

Grounded by Bipolar Disorder: One Pilot's Landing

Brian Jost



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(Chapter one may be read for free at www.groundedbybipolardisorder.com) Being diagnosed with bipolar disorder was like losing my flight plan. It was if my destination and alternate airports had disappeared. My engines were on fire during the height of my first full-blown manic episode and I was certain that a crash was imminent. An emergency was declared. To my surprise I learned that I had on board with me the love and support of family and friends, the professional advice and direction of psychiatrists, therapists, and nutritionists as well as support and education from organizations such as NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness). In the end I landed safe and sound, just not where I had intended. I was never able to make a career out of flying. Having worked four commercial pilot jobs as a flight instructor and charter pilot, I now know that those years were the beginning of unrecognized signs and symptoms of bipolar disorder. I was too restless to stay at one job long enough to be truly prepared for the next. My passion for writing and recording music distracted me, leading me to bounce back and forth between my goals of flying for a major airline and working as an audio engineer. The diagnosis of bipolar disorder type one meant I couldn't pursue work as a commercial pilot as I would no longer qualify for the required FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) medical certificate. It's been an incredible journey. My passion for flying introduced me to many amazing people and allowed me to see parts of the United States that I otherwise may have never seen. An enormous part of my experience of living with bipolar disorder has been the theft of my dream, the lack of access to my passion, being told "no, you can't do that anymore" and not being able to prove otherwise. I'm not alone. Everyone who lives with a mental illness experiences loss, commonly the loss of relationships, jobs, money, physical health, and often the loss of the ability to trust one's own thoughts and emotions. I've crawled through my depressions and soared through my manic episodes so high that I might never have come down. Fortunately, with the proper professional and personal supports in place, I was able to take a new heading in the direction of a life so meaningful that I can't believe I ever wanted to go anywhere else.

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