

# **INTRODUCTION**

## **My Mother's Bipolar, So What Am I?**

My mother's bipolar. Wow! I said it! If you have a bipolar parent, you realize how difficult it is to make that statement. The stigma that goes with mental illness can be demoralizing. Our society often lumps people with bipolar disorder (or manic/depression) into categories similar to schizophrenia. As a result, we have only recently heard people talk about this subject.

It used to be that any mention of mental illness would conjure up images of straight jackets and padded cells. Thanks to celebrities like Patty Duke, Carrie Fisher, Jane Pauley, Linda Hamilton, and Ted Turner we can now associate well-known faces with this mysterious disease called bipolar disorder. Who would have thought that these hugely successful people have dealt with these same challenges?

Recently, I met a woman named Cathi and we began to talk about our mothers. The conversation began with a mutual roll of the eyes and heavy sighs. We talked about how difficult it was to have any kind of relationship with our mothers because of their behavior. It turned out that her mother was bipolar also. We stayed up talking nearly all night. It was such a relief to be able to share the frustrations and stories about our families and our lives. Shortly after that conversation, I began to realize how little the subject of bipolar was discussed – by people who had the disease. Their families certainly weren't talking about it! I decided to write this book to help the children of those living with bipolar disorder – whether or not they have been diagnosed. This book contains my memories and those from more than a dozen people that I interviewed. My hope is that by reading stories from other families, you will feel a connection and know that you are not alone. After seeing the disorder from an adult child's perspective, you may be able to have a healthier relationship with your bipolar parent and recognize the effect your parent's illness has had on your life.

My intention with this book is not to blame our parents for the difficulties we might have experienced as adults. Despite our challenges, we are adults and we benefit by taking responsibility for our behavior and our own lives. I don't mean to create a pity party for all of us poor children of bipolar parents, but I do want to open a dialog and encourage you to talk about your experience. Your parent

may have an illness that requires patience, love, and understanding, but it doesn't require you to give up your life and your dreams in order to take care of them. You can face these challenges and still have a healthy relationship with yourself and your parent.

If you are a parent who has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, my intention in writing this book is *not* to, in any way, disrespect or minimize your experience. Yours is a very difficult journey and one that you likely have not made alone. Your parents, children, significant others and friends have loved you and witnessed your pain. They may not have understood your behavior and perhaps were not supportive. By sharing our experiences, we can begin to understand the mystery of this disorder. In turn, perhaps we will take better care of ourselves and be better equipped to help you get the care that you need.

Although a wide range of readers may be able to relate to experiences shared in the book, my primary objective is to help people realize the impact of growing up with a bipolar parent. If you can look honestly at your own situation and behaviors born out of that experience, you may be able to improve your relationships and your life. Because information leads to understanding, you may be able to reconnect with your mother or father.

I believe there are many people who are suffering with this illness because they have not been diagnosed. Some of the stories may strike a chord with you even though you don't know anyone who has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder. You may be able to help someone by simply being aware of the information in this book.

You may be wondering why I used the acronym CBP (Child of a Bipolar Parent) after my name. As I began to research books already written about this topic, I noticed a lot of letters after the authors' names (e.g. PhD, MD, PsyD). The credentials intimidated me a bit because I'm certainly no expert on matters of mental illness. My professional experience consists of twenty years in the corporate world. The CBP acronym reminds me that my expertise comes from my first-hand knowledge of being the child of a bipolar parent – the very topic of this book. Clinical information presented here has been researched. My words, however, are from my own experiences and from others who've had similar experiences.

Join me on a journey of understanding a very challenging, mysterious disease called bipolar disorder. Say "good-bye" to your current perception of people who live with this illness. As you begin to learn more about it, you will let go of your frustration and resentment towards your parent. You will begin a wonderful healing journey that

will, if nothing else, provide a few “ah-ha” moments. As you read the pages of this book, please know that I am opening my heart to you. Together, we can make the journey easier.