

Prologue
From "Running Uphill"

I wake up and look at the clock: 5:30 a.m. Thank God. I can stay in bed for another hour. I look at the clock every 5 minutes to see how much longer I can stay here. It's so safe here in bed. I can hide. I don't have to face anything. If I could just stay in bed, pull the covers over my head; and if it would just stay dark outside, then I wouldn't have to get up. I wouldn't have to feel guilty.

Finally it's 7:00 a.m. Now I'll really have to hurry to get to work on time. I don't want to get up. I don't want to get in the shower. I just want to stay here. But I force myself to get up and then I go get a cup of coffee. I shouldn't take the time; I should get right in the shower. At 7:15 I finally turn the water on and get in. Now I'm going to be late. Oh well, it's just a temp job. Nobody will notice. Am I getting depressed again? That's usually one of the warning signs: Not wanting to get out of bed.

No, lots of people don't want to get out of bed in the morning. It's ok. But I also notice I don't care as much about how I look or what I wear. It's been this way for the past week. Oh God, please, please don't let me get depressed again. I've felt really good for about a month now. But sometimes that's all I get—a month. Sometimes I get less than that. Then it comes back. No, I'll fight it. I'll just act as if I feel fine. I'm fine. I can't get depressed now! Mike's family is coming for a week. I can't function if I'm depressed.

Sometimes I'll sit here in the mornings and try to remember what it felt like when I wasn't depressed. I can remember times but I can't recapture feelings. The situation is the same. My life is the same. The circumstances are the same. But my perception of everything is distorted. I don't understand why my mood is black because of some chemicals floating around—or not floating around—correctly in my brain. It doesn't seem fair. It isn't fair. What scares me most is that sometimes I just feel like giving up. I don't want to, but what if I have to keep on going through these awful depressions for the rest of my life? What if I never find a solution or a treatment that works?

I've been tried on so many medications, even tried ECT when I was at my worst; and it still comes back. I hate what it does to me. I hate what it does to my family. I can't understand how a chemical imbalance could make such a difference in how I perceive the world. I hate "IT."

Conversely, when I'm feeling good—in between depressions—I can't remember the way it felt when I was depressed. Oh, I can remember that it was horrible; but it's almost as if it happened to someone else. During those "good" times, I really can't comprehend what could have possibly caused me to feel so hopeless. In between the depressions, I'm happy; I love my life, my husband, my son. I feel motivated, energetic, hopeful. I thank for God those times, and I keep praying they'll last. But they don't. For some unknown reason, I sink back into hell and I never know how long I'll be there before it goes away again.

I don't have the answers. I can only keep hoping to maintain the strength to get through those awful black, raging storms and remember that they have always passed, even though it feels at the time that it will go on forever and I'll never feel good again.

At least I've been able to force myself to go to work even when I don't feel like going. I need a reason to get up every day. I find that it's better than sitting at home wallowing in my misery, which only further aggravates the hopelessness I feel. For the time I'm at work, I can fake it well enough to make it through the days although inside I feel like shutting down completely. It's not an easy thing to push myself when I only feel like vegging out on the sofa in front of the television, but if I want to survive, I have to make myself do things I don't really want.

Why can't people understand that no matter how much support you have from your loved ones, no matter how much they care about you and love you, you are still completely alone with the feelings that seem more pervasive than anything else in your life.

I can't make anyone understand why I feel the way I do, or even express exactly what I feel, other than to tell them it's a sense of emptiness, of nothingness, of hopelessness, and a constant, nagging fear that it will never change, that I'll never again wake up with hope and love in my heart and with a desire to do things again other than stumble through the motions of living. How can I explain something that even I don't understand?

There are people who actually have never even heard of major depression, much less bipolar. Have they had their heads in the sand or what?

I remember times when I'll be depressed for months; and sometimes Mike has to entertain some clients or go to some company function that require my presence. I don't know how I actually do it, but for a few hours, I can manage to pull myself together and go to these functions without anyone ever knowing I just want to die. I guess you could say I can be a fairly good actress when I need to be – but only for short periods of time. Having dinner is particularly difficult because I have no appetite. Food tastes like cardboard. Sometimes I'll just put it in my mouth and chew it and then spit it in my napkin when no one is looking, because I just can't swallow anything.

I'm so afraid that someone will find out how depressed I am and just run in the other direction. Why am I ashamed of something over which I have no control? What is it that causes some people to be so judgmental?