go away so easily.

For months I barely did any school work. I was sleeping a lot, existing in a plane of half existence as I glided around like a ghost mentally. I lacked so much energy that I ended up drinking multiple pots of coffee a day. It became my crutch, and as my legs buckled underneath the stress of the disorder, so did I consume more coffee until I totaled sometimes around fifty cups a day. I just had no energy. Everything felt like more effort than it actually was.

Bipolar disorder is terrifying in ways that people don't understand completely unless they've experienced for themselves. For me, and I won't speak for everyone who goes through it because everyone's experience is different, it was like my very essence

as a person was being stolen from me. It felt like my body wasn't my own sometimes. It moved against me like someone else was at the helm of my brain. My brain felt like it was being messed with, the high aggravation of mania and the stone grasp of depression swirling around in my head like yin and yang. One side is like the North Pole and the other the South Pole. It was terrifying to feel like you're not of your own will completely. That sheer terror is hard to describe. Horror movies pale in comparison to that.

Somehow, I managed to pull myself together just long enough to complete what school work I needed and graduate highschool, even somehow being invited to the National Honor Society.

I definitely felt like I didn't deserve it. In my half haze of existing I half assed work like my math and guessed questions nine times out of ten. And yet I still graduated with modest scores. Maybe I did deserve it, I have trouble recognizing my own worth sometimes. Especially after my diagnosis. My self-esteem took a huge dive and it became really hard to see the things that I did mattered or were of any good quality.

I would consider myself a writer. I was writing before the disorder, and after the disorder. But not as much as I should've been. The disorder messed me up, and I put up my pen to focus more on the issues at hand that were stemming from Bipolar disorder. It feels like a luxury being able to now indulge in my passion, even though I am still a bit hesitant at times to do so just from my previous way of thinking.

Of course after high school everything became vastly different. I wasn't a high school student anymore, I was soon to be a college student, hopefully. College seemed like an unconquerable beast, dwelling at the end of the maze and awaiting its prey. My

goal was originally meant to pursue a degree in writing and help me become an author. But my mental health was terrible after everything I had gone through, and I just didn't feel ready for college as much as I tried. I refused to acknowledge how I felt and proceeded along with going to college.

The buildup to the first day of college was one of sheer helpless frozen dread. So helpless in fact I forgot to register my classes way ahead of time. Because of not doing it way ahead of time like I should've, they didn't even have room for me in the mandatory introductory class and I had to work with the staff to get a spot. It caused me so much distress, I felt like a failure. After dealing with the unhelpful college staff, I eventually began to question if I should just withdraw. The decision had to be made soon before I wasted any of the money I had gotten sent there.

And I did end up withdrawing, then having to deal with more people to get everything sorted. Also to make sure all the money was returned as well.

I usually procrastinated the idea of thinking about college anymore after that, despite being nudged by my loved ones to do so. It felt like an impossible task, so I ended up going in a circle. Feelings coming and going as I tried to figure out what I wanted to do with myself. It was hard not to get discouraged and blame myself over everything that had happened. I felt like I needed to work harder.

Time felt like a blur as the days began to bleed together. Wake up, sleep; wake up, sleep; wake up, sleep again. There was a maddening monotony to it, and I was still struggling with my mental health. I felt lost. But I wanted to better it as hard and painful as it was going to be. I wanted things to be better.

When you're trying to better yourself, you first realize that this is going to be a lot harder than you think it'll be. It isn't some afternoon excursion full of self-reflection and positive growth. Well meaning platitudes mean nothing to the process that it is. It hurt me so much at first because I didn't take my health seriously and began to realize this wasn't a simple problem that I could fix in a day. I thought I could just jump over one hurdle and the rest of the path would be a steady jog. Let me tell you, there wasn't just one hurdle. Honestly, as someone who has watched a lot of horror movies over his lifetime so far, you would expect my horror movie sense to kick in and say something isn't right here.

I think sometimes we find it easy to discriminate and make assumptions about people with mental health disorders. Their behaviors are easy to be offended by, and it's even easier to judge them as people as a whole. But people that suffer from mental disorders are victims of unfortunate circumstances. I've faced that discrimination before. A friend of mine learned that I had Bipolar 1 disorder and said I basically couldn't be trusted. Discrimination like this isn't an uncommon thing. Whether people who suffer mental health disorders choose to seek treatment and take care of themselves are a different matter. But of good and bad, they are all still victims of circumstance one way or another.

After dealing with all I've dealt with the last few years, it's given me a lot of empathy. I'll admit I haven't always been the best about taking care of myself before. For a while I was really neglectful, I didn't even eat sometimes. I also didn't really talk about what I was going through with other people, not even my own parents. I felt like I

couldn't trust people as silly as that sounds. Bipolar disorder is scary, and it definitely made me feel alone.

The first step to getting better is to definitely seek treatment. Treatment can make the difference between literal life and death. As a person that has gone through all this, to explain it is both hard and devastating. Not all who have mental disorders have the means to seek proper treatment, not accounting for different circumstances. And some even refuse treatment, for different reasons. But disorders, like Bipolar disorder, never get better on their own, just worse. I wouldn't be the man I am today if I hadn't sought treatment. If I hadn't sought treatment, God only knows what would've happened to me. I don't want to think about it. Most people aren't lucky like me, or willing to do their part.

A well meaning attitude and a desire for change at first glosses over the reality of change itself. Change is hard, a heavy toll on the brain as it works out new quirks and ideas into its foundation. It doesn't account for changes in your life that come along: getting older, your body changing, circumstances outside your control, more things than you can expectantly prepare for. I realized this as I tried to come into my own person. Reflecting on everything, I realized I needed a lot of change.

My relationships with other people needed to change for the better. I loved my friends, but they weren't healthy for me to be around. There is such a thing as loving someone, but them being bad for you to be around. It was beginning to damage my health.

Because of that I ended a lot of my relationships. A lot of my habits and my social engagements were not healthy for me. Topping it off with toxic family drama that was especially hard to disconnect myself from entirely. But I really felt it about my family after

my great grandfather passed away. I needed to focus on myself, and finally cut the rope with them all for good.

My great grandfather taught me a lot indirectly growing up around him. Hard work, humor, and taking care of the people you love, even if they don't appreciate it in return. I loved him. Went to the funeral. He married three times and outlived his first two wives before dying before the third. Was really successful in his life. He was a good man, and in a way, he helped save me now by having instilled those same ethics he adhered to himself. But at the same time on the other side of the coin he was tired by the time his passing came, and he just wanted to go. For someone as strong as he was, I was mad at him for what felt like in my eyes was giving up. Even now, I still feel complicated, though I understand being tired and just wanting to sleep. I can't say anything about being mad at him for giving up when I originally wanted to give up before when I was first dealing with Bipolar disorder. I hope he rests well. He deserves that and more.

Even with all my struggles I had a solid support system that blocked me from any issues that arose whenever, despite me really not talking about my issues. Part of the process of bettering yourself with Bipolar disorder is relying on other people for help and support. Trusting people was very hard, or at the very least I didn't know how to correctly or healthily open myself up to other people. I also struggle to cry in front of other people.

In all the years I've dealt with Bipolar disorder, there were a lot of good moments and bad moments as my emotions flowed and swayed from one side of the scale to the other. Like before, it taught me empathy, but it also taught me a lot of other things. It

showed me the power of how much hard work mattered when you were dealing with something like this. Despite all the bad I've experienced, I've learned a lot of good from it.

Not everything has been a smooth ride. Starting out on my first medication didn't work forever as I had hoped, and the symptoms returned. Might've been naive to think it would work for the rest of my life, but it gave me hope when it started to subdue my symptoms and make life easier to live again.

The worst was the time when I switched my medication from the one I currently take now. This one was advertised as doing the work my medicine does, but less of an amount that it takes to work. It seemed like the perfect thing for me, I wanted to be on less medication. Although it was rough, I managed to wean myself off my main medication and start on it. Unfortunately for me, I had a bad reaction to the medicine. For two weeks it felt like I wasn't in control of my body. Everything felt like it was moving faster than my body could handle. My parents offered to take me to the mental hospital, but I refused. I thought I could outlast it. And while I did outlast it and manage to get back onto my main medication, it is something I don't recommend other people to do. I should've gone and got help, but I didn't want to go to the mental hospital. I was afraid of mental health hospitals like that, and I didn't want to spend the night there.

After that, most of the struggle of Bipolar disorder was hard work and the like. It takes a lot of effort and energy to control and maintain yourself with Bipolar disorder. It's easy to forget sometimes that even with taking medicine and maintaining that it isn't a total cure.

I still have my off days. And I'm still wrangling in my emotions and brain sometimes like a cowboy on a horse. And just between me and you, thinking of it like that makes me sound really badass like I'm in one of those old western flicks. I try to write in my journal every day and go to bed at the same time. A lot of what helps to maintain Bipolar disorder is just small things that add up together over time. I think what hinders a lot of people from taking care of themselves is looking at everything as a whole. It can be overwhelming to see all that you have to do, especially if you're just starting out on this journey like I was at first. But at least from my experience, it does get easier. I used to think that people that said it gets easier were huge assholes that don't understand a single thing I'm going through. It's easier to say than it is to be. But having a lot of experience in this, I can definitely say it gets easier, if you put in the work.

Getting better isn't straightforward, even with putting in the work. Over the last few years I've had amazing gains, and devastating setbacks, not even counting the horrible reaction I had to the medicine before. Positives and negatives. I'm more in control, but mania still can wreck me like before if I don't keep a control on things.

I used to feel like the life I knew was over when I was diagnosed with Bipolar disorder. I wouldn't be the person I thought I would be. It's very life changing. And now, after all my work, I'm still not the person I thought I would be. The person I wished to be didn't suddenly spring forth into existence once I became more in control of myself. I've become another person entirely. I think in its own way this worked out for the better for me. I grieved the person I thought I lost for a long time, but who I am now is for the better. Sometimes life doesn't give us what we want. Sometimes it gives us what we need instead.



My journey is going to continue on. There's always something new to learn on how to be better. I sought an ending to all this for a long time. I used to think that once I crossed a certain threshold, things would click right back into place. But that's not entirely true.

Bipolar disorder is still a lot of work. I have to take my medication every day, I have to eat properly, I need to avoid certain activities, etc. That's just the reality of living with this. I can choose to be miserable about it, or I can take control and live the life I want to live. You can already see what I chose.

By the time I hope this is done, next month, I'll be finally going off to college and wanting to do more with myself. Going in to get my certification in Medical Billing. It's a huge step, one I've been working towards for the past few years. And then there's my relationship of a few years, where I want to marry my partner eventually. There's still a lot of things I want to do ahead, and a lot more hard work ahead as well to top it all off like a little figurine on top of a nice wedding cake.

In a way, I'm glad with how everything turned out. My story didn't end when I started to manage and control Bipolar disorder. There is no cure for what I and so many other people deal with. It's just something I have to take responsibility for the rest of my life. Take care of myself, take my medication, etc - it is a continuous process. It is part of the continuous story of my life and the lives of all who deal with it on a daily basis. I wouldn't say there's a happily ever after, where everything is perfect and the light of the sun pushes away all the darkness of the land. Personally, I feel like happy endings like that are disingenuous. I think there's something better in not having a happy ending, at least that's my perspective anyway. Happy endings ignore the after credits. You

might've defeated the big scary monster, but now you have the rest of your life to live. I feel like it gave me perspective on life. Whenever someone goes through something life changing, I feel like drastic change always follows that. Whether we choose to embrace that change or not is on us, but for me, I embraced it.

Writing all this down has been a challenge. To give voice to things that are uncomfortable is a challenge all writers have to face. Bipolar disorder is like a monstrosity in the abyss that people like H.P. Lovecraft barely are barely able to put to words with their vivid and graphic descriptions of the unknowable. In a way, Bipolar disorder is like a massive, unknowable beast lurking in the darkness, given form by our thoughts and feelings. Writing this has been stressful. To face the unknowable is a terrifying endeavor, and I have to admit it was terrifying for me at first to write this. But now that I'm near the end, I feel like I have much more power over all this than I thought I had.

Dealing with Bipolar disorder is still hard, even unfair since no one asks to be given this condition. But I think there's strength and grace in overcoming your condition and living the life you want to live regardless of external circumstances. Because what I learned in focusing so much on dealing with my condition is that my story, and the stories of everyone else, are so much more than the unfair condition we were given and have to deal with on a daily basis. I am me because of all my hard work, and I am content enough with that.