

## Living with someone diagnosed as Bipolar

Being a 'carer' is portrayed as just making sure some other person is OK but in the case of a carer for a bipolar person it is somewhat different. In my husband's case he is a high achiever and when he crashes I have to pick up the pieces - not just looking after him but become Managing Director for all the outstanding building projects too! If I did not our business would be in a mess and our income stream too. Also I have to untangle decisions made to (in his words) 'make life easier'. For example, he did not wish to be part of the limited company that he set up and wanted to become a sole trader but I had to sort that out as he was feeling too low to deal with enacting such a decision. Sometimes he thinks I am too involved and he wants to do things himself, but after a while it can become too much for him and he changes his mind wanting me to sort things out again and unravel things (e.g. bring him back into the Ltd Company). Luckily I have the skills to accommodate these changes but it is difficult living and working with someone who needs to feel free to make his own decisions when it is also likely that those decisions will not remain constant and I will have to correct things later.

I find it most difficult when he is starting to go manic. He becomes very argumentative and difficult to reason with at this stage, and sometimes very hurtful in what he says. I find these times the most hard. My problem is identifying this but when I have I find it best to tell him that I do not wish to discuss anything at present and I withdraw. This tends to alleviate the situation and give him time to reflect on his behaviour and to realise that he is also going into the manic (mainly) or depressed stage. Mania tends to send him into his 'SELF' state when it is difficult for him to see any other points of view.

When other people are in the household I always make them aware of my husband's illness and advise them that when he is depressed he will not wish to speak, see or telephone anyone. It helps that they understand and they carry on as normal even though he may be acting introvertly.

Both my husband and I have examined the bipolar condition in detail and being aware of what other similarly diagnosed people experience and have written about manic depression has really helped both of us. We try and spot the signs early enough and make each other aware of each other's thinking. This gives us both a chance to set in place procedures to lessen the effect of his mind state as best we can and make the challenges easier to bare. I will take as much stress off him as I can at this point e.g. telephone calls, dealing with clients, etc.

When we first met he was not coping very well. From my perspective his past seemed to exacerbate the condition. He hadn't dealt with troubles in childhood and had buried them because they were very painful. He hardly remembered anything from when he was young. I encouraged him to go and see his brother, father and step-mother to ascertain whether what he was thinking was actually real. He was very surprised to know that they all missed him greatly and his step-mum was not quite the ogre he thought. This was very healing. His real mother had left him at five years old and we also went to see her but he could not reconcile this aged woman with the person whom

had left him at such a young age. He took the decision not to see her again because he could not act normally knowing that she had left him whatever the reason.

Setting boundaries helped him and our marriage. Knowing his unfaithfulness in the past I said to him that if he wanted to go with someone else, then that was his choice. The consequences of that action would mean that I would have a choice and not want to stay with him as trust in a relationship is so important to me. I think this shocked him but he has never crossed the line and as a result our relationship has grown stronger.

Some of my husband's actions in the past have been to do with his previous experiences and he used to be so insecure in the fear of losing me but again, with his psychologist's help, he has turned this around. I do not think this was solely to do with bipolar disorder but it all mixed into one and with a disastrous childhood the two could not be separated. I do know that when mania strikes he is vulnerable at this stage and could be tempted - if his thoughts go in that direction he alerts me.

When he reached his teens and early twenties he realised that young people really liked his manic behaviour and so he likened, in my opinion, being popular with acting bizarrely (something you can get away with in youth!). He was always the centre of attention until he was on his own again. When we would go into a public bar he would have to buy everyone a drink so that everybody would like him. This was to the detriment of me as I was very often left on my own. By talking this through he has come to understand his behaviour more and this does not happen now. He now likes to be liked for what he is and not for what he thinks people want him to be.

One of the most difficult situations to deal with is when he makes a decision because he has to make a decision, without thinking of the consequences. For example, we went to Greece and whilst I was back in England for a week he decided that we were going to stay forever. He rented a flat, fully furnished it and bought a scooter with a £15000 bank loan. We stayed three months before we wanted to come back and sold the furnishings and scooter for approx £2000. We are still paying the loan. He is better now but at one time he frequently acted without considering the consequences.

His depression is definitely not as bad as it was when he used to stay in bed for days on end as awareness has helped him cope, together with the stability of home life. I also tell him that even though he is depressed at that time he will not always feel like that and he will feel better soon.

If I had to summarise what has helped us I would highlight:

Dealing with painful past experiences head on.

Becoming fully aware of his condition and his reactions to various mental states and life experiences.

Realising that he has a worth and can be his own man without fear.

Setting boundaries within our marriage - this has helped him to apply his own boundaries in other areas.

Reducing his workload in order to lower stress levels.

Practical things that have helped include:

Setting up a Power of Attorney.

My taking over control of the bank accounts. He is in charge of housekeeping but is no longer able to spend large amounts of money without my knowledge or agreement.

However he loves shopping and has sufficient funds to buy smaller items. He now picks all the bargains; my next problem is we don't always want the bargains!

The bankruptcy - it made him realise that money does not grow on trees and so he is now more careful. (I was also caught up in this disastrous time as we lost not just the business but everything we owned).

All in all he tries very hard to self-monitor and self-regulate his condition. He has tried to do this whilst taking and whilst not taking various psychiatric drugs, with some success either way. Currently he is taking medication again.

I would like to end by saying that he is a lovely man!