

The Love of My Life has Bipolar Disorder

By Mary J.



Every girl who is looking for her Prince Charming always envisions a tall, dark and handsome man. Few descriptions of this person ever describe his mental condition; however, psychology tells us that if a person is tall, dark and handsome, the halo effect that we ascribe to him will automatically include intelligence, wit and mental stability. (If you are unfamiliar with the halo effect, it simply means that a person with one good quality is seen to have many good qualities.)

Few, if any women will ever achieve this perfect vision in their real lives. I have yet to meet the perfect woman on this earth, so we can assume that there is no such thing as a perfect man. Once I got over needing to have a cartoon as my life partner, I found the love of my life in a package much different than the Disney caricature.

Believe it or not, I actually met my husband at an AA meeting. His depressive state had caused him to use alcohol as a sort of self-medication. In many ways he was the most in need of help, but he always had the kindest words of encouragement for me and for others in the group. I asked around to see if his behavior changed just to get me on a date. Everyone said that this was his true personality, so I ended up asking him out.

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After six months of dating, I knew that this was the man I was going to marry. He said that he knew from the second he saw me walk into the AA group, which is quite a romantic thing to say. He says very romantic things, which is another reason why I had to lock it down.

Part of the reason that I married him was that he let me know exactly how debilitating his condition was. With his doctor's permission, he actually went off of his medication for a while in order to show me exactly what a worst-case scenario would be like. I chose him only after experiencing that episode firsthand.

We both wanted kids; we definitely had to agree on this point in order to get married. We decided that our various challenges would serve as a good example for our children. If they came out healthy, they would have no excuses. Both of us are very driven, and we wanted our children to be inspired by us and be driven in life as well.

Bipolar disorder is described as a set of behaviors that fluctuate wildly without any external provocation. Moods shift from extremely manic highs to extremely depressed lows. My husband's bipolar disorder was not able to be diagnosed precisely, as many cases are not. However, our doctors and my gut say that it was partly from genetics and partly from a lack of nutrition early in his childhood. It certainly did not help that he grew up in a mildly abusive household in which no one really knew how to vent frustration in a proper way.

My husband, the true love of my life, deals on a day-to-day basis with bipolar disorder. Before we go into the reasons that this is difficult, we must go first into the character traits that made me want to marry him despite his mental disorder.

The spirit that I saw in this man as he dealt with his bipolar disorder was unshakable. The number one reason that he is my husband now is that no matter how he felt biologically that day, his service to other people never wavered. He gave the same to everyone whether he was feeling well that day or not. It was then that I learned the true nature of the spirit and that our bodies are truly just vessels for a much higher energy.

This is not to say that our marriage is without its problems, of course. The process that my husband must go through in order to overcome his mental weaknesses enough to serve society in the way he does takes quite a toll on me, his main source of daily support. At times, I am his mental punching bag.

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It can be difficult to try to explain to my best friends from childhood that my husband truly does not mean to make me cry at family occasions and during holidays. Ex-boyfriends have physically confronted my husband about some of the things that he has said about me in public because of his bipolar disorder. Some of the things that he says while depressed are the exact same things that physically abusive husbands say to their wives.

Even as you read this, you are likely saying to yourself that I am letting love blind me and that I may even be in some physical danger. Believe me, this social pressure is an incredibly difficult ship to navigate, because while a bipolar person is depressed, the things that they say resemble abuse. If a so-called mentally healthy person said the same things, it would be abuse.

This is exactly why I would like to focus on the difference between dating someone with a mental disorder and someone who has the potential to abuse you and possibly end your life.

If you are dating someone with a true mental disorder, then that person should first be aware himself of his problem. If he has not sought out medical attention and given himself the potential for stability through medication or through a daily routine, then that person is not ready for you to date. For instance, if you are dating a mentally ill person who believes that he can get off his medication whenever he wants, this can be a dangerous situation. Leave it alone.

Secondly, a person with a mental disorder will also understand the social ramifications of his actions. My husband never made excuses for his behavior in front of people — he immediately returned to his doctor and worked out a medical program that would increase his stability. I did not have to cajole him to do this; he is well aware that the person he is when depressed does not deserve a caring wife. Abusive people say that they will change and do nothing.

Third, understand that dating or marrying a person with a mental disorder places you in a situation that many people simply will not understand. You may have to explain yourself over and over again to people who love you. You cannot become frustrated with this, as that frustration will creep back into your relationship and affect it negatively.

As women, we always prefer to be the ones with the freedom to emote; however, if you are planning on a serious life with a person who has a mental disorder, this is simply one of the sacrifices that love calls on you to make. Your partner will need your mental stability in order for the relationship to work.

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Most importantly, you must be able to separate the mental illness from the person who is suffering from it. This is perhaps the biggest lesson that my relationship with my husband has taught me — the physical body is a slave to nerve endings and neurons and blood chemicals. The spirit, however, is completely separate. It is truly difficult to explain, but if you cannot fall in love with the spirit of a person through the noise of biology that a mental disorder creates, then you should immediately let that person go. The relationship will not go well for either of you.

My husband and I set up physical boundaries as well. For instance, it is agreed among our entire family that if my husband ever hits me for any reason, I am to immediately leave. We have this in writing. It is not a legal contract, but it is an agreement that is known to my entire family as well as his.

The bottom line is this: There are ways to overcome the difficulties that mental disorders bring to a relationship. True love will always find a way.

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