

Poles apart

People with Bipolar are a bit weird, right? They run about hallucinating, think they are Jesus sometimes, and jump off tall buildings thinking they can fly. When they aren't doing this, they are hiding under the bed in a pit of depression, trying to hack their wrists up.

Right?

Well, no. Not all of the time. I've certainly never experienced Bipolar like that.

From what I can gather, I've had Bipolar since I was 14. At least, I'm assuming so, because that was the age of my first suicide attempt. My second was at 18. I stopped after that, because I found drugs and alcohol.

My life has been punctuated by wild mood swings. They come around every few weeks. It starts off with a sense of exhilaration and energy. I am amazing, I can achieve anything. I sign up for random courses, talk too much, drink too much, drive too fast, shop too much, set up companies, put myself at risk, laugh too loudly. I become uber-me; capable of anything. I can stand and do DIY for hours at a stretch without a break. I can go without sleep; write a book in a matter of weeks. And then, my sense of smell becomes weirdly acute. I become obsessed with cleaning, decorating, tidying. My thoughts begin to race faster than I can cope with and I can't stop or slow down. There's music blaring in my head all day and all night. I can't sit still. I have limitless, panicky energy and a huge amount of anxiety about nothing at all.

And then it all stops.

It doesn't just stop, it crawls backwards. I sleep for up to 22 hours a day. I can't eat. I hate myself. I see blood pouring out of the walls and I'm obsessed with death. Being dead, trying to be dead, feeling and tasting and seeing death. I can smell death oozing out of my pores. I can't speak to anyone. In the end I want so much to get away from my own mind I am willing to do almost anything to crawl away from myself. I drink myself unconscious and sleep it off for days. I'm useless, vile, pointless. A waste of time.

And then, I jump out of the pit and I'm fine. Normal. Just like everyone else, apart from the fact I have to undo all the damage I did when I was manic, and put right everything I ignored when I was depressed. For a few weeks, or a couple of months if I'm lucky, I lead a perfectly stable life. I have a great marriage, a beautiful home, I run a successful company.

This is my life. I've learned that I will always be this way. I am taking medication that makes the swings more like speed bumps, there to stop the crazy highs, and therefore halt the lows. Life is so much better now, than it has ever been.

Here are some of the things that I know; I am hugely positive, most of the time. I can make someone smile at fifty paces just by bouncing in to the room and grinning at them. Bipolar people on the whole seem to be philosophical and questioning, extrovert and interesting (as well as quirky, snappy infuriating and miserable sometimes). I have also learned that Bipolar seems to bring a level of creativity with it. It's as if all that torrid emotion needs a vehicle to express itself, and when it finds

an outlet, it pours out like water. I'm not sure where my personality ends, and the Bipolar starts. Sometimes, I wonder what I would be without this exhilarating, terrifying and isolating condition.

Most Manic Depressives say that if they had the choice of being cured, or staying the same, they'd choose to have Bipolar. I'm not there, yet, but I'm looking forward to reaching that feeling, sometime soon.