

Name: Madeline Muth
Grade: 8
Teacher: Mrs. Tatum
School: Sacred Heart School
School City/State: Palm Desert, California

“Daddy, I’m feeling it again...” I whispered through the jet black receiver of the telephone. My sensation of utter reject and darkness hung in the air. I just couldn’t believe that I was dealing with these feelings again. Didn’t I already have enough to handle? “Breath in and out, I’ll be there soon,” I heard Daddy reply calmly. I sat alone in the school office, feeling as uncomfortable as I did on my first day of school. I could sense the harsh flutter of the butterflies in my stomach, and the tears forming in my eyes. *Life is not fair*, I thought. And I knew that wishing I had never been diagnosed wouldn’t help, because I would be Bipolar...forever.

As days turned into weeks and weeks into months, I slowly learned that Bipolar Disorder was a mental illness involving severe episodes of mania and depression. I discovered that my moods had the ability to change from excessively high natures to life threatening sadness in a matter of seconds.

At the start of my diagnosis, I was very confused. I didn’t see how insecure I came across. I would even find myself hurting others and my family, by how I acted and responded. I was so unbalanced that I could not last a full day in school. That year was the worst 365 days of my life. Every moment seemed so surreal, and I couldn’t handle seeing myself in such bad shape. I felt like I was on a non-stop roller coaster. The “ups” and the “downs” of my journey were no joy

ride. I knew that I couldn't change who I was and had to deal with Bipolar somehow, so I put on what I call my "mask." Every day at school I pretended to be perfectly normal, but truly inside I felt like the world was crashing down on me and the pressure was too much to carry.

Thankfully, over the years I have formed a team; consisting of my parents, my brother, my psychiatrist, psychotherapist and myself. With this team I find ways to cope; such as listening to soothing music or journaling my awful feelings. Just like Jackie Robinson used teamwork to break the color barrier, I too use **teamwork** to break through my own barriers. However, due to society's misunderstanding of Bipolar, I feel the need to keep "my secret" to the boundaries of my family.

Bipolar Disorder is a very complicated mental illness. Most people don't even know what Bipolar is, and what is included with the infirmity. As a Bipolar child, my life is different from every "normal" person. I feel emotions much stronger than most people. I face the wrath of racing thoughts. Sometimes I tend to think off topic and can't control the speed or subject on what I am thinking about. In other ways, I can be so artistic, even Leonardo da Vinci can't top me. I thrive in reading, writing, chorus, and dance. I use my creativity to channel my feelings, as Jackie Robinson used his creativity to write the autobiography, "I Never Had It Made."

It is sometimes hard to make friends because I am so different. I am perceived as arrogant because of my lack of sociality. I am so worried about myself and how I am perceived, that I rarely have time for others. I honestly don't

mean to act this way, but I guess it is another annoyance of the disorder. I find myself struggling not only with my feelings, but with schoolwork and self confidence. Staying in school is very hard, especially because I am without friends and I need someone who relates to me. I usually spend lunch alone. If only I had a class mate that I could share “my secret” with.

I have trouble concentrating because I undergo awful pains. For example, many days an overwhelming sadness comes about, and I leave the class crying for no reason. I cannot face other kids when I am that way, because I am afraid that they will make fun of me. I usually wish that a hole in the ground would just suck me up, never to breathe fresh air again. Yet, luckily, I have the **determination** to continue on through my lifelong status, and the **persistence** to grow stronger each day.

Most kids my age lead the simple life and don't even know it. They are able to enjoy everyday norms such as schoolwork, sleepovers and dates. On the other hand, I deal with fluctuating medicine levels, stomach and head aches, anxiety, the never ending thirst for companionship, blood tests, getting the right amount of sleep and doctor appointments, twice a week! I pursue this schedule while still maintaining “my secret.”

Unlike an illness, such as Cancer, Bipolar is not recognized or supported. Cancer is a painful disease with many loved ones rooting for you to beat it. Cancer is the enemy, not the person with Cancer. On the other hand, Bipolar is misunderstood and unaccepted. People are afraid of mental health issues. People do not understand how hard it is to thrive with this unwanted lifestyle and

many have no desire to learn. It is sad that most of the time Bipolar children are treated as the enemy, not the illness.

After all I have been and am still going through, I have finally changed my mind on Bipolar. In the beginning I felt such horrid temptations to simply give up, but three years later, I am happy that I was diagnosed. Regardless of the many struggles, I have realized that Bipolar Disorder has turned me into a stronger, more confident person. I know now that I am ready to take on life's challenges, and I hope that one day I will help others from my ongoing experience. I am also very thankful that my disorder made me who I am today, and has kept me from giving up on my dreams.

As I sat in that wretched chair, sobbing my eyes out, I heard the familiar sound of my dad's footsteps. The next moment I saw his comforting face, and grasped him in a tight hug. "Things are going to be okay," he said. A few seconds passed until I whispered into his ear "I know...because I will never, ever let Bipolar beat me."