



Cry Out Loud: Living With Mental Illness: An Autobiography

Sue Cromie

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It seemed that I'd been having episodes, particularly of severe depression, since I was only just a wee girl, but I wasn't diagnosed until my mid-twenties. I didn't know what was wrong with me and felt relieved when I was finally diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder, a serious mental illness. At least it proved I wasn't going mad! I knew it couldn't be normal to spend an hour each day contemplating the advantages of carbon monoxide poisoning over a quick leap off a high building. So after years of going it alone, I wanted the ride to stop. I wanted to get off. The cycles were coming too fast and furious and both my physical and mental capacity were frightfully compromised. I was exhausted. But I chose to write about it and this is what makes my story unique: Cry Out Loud relates episodes of in-the-moment depression, mania and psychosis, all common elements of mental illness. To tell my story I have to admit that Bipolar Disorder is like anything else. You can make it the centre of your life or say it's only part of it. However, apart from wanting to publish every detail of my most intimate moments, I don't really want to make a career out of being 'Bipolar'. I want to treat it with respect and do what I can about it. Just get on with life. Yet it won't let me do this and therefore, I feel the need to tell you about my ongoing turmoil. Throughout Cry Out Loud, I also share with you my near-death experiences. I've been close to death a number of times. Self-inflicted? Yes. Fighting for my life? Not really. I didn't want to live. In fact, I should have been dead. But some strange twist of fate meant that I lived to tell my story. Throughout my years of living with mental illness, I believe I have earned the right to share this story with both those who also suffer from a life-shattering mental illness or for those who want to learn more about and understand the complexities of mental illness. Despite often being in a debilitating and deteriorating state, the growth I experience over a number of years is remarkable. Although still constrained by the effects of my illness, the outcomes of such incredible hardships and personal growth are both enlightening and rewarding to those who find themselves on similar paths. I invite you to come along on a journey with me, one that will take you through the exhausting experiences of my life so far. Step inside my mind and body as I am inflicted with a soul-destroying mental illness. Experience the degree of suffering and learn how life-shattering it can be to live day after day with an illness such as Bipolar Disorder. But just as importantly, discover how, through much hardship, there may also be a light at the end of the tunnel. So gain some insight into this serious mental illness and share in the pulse of my recovery. "I am pacing, pacing fast, pacing faster and faster. I have just spent the past two minutes banging my head against the glass cage of the nurses' station window, to no avail. I feel like a child needing to throw a tantrum, but not wanting to hurt myself. So what is it that I want from that glass wall and those untouchable people behind it? I feel an incredible, smothering anxiety. I want desperately to run, scream, jump through the window and run for my life. Or maybe run away from my life. Yes, that makes much more sense. I just want my body and mind to rest, but I don't want any more tranquillisers. However, at this precise point in time, it seems as though a prescribed overdose of valium is all that will work to stop the irritation, agitation and discomfort I feel. It's a degrading, horrid sensation to be intentionally seeking attention. But I'm feeling suicidal. I want to cry out loud but can't. There's an overwhelming need to rip my irritable, awkward self from my pacing body, hang it all out in the sun to dry and hope that it's ready to wear in a co-ordinated fashion again by the morning."

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