

## Me, my Family and Our Secret.

Words 1424

Here's how it is. I don't suffer from bi-polar – I am bi-polar. Basically this means that my emotions and Melbourne's weather have a lot in common. Or, to the uninitiated, when I'm fine to high, I feel great, and when I'm low to lower, I often wish there was another way out of this place.

My first episodes began when I was a kid and they haven't stopped.

Before I was diagnosed, thanks mainly to the interesting antics I got up to while I was high, I was seen by all those I had damaged as a difficult and destructive wanker. After I was diagnosed, I was reassessed within the blink of an eye, and reclassified as a difficult and destructive wanker with a questionable diagnosis. A diagnosis that fixed nothing. Instead, it made matters worse, as now, many of those who felt damaged, also experienced a degree of guilt.

Being diagnosed though, shuddering as it was, was also the first step I took towards understanding and attaining some control of my life.

No doubt there are people, stronger than me, who were and are able to begin their post-diagnosed lives upon the remnants of their pre-diagnosed, but a year after my 'Cranium Malfunction' had been labelled, I realised that if I was to have any hope of attaining a clean foundation, I would have to leave and start again.

This is not advice. This is just what I did.

Also, since I had no children to support, and with my first marriage was lost, there was nothing to hold me.

Alone, and taking enough lithium to power a tourist bus full of digital cameras, I began a second life in Melbourne. This time though, anyone who came into my life, was, after a short period of time, informed of my condition.

Two jobs later, both of which I was let go from shortly after I'd revealed my secret, taught me that perhaps it was better if not everybody knew.

In my private life though, with the medication keeping me fairly stable, I found people weren't that bothered. Most knew someone else who had it (or

someone who suffered from depression) and caught up in their own lives, they left it at that.

This was freedom: the freedom of being accepted for who I was and not what I had done.

Also, now separated from my past, I began the long process of shifting through its wreckage. I began to find patterns of behaviour, blatantly clear clues, and finally I came to understand some of the craziness.

My brother once told me that he and my sister had taken it for granted that I would kill myself before I was twenty-one. At the time, I thought the same, and yet had no idea why. Now I did, and this was freedom too.

One of the reasons my high periods always saw me creating one messy situation after another was that I wasn't a bad looking fella. Not only that, but when high, I was funny, charming and quite often exciting to be around. Magnetic. In these periods, falling in love, spending money I didn't have, and gaining employment was easy. A few months later though, once the moods had changed shift, I'd find myself unemployed, heart broken or both. More often than not I was also in debt and desperate to be alone. This was what I always found odd about the Black Dog metaphor. A dog craves company, but when I'm down, I don't. Whether I am next to you, in bed with you, even making love to you, I am an island.

These habits of creating emotional catastrophes are common to many Bi-polar folk. In fact, it is the culminating effect of them, added to the knowledge that you are destined to create more, that becomes too much for many of us.

This is why I've always been proud of myself for making it this far.

Now, ten years since it was discovered, I am married, again, and I have been with this beautiful woman for over five years. Just this week too, I passed another milestone. I have managed to hold down the one, full time job for over a year. For me, this is a huge achievement.

I am now a postie.

Not only am I married, but we have also been given the two greatest and completely organic anti-depressants we will ever receive: our children.

I cannot under-emphasize the preciousness of my blessings. And while I often find it difficult to be the father that I feel I should be, I love my kids and at the moment they are both mad about me.

When I first met my second wife I informed her, almost immediately, about the other aspects of my head. If she chose to stay she should know the risks. At first I was fine, so secretly she thought I was exaggerating the problem. If there was a problem. But then I got sick and she changed her mind. Being half crazy herself, she chose to stay.

After the birth of my first child, my son, I experienced a crisis. I didn't want my boy to grow up with a dad who had to be medicated. Oh my, the stigma of it all. So, with my wife willing to take the chance, I stopped taking my pills and instead tried a healthier diet, plus exercise.

Unfortunately this didn't work. I got sick, again. But I am still glad we tried. Hard as this was, knowing where my boundaries lay, gave me a sense of freedom too. Freedom from doubt.

Down deep enough to mine for coal, I visited my local GP to get back on Lithium. After checking my records though, he decided I wasn't bi-polar. He told me people were always misdiagnosed and all I needed to do was go on a course of antidepressants. I did, and rapidly, got worse.

A new GP read my records, listened to me (which was nice) then took me off the AD's and put me on epilum. Not only do they work, but my wife makes sure I take them every day: without fail. It's a pain in the arse, sometimes, but they are the compromise I am willing to make to try maintain the life we have built and hopefully are building.

I still get sick, but so far not to the degree I used to. And I know it will be frowned upon, but I don't see a psychiatrist. Why, because who can afford to? Oh there is a lot of help out there all right: much more than in other countries. But health care is like everything else now. Basically, if you're sick, try to be financial and sick.

The last one I saw was at the Melbourne clinic. We waited two months to see him. He was nice. He listened. He talked to my wife, and he spoke honestly. He even agreed with us, when we told him, that it was ridiculous for

us to put the entire responsibility of my illness, and our lives, in his hands, when he only had forty-five minutes to assess our entire situation.

Ultimately, I believe, that my life is my responsibility.

This too, is not advice. It is simply, a choice I have made, and if things get too much there's always my GP.

Let's talk shop.

I experience two forms of depression. The triggered variety, which can sometimes be reasoned with, and the chemical ones, which cannot. Some things do help. Writing can sometimes ease them. Long walks can sometimes tire them out. But nothing I've come across truly removes them. They come and go like tides and that's the end of it. It's not all bad though. When I feel them leaving, the sense of spiritual and physical lightness I experience is wonderful. Within no time I feel refreshed and alive.

Sadly, in the future, we know that there's a good chance that one of our children may show symptoms. But if and when that occurs we will deal with it. At least we will know what it is. Then again, who knows what will happen? Maybe even something good. Because, contrary to how you feel when you are down, the odds are always even.

So, this is my life. It could be better, but it could be a hell of a lot worse. And in my Mother's words:

'At least you're leading an interesting life.'