Issue 1

# Bipolar Creatives

*We all have a story. Share yours.*

# Our Artists

- Dina Jane Walker
- Dvora Dali
- Kel
- Kimmy Henderson
- Sean Sugre
- Mahrinna
- Katie Kendall
- Tiffany Romito
- Ayesha Nava
- Kim Holm
- Violette Kay
- Gireesh Raman
- Andy Rivers

# A note by the founder

I started Bipolar Creatives in the Fall of 2020. It was a difficult time, and I wanted to bring more positivity into the world. The response I've received from the artists I work with has been uplifting and inspiring. These artists inspire me every day.

Bipolar Creatives began as an Instagram page. Then, I designed a website. Look at us now!

Bipolar Creatives accepts many mediums from its artists. Some creatives are potters, some are musicians, while others are photographers or painters. I, myself, am a writer.  The one requirement of Bipolar Creatives is a bipolar or schizoaffective diagnosis.

Art is the focus of Bipolar Creatives, but not because I believe that people with bipolar are more creative than others. I simply believe that art is the most powerful means of communication we have. And, of course, the power of art in healing cannot be overestimated.

I'm looking forward to all of the great work Bipolar Creatives will do in the future. I hope you all enjoy our first issue.

*Our disorder unites us...*

*Our creativity defines us!*

# DINA JANE WALKER

## lies about lithium

this bitch told me
i don't look like i have bipolar
so i shat in the palms of my hands
grabbed her face, told her i loved her
and that she was the shit.

that wasn't enough.

so i slit my wrist offered her my blood
in exchange for her lipstick
when she was thirsty i pissed into a
cup
forced her throat open and told her to
swallow

that wasn't dark enough

so i told her about the ghost that
never lived
that i cradle to sleep every night
i showed her the notes i keep from
the old mes
i rolled up my sleeves and let her
brush fingertips over my mind
like skin mental illness comes in many
shades
mine has always been pigment
challenged
my diagnosis has always been up for
question
by those who have never had to
question their own mind.
i'm yet to name myself after the son of
God
and to believe in one,
who would make me bipolar amongst
other things
and give others the audacity
to question me.

Born in 2002 to Nigerian parents in Central London in 2002 , Dina Jane Walker began her poetry career in her Southwark bedroom, performing her tragic and comedic poems for friends and family, then later, dates, and therapists - or anyone who would listen. The full time English and creative writing student self-published her first title "Dina 'n' Dynamite," intending to set off her professional career as a writer with a bang. Walker offers a fresh and vibrant voice to confessional poetry. She is currently "living her best life" in the South of England while she works on her next book.

# DVORA DALI

Do not glorify me.
I am you behind doors
dishevelled self crying
for the broken dolls
in your attic full of dust.

Do not deify me. I am lost
like you: I am always looking
and do I really want to know?
where me is if perhaps
I want to keep knowing me.

Do  not strategize me,
I am broken parts looking
into a honest mirror not
beauty in perfect plans: I

know me, in transparency
for what you are is what
I am the one behind your
mask.

## *Tell me a little bit about yourself!*

I'm Dvora. I'm 31 years old, deep, dorky, and was diagnosed bipolar this year. I've worked in China, Barcelona and Singapore but always quit because I was undiagnosed and untreated. I was physically and psychologically abused, and suffer from CPTSD, but thankfully I am in a much better place now, and I'm looking forward to seeing where I am in a year. I want to say I'm an artist, but I also suffer  from imposter syndrome, so my boyfriend and close friends can tell you that instead. I love to create, though, and I love to express, and I hope to keep evolving my work until the day I die.

**Where did you grow up?**

I was born in Singapore and moved to Australia when I was 3, then back to Singapore, then back to Australia. My parents are Filipino, so I grew up influenced by all three cultures, and don't feel a part of any of them at the same time.

**What are you up to now?**

I have been focused on therapy for the past 3 years, and started getting treatment for bipolar in April this year. Alongside therapy, I've been working on some creative projects. Apart from that, I moved to the Gold Coast in November last year and have been really happy to be living right next to the beach in gorgeous weather and amongst some beautiful nature spots.

**When did you start writing poetry? How did you learn?**

I started with no intention of really pursuing writing as anything serious. It was a way for me to express and explore the insides of my mind while I first started therapy. The only previous experience I had writing creatively was with a few songs I wrote that I kept to myself and my partner and close friends at the time. Maybe being a very lyrical person influenced me a bit as my poetry was very sing-songy for the first part. Since then, my style has evolved, and I'm sure I have learned from other poets I've grown with in our little online family.

**Are there any other creative outlets you have?**

I dabble in a lot of things and hope to develop more projects in each of them: writing, sketching, music (singing, guitar, piano), and now 3-D modeling with my boyfriend. It's hard for me to stick with one of them, but writing has been the most constant out of all of them.

**What's your favorite poem you've ever written? What do you think makes your poetry unique?**

There's no poem that comes to mind. Each poem is a piece of me. I can say I favor my more recent work more than my earlier work as I feel like my style has matured in a sense. My work is heavily influenced by surrealist imagery and nature. When I write, I imagine the scene vividly (sometimes you'll see me moving my body or hands to try and experience it more fully) so I can see, hear, feel, smell the compelling emotion and movement of the scene, and hopefully bring the reader into my world. I'm not sure I can say my poetry is unique, but you will like it if you're interested in themes of love, beauty, philosophy and healing. My earlier work touched on themes of depression, grief, and anger as well as those just mentioned, which you'll be able to explore in my first book.

**Can you tell me a little bit about your book? What inspired the title? Why should people read it?**

"The Night Knows Your Name" is a collection of my work from my earlier days of writing. As I built momentum, I was determined to share my journey and bits of wisdom I learned along the way. I wanted to honor and explore every emotion I had during this time, as previously I hated myself whenever I was having a hard time. The title comes from this idea of not being afraid of the dark – a metaphor for not being afraid to explore all your difficult feelings, so you can learn how to love yourself in your entirety and, inevitably, know who you really are.

**A lot of your poems are about love. Why do you write so many poems based on this theme?**

Probably because for the first time in my life, I'm having a healthy relationship with someone who truly gets me and makes me want to be a better person. We are both being treated for our own mental illness, and I've never been prouder of the both of us. Tahir has been my rock and my muse for a long time, and I love to express it. I guess it's a form of gratitude.

**How do you think your background--educational, cultural, social etc--has played a role in your mental health?**

There are a lot of strange things that fall under the scope of "culture," some are unhealthy things passed on over generations that should evolve over time but don't. I was torn between the freedom I felt around my very open-minded friends and their families, and "being a good daughter" to my conservative parents. I was an only child, so if I wasn't playing football or basketball, or just hanging out with my friends after school, I would spend a lot of time reading, writing, playing the guitar/piano and sketching.

**When were you first diagnosed with bipolar? What was that experience like and how did you feel?**

I've been trying to figure out what was wrong with me for the longest time, and why I seemed to be struggling so much compared to everyone else. I told myself I wouldn't be a mother if I didn't have my brain sorted before that. The initial process was nerve-wracking, and I had no idea

what I was in for. I was in therapy for two years before I got my bipolar diagnosis (at the age of 30) in April this year. I had quit another job, crashing from nights of no sleep and suicidality. I thought it was severe depression and anxiety, then borderline (lots of fear of abandonment issues). As I became more aware and more in control of my triggers, though, I wondered why I was still having depressive episodes and why at times I would be extremely confident, social, outgoing, doing 5 projects at the same time. Bipolar came into mind, and I did my research, and thought I should probably see a psychiatrist about it. I told my psychologist about it, and honestly, I got so used to my symptoms, I didn't think they were anything to report. My psychologist was shocked I never mentioned my highs and lows. I was shocked that they weren't normal. So, when I was finally diagnosed, I felt like OK, now we're on the right track. I was scared to start meds and wanted to go the all natural route (and tried for a while), but nothing was helping. I was on lithium first, which sent me to hospital. I was scared to give the next one a go but, thankfully, this one (Lamotrigine) has stabilised me with zero side effects, and I've never been more optimistic and calm about my life and future since. It was all worth it, and I wish I did all this sooner.

**Who/what inspires you?**

Salvador Dali – the reason I fell in love with surrealism on that fateful day in high school. Brandon Boyd, Chris Cornell, Chopin, Pavarotti, Slipknot, FKA Twigs, Sevdaliza – too many musicians to mention. Evidently, all creative people who pursue their passions, and anyone in general who takes that risk. People full of heart. Kindness, love. Nature, spirituality, philosophy, and darker aesthetics, cultures, and of course, my boyfriend.

**Who is most supportive of you/your mental health/your art? How do they help?**

My dad is almost too enthusiastic, haha. My psychologist, goes above and beyond to build me up, and my boyfriend who always goes on about my mind and my creativity, which, on a usual day, I roll my eyes to. :)

**What advice would you give to someone recently diagnosed with bipolar disorder?**

It's OK to be scared, but there's hope now. If you stay honest with yourself and the people that matter, keep toxicity away, and put yourself first during this time it will get better. Also, observe everything you feel, and think, and keep it in your notes so at every session you can bring these things up. Lastly, join bipolar forums, if not support groups, so you'll have people to ask all your questions to, and you'll know just how many people understand exactly what you're going through. It's a good feeling to have that.

**How was your day? Did you do anything nice for yourself or another person?**

I went out to study stuff for therapy actually but ended up talking to a nice stranger who had some interesting stories about his life. One eye was closed shut, and he later told me he got shot in the face. We talked about all sorts of things, and I think we both enjoyed the conversation. I always feel an instant connection with anyone who's gone through hard stuff in their life.

**Is there anything you'd like to add?**

I just want to say thank you to Chloe for reaching out to me and taking the time to do this interview. I'm really glad to be a part of this.

HEART SONG OF LOVE IN THE GREY

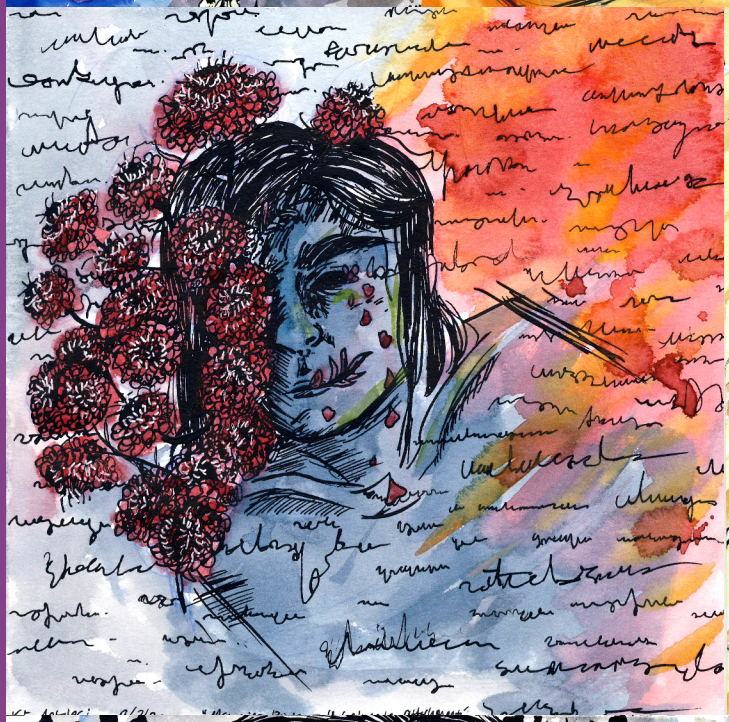
Look towards the sky, watch the rain fall;
She's crying for the dead of the day.
She wants just to say, join hands and pray
And be glad for the sun on its way.

Look at the birds sing through sorrow,
They don't know what comes from dismay;
There's only one thing the birds want to sing
It's the heart song of love in the grey.

Look towards your heart my sweet lover;
There's much to be had in your pain.
Stand quietly still, hold onto your will
Let the oceans run wild through your veins.

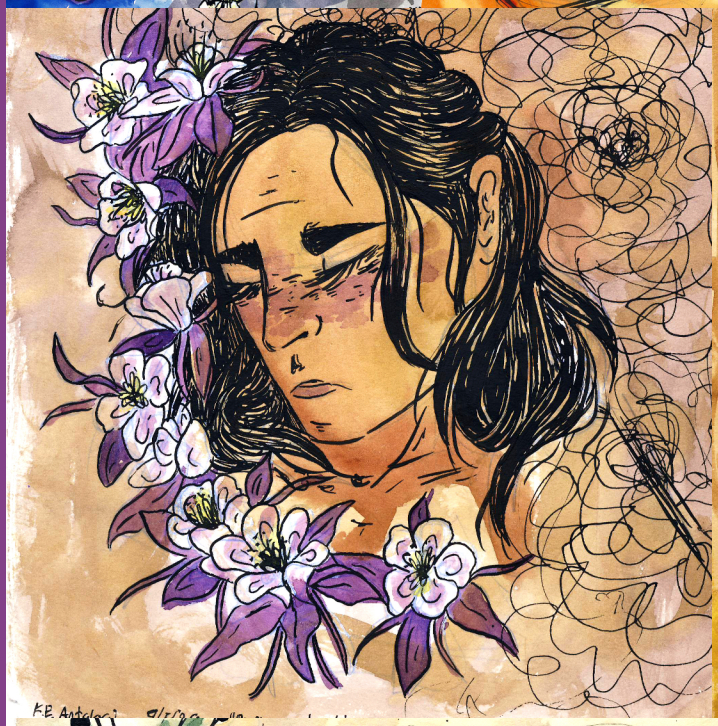
# Cycles

## By Kel



K.E. Antolec 9/5/20 "Coral honeysuckle the color of my face"

K.E. Antolec 9/6/20 "Snapdragon — graciousness & Deception"



K.E. Antolci 9/9/20 Pine time with cure

K.E. Antolci 9/10/20 Ivy Geranium your hand for the next dance

K.E. Antoluci 9/11/20 Begonia Beware, dark thoughts

K.E. Antoluci 9/13/20 Dwarf sunflower Adoration

K.E. Antoluci 9/14/20 Willow Sadness

K.E. Antoloci 9/18/20 Butterfly Weed let me go

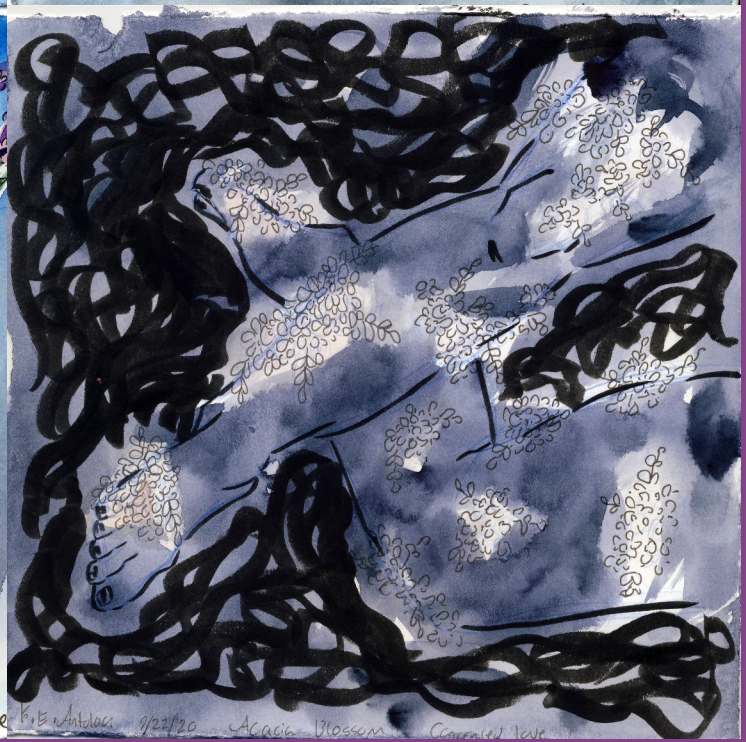
K.E. Antoloci

K.E. Antoloci 9/17/20 forget me not — do not forget me

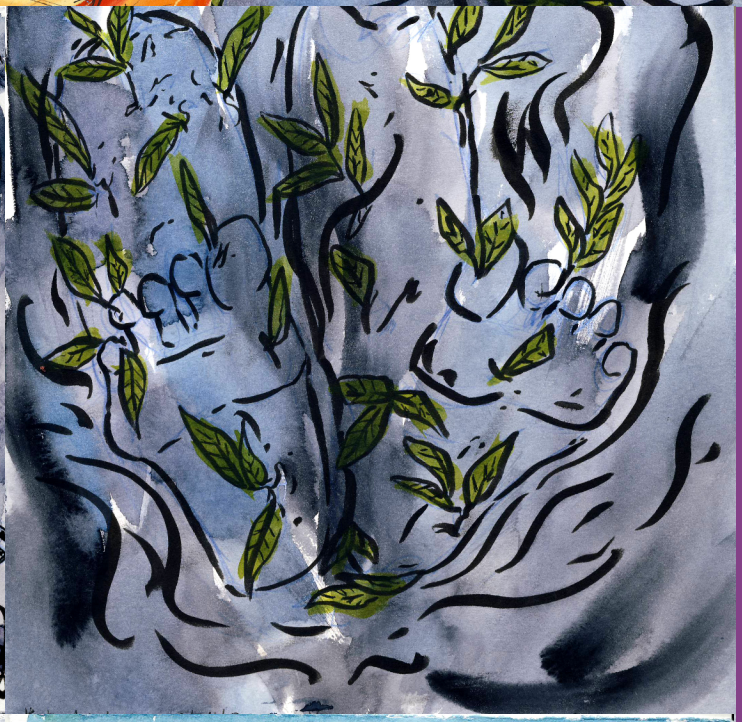
K.E. Antoloci 9/18/20 anemone forsaken

K.E. Antolosi 9/19/20 Sweet Pea Venture

K.E. Antolosi 9/21/20 lavender Words, though sweet, may be deceptive


K.E. Antolosi 9/22/20 Acacia Blossom Connected Love

K.E. Antoloci 9/23/20 Crab Blossoms in nature



K.E. Antoloci 9/25/20 Poppy Eternal Sleep

K.E. Antoloci 9/26/20 White Clover think of Me

9/27/20 Petunia resentment / anger

9/28/20 Gladioli Give me a break

9/30/20 Monkshood Deceit; Poisonous words

# KIMMY HENDERSON

feelings are much like waves,
we can't stop them from coming but
we can choose which one to surf
#BIPOLARBUTTERFLYPROJECT

I grew up in North Canton, Ohio, which is Northeast of Ohio, like 50 minutes south of Cleveland. I doodled all my life and sketched and when I was younger I wanted to work for Disney. I went to school, I switched majors four times, nothing art related. I ended up bartending after that. I never used any of my education, and I painted a window.

*I first picked up a paintbrush after my son was born, so I was 28, and I painted a window, and a friend liked it and asked me to paint them a window, and then I started painting.* And I wanted to stay with glass because there are so many canvas artists, so it was just something different. And I got involved in the local artists district where I live. They have shows, like First Fridays, and then I painted wine glasses for my old boss. And that changed everything. It was much more lucrative. It was a good niche market for me, and with the help of social media, I went from selling at local events in Northeast Ohio to shipping worldwide. It was taking off. I was kind of offered a contract with Bed, Bath, and Beyond for their regional sale, but I couldn't keep up—it was just me painting. And I looked really legit online. Kids were sending me internship requests and resumes from different art institutes, and I was like: This is just my kitchen, everything's covered with paint. I think people thought I was more successful than I was. I was very flattered by that though.

Things were escalating very fast before I had my first big manic episode. *Before I was diagnosed and before I really hit my peak. I painted a butterfly on a window, which later on was the first bipolar butterfly.* And I peaked—I was very lucky I wasn't hospitalized, only because I have a family history and they have a doctor who brought me in. And I stayed at my parents' house for like 3 weeks, just instead of being admitted. I was pretty young, not disobedient, but it was hard, so I wouldn't take the medicine, fell into a huge depression. I've never really experienced depression like that before. I just couldn't paint anymore, I had no desire, I'd lost all my creativity, and then after I found a balance of medicine—for me it's Lamotrigine—and figured out therapy that worked for me, *I realized how well the butterfly represents not only the dual sides of bipolar, the creative and inspiring against the chaos, messy. But then I got to thinking: It's almost like all mental illness because people want to show your best side forward, and we can't see what each other are going through inside, and inside we may be crumbling, you know, and just melting away, and people don't know that.* So I called it a bipolar butterfly, I shared it, and I started getting lots of orders, and people were like: I love that you're so open about this, and you're so brave to talk about this, and I was like: *It shouldn't be brave, you know.*

So, I decided to paint a whole series, and I was in the middle of painting prints, when I heard a segment on NPR. And it was discussing violence in mental health, and there were plenty of awful statistics, but the one that ate at me was the number two cause for ten to 34-year-olds was suicide. I had a ten year old and a 13 year old at the time. And they're predispositioned to struggle with this already, so I'm like I want to do something more with this, it's getting such a good outpour and feedback. I had the opportunity to do a mural. I was accepted to do a mural for open art call, and I painted the one they wanted, and then afterwards, there was another wall, and I shared my story, and *I asked them if I could paint the first interactive bipolar butterfly mural and they agreed to let me.* And then another gallery saw it, and it just kind of spread, you know. It got awareness and it got media coverage, and it kind of grew, and then I did a sculpture one for a really prestigious historical place here, and I'm doing one right now for the zoo here. It's just kind of taking off on its own. *I'm not steering here, I'm just along for the ride.* I have no idea what'll come next. We'll see. You reached out to me, and I'm meeting new people. And I would love to get funding for one in every state, like the capital or something, but that's really ambitious, and we'll see one day. Right now I have four cities in Northeast Ohio, I have three more sites approved, funding's become an issue because of Covid. I'm not teaching classes anymore, so my personal income has dropped, so I've applied for grants. And we're doing a GoFundMe in some of the different cities, like Downtown Akron reached out to me and they have free programs, but it can take a long time for that to go through. But *this has become something to me that I've never expected.*

It's funny because my mania is very spiritually rooted, and that's common. I know there's illusions of grandeur and whatnot but religion's a big one. And I feel called to ministry. And I'm convinced that God has given me a purpose, something to do, but it does cross over to delusion at some point. But, I feel that there is kind of truth to it, and it turns out this whole bipolar butterfly project is that call. *It's not a religious call rather but a spiritual call. So, I'm happy to do it.*

I realized I don't want this to be just about my art. I want it to be uplifting, and somewhere other people can come to share their story. I don't want to be just: Oh, that's cool, she shows off all her art, her story, like that's cool. I want it to be inspirational, and, honestly I'd love to do something like you're doing: have a blog where people can come and share their story. I find it fascinating when I talk to people who are bipolar. Nobody talks about their manic experience. My family doesn't like it because I have good memories, positive, and they're like, Kimmy, no, no one feels the same way as you, it was not positive. So, I just think it would be cool to have a space where different people feel comfortable talking about it. And I also feel like it would be easier for me to recognize it and not be in so much denial. I've read other stories and been like: Oh my gosh, I totally relate.

But now, I've realized, okay it is a chemical illness because so many of us are experiencing similar things. If I had known that before I might have been in less denial. I just think that could be therapeutic for people and help them.

It's funny with the wine glasses because people are like this isn't as lucratively steady as that; why don't you go back to that, and I can't explain it—I'm not moved. *And there really is a thing about the starving artist if you look throughout history.* They sacrifice a lot of material comfort because they're so into it and I never understood that until now. Like I've done murals for free, just for places that want to have it but don't have the money to pay for it, and I'm like, that's okay, I'll do it because I just want to do it. It's not about the money right now, which it's going to have to be, because I can't afford to keep doing this. But, yeah, honestly this has been my primary focus this whole year.

It's kind of convenient with COVID, so I used to teach all different classes, I'd teach them at the zoo and at different restaurants and I'd have company and team building exercises and I've done workshops with middle school grade kids, and I love that. The last one we did was a bunch of middle school girls and we were just talking about activism through art and using your voice, and we focused on the butterfly. They made a paper butterfly, and it was gorgeous, but the point of it was teaching them things that are important to you that you want to change or make a difference in, art is a great expression for that. *And, for me, teaching classes is helpful for a lot of people who don't realize how therapeutic art can be.* You can express things where words cannot. And a lot of people are like—I'm not artistic, I can't do stick figures, and it's like, when we break it down and get into it, I've never had anyone who's not pleasantly surprised. One, how much they enjoy it, and two, when you're just doing it freely without the expectation, everyone feels impressed with what they make.

When I was little I wanted to work for Disney—I love his style, but honestly, wing murals—I didn't know I was going to do wing murals. Kelsey Montague, who does the famous one, the big Tennessee ones, I actually sent her an email but I haven't heard back. She travels the world, she's huge. But there's other—I can't remember specific names, isn't that awful—the only art education I had in college was art history which was a prerequisite, you had to take it, and of course, Frida Kahlo and Georgia O'Keefe. I just love that style. In my personal life, my oldest sister is very creative. My brother too. I have two sisters and a brother, and my one sister will tell you that she's not artistic, but she is. She used to do stationary and she just has an eye for arrangements and stuff.

I tell everyone now when I talk to people and their kids, *we live in a world where it's so easy to encourage the arts.* Because when I was young, there was no Instagram, like what are you going to do with an art degree? It was fun to do but there was no way to do it as a business, really.

And now, through social media, we just have this creative industry that is so much more present than it was back in the 1900s. I was born in '79, so technically I was born in the '70s but not really. A lot of people will contact me and be like: how did you get started and whatnot, and I will say, there was no game plan. It was literally all organic; I just stumbled my way through it. *But I will say you're going to get a lot more rejection than you will reception. And at the beginning I used to be really disheartened, but now, I realize that, every time I get a rejection, that's just fuel for what to do differently.* I don't get sad anymore, I'm just like, that's not my avenue.

I didn't get diagnosed until I was 35, and I've heard people say that there's a big diagnosis between your teen years through your twenties and then there's another wave of diagnoses in your upper-thirties to 50, and a lot of those people, either their intelligence level is high or their creativity level is high, and they were able to ride out the mania in a sense. But I had that first major manic episode when I was 35, and since then I've had three documentable, but as you may know, it's a learning curve. The first one spiked so high because we didn't know, and then the second one, when I'm getting elevated, which just means I'm not sleeping. I can see my history. *When I get creative or I have a show or I'm really into something, I'm up all night. I don't want to sleep. I want to paint.* But now, my husband will say, you're not sleeping, and if he says I need to take Risperdal or something to come down, he can see it before me. So, my last two were getting smaller and smaller, and I'm kind of learning how to balance.

I can't tell you the encouragement I've received just from the general public. I hate to say it, but people I don't know are almost more supportive of it and are like, this is great what you're doing, rather than people who know me personally. I think sometimes they'll get—not concerned—but I get so excited and stressed about projects. They're always asking, are you sleeping, are you taking your meds, and I'm kind of like, "yeah." So, definitely, my family is happy for me, but *I think my biggest encouragement is honestly people that I don't know who contact me or write to me and say "I'm so moved by this" or whatever, and that's just an honor. I love that I have the opportunity to make that kind of impact.*

Once COVID is over, I would love to do more community paint classes or even projects. Like if I could work for kids groups and have a community effort to paint, you know, that's not just me, but like I go into a city, and we work with whatever youth, and they help design and help paint or whatnot. I just want it to be less about me and my personal experience and more about the story, you know. People being a part of it. And I loved doing the classes, but all that's in the air right now. We have no idea what's going to happen.

*Honestly, I've never had anyone not like butterflies*, and it means a lot, so many different things, and the changing, the evolving, you know. And there's a quote, "for just when the caterpillar thought his life was over," or something about being in the dark, "he emerges a butterfly." *It's just a good example of change and becoming more happy and beautiful with your life, I guess.*

The mayor had me come do "junior achievement." I don't know if you know what that is, but it's a program where professionals come and talk to grade-school level kids, just to give them a experience. So, they asked me to come as an entrepreneur, which was an honor. And I told him, my only fear is, when I talk about college, I don't want to discourage kids from college, but for kids who aren't going to have that opportunity, that they don't need it necessarily depending on what they do. I want people to realize I had an academic plan. I was gonna be a teacher, like my sisters, and I had direction, and it just didn't pan out. And, I felt lost, for a long time. If I could talk to myself twenty years ago now, because this has all really taken off in the last year, I would saved so much stress and so much money. *I want people to realize, you don't have to follow the path or the mold that's expected of you.* And I don't want to tell people to not do what their family or friends want them to do, but you kind of got to follow your heart, and *sometimes you'll find your space or your calling in a completely unplanned way.*

I feel sometimes when I meet people in public, I can almost feel like they're hypomanic right now or whatever, just the way that they're talking. Like my husband, he can tell. And I'm social anyway, and I like to talk, but when I am a little manic, I just keep going, and I'm asking people their history, and I just can't turn it off. I think a lot of people who are afraid to talk about it, about the stigma is they assume that people think they're crazy, they're unstable, they're unhealthy. And that's not true for everyone. For me, I'm really creative. That's my mania. It's not always self-destructive. It gets to the point where it is but up until that, it's very inspiring kind of.

*I have to say, the original butterfly I did with the trees behind it, that's the closest to the original one I painted on a window, which is my favorite.* That's the first one, from my first manic episode before I was diagnosed, where we knew I was manic, was when I drew it. And really when I think about it, *it feels like destiny.* Like the universe, in the beginning, evolving this without my knowledge.

*Painting is just fun for me.* We ended up doing a metal sculpture which was a collaboration with a metal fabricator who I shared my story with. There was a call for sculptures at this national historic place in Akron. And I've never done a sculpture and it got me thinking. And I asked my husband, How can I take this from a 2D painting and make it into a 3D sculpture, so I ended up emailing multiple metal fabricators, and one responded. They were so on board with the idea because it touched them, all of them, in such a personal spot. They all

had a mental health personal experience. They donated the metal for the first one, and it would've been ten thousand dollars. So, they're also working with me on the zoo one right now. *So, that's another thing I'm floored by, is that so many other people want to be a part of it*. There's another company that made a filter of butterfly wings for me on Facebook. And I couldn't afford any of this, but people hear about this, and they want to be a part of it. So, that's another big thing for me, is realizing that this movement, if you will, that people want to be a part of it. And not just me, and not just artists. Like people that make things in other industries. But my first blue one probably is my favorite, and painting is my favorite, but I do enjoy the sculpture that we made, and we also made a big wood one. *I do enjoy experimenting with other mediums. I really want to paint some on glass, that's my goal.* So free-standing glass, in cities, so it's clear, but it's so expensive. And we have to find a glass company.

The one at the zoo is going to have a design of a variety of animals they have at their zoo. It's the shape of a butterfly, but it's not going to be the picture of a butterfly. It'll be a montage of fauna and flora from their zoo.

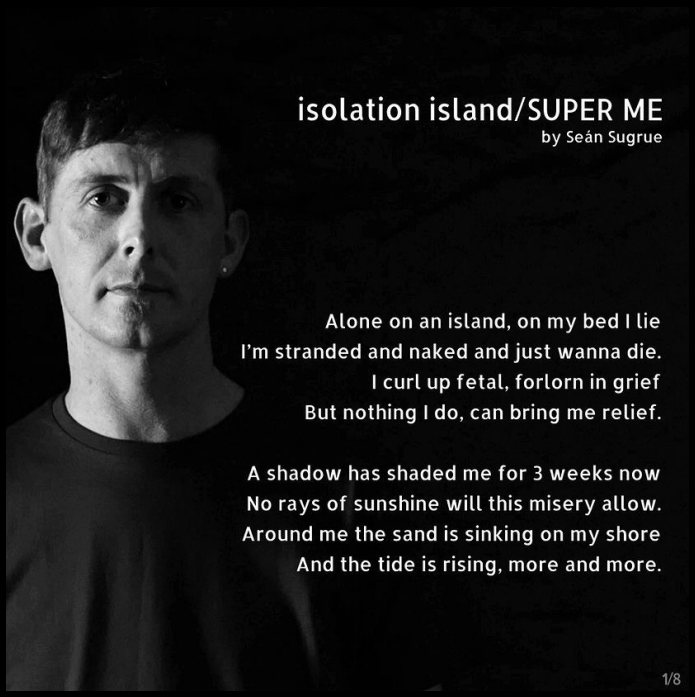
I was blogging for a while before my episode, and then the first response I had was after I blogged about mental health, after the first butterfly, and that's when I realized this speaks to a lot of people. But I love writing. I didn't realize how much I would love writing. I need to get a blog back up again. Right now, I feel like I have so many plates in the air, but yeah, I do love writing, and something I didn't think I would love as much as I do.

*Right now, I have Makikisart.com, but we're starting bipolarbutterflyproject.com*. I'm really hoping that, with social media, there are so many social influencers right now that are advocates for mental health. So I'm really hoping that this takes off. And I've sent stuff to different people I've seen or advocates, but I doubt it'll ever make it too them. They get fan mail from millions of people. It's based on exposure.

*For a recently diagnosed person, my advice would be that it does get easier. You might go through serious hell, but it does get easier*. I was kind of blessed. I had a good support group. I had family that's familiar with it. They kind of recognized it, and I had a supportive husband, and I was really lucky to have that lifeline, and, honestly, I can't imagine not having that. You hear all of these awful stories, whether they're homeless, or who knows what they're going through. We don't know what anybody's going through mentally, or what kind of support group they have, or what kind of experience they've had, so one, just love. That's what I teach my children. You never know, and I hope they realize that too, you never know what people are going through and just to be nice to everyone and some people don't have that lifeline. And *just through your kindness, you may be helping someone you'll never know.* That smile or that whatever they need. For artists, I'd say keep at it, even if people don't agree or like it, or question what you're doing.

*No matter how much rejection you get, keep at it and believe in yourself. I believe a lot of things are meant to be if people just have the confidence. Plus, it's just therapeutic even if you don't have the confidence. It's just good for your health, and your soul, and your mental health to get that creativity out there. For people who are both bipolar and artists, I think very much art is a good way for people to express themselves. It's a great creative outlet to harness and give yourself that opportunity.*

*And a lot of people are like, I'm not artistic, I don't do that sort of thing, but just try it, you never know.*



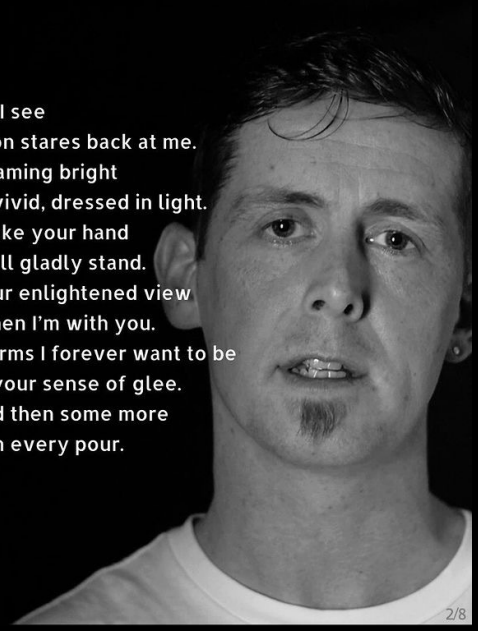
## isolation island/SUPER ME

by Seán Sugrue

Alone on an island, on my bed I lie
I'm stranded and naked and just wanna die.
I curl up fetal, forlorn in grief
But nothing I do, can bring me relief.

A shadow has shaded me for 3 weeks now
No rays of sunshine will this misery allow.
Around me the sand is sinking on my shore
And the tide is rising, more and more.

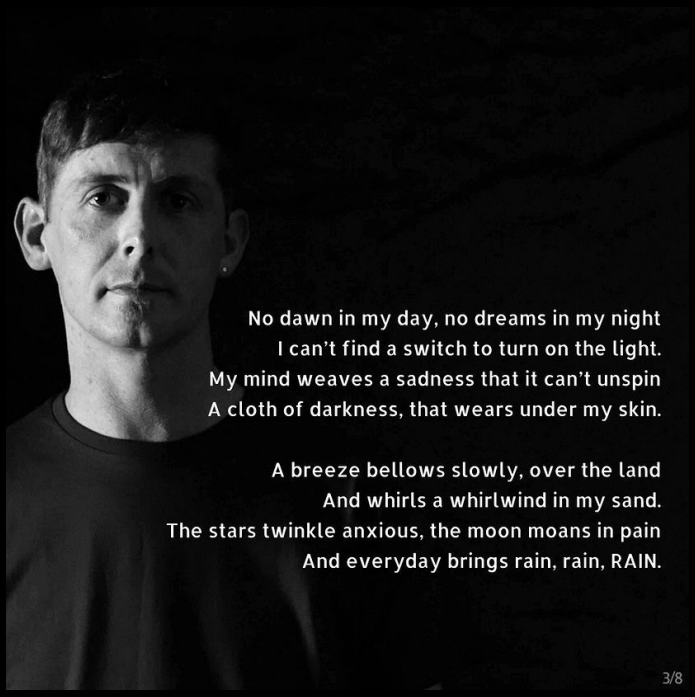




SUPER ME, it's you I see
When my reflection stares back at me.
A mirror image beaming bright
That seems more vivid, dressed in light.
So my friend, I'll take your hand
And by your side I'll gladly stand.
Because I love your enlightened view
I feel more me, when I'm with you.
Wrapped in your arms I forever want to be
And always have your sense of glee.
You fill me full and then some more
With excitement in every pour.



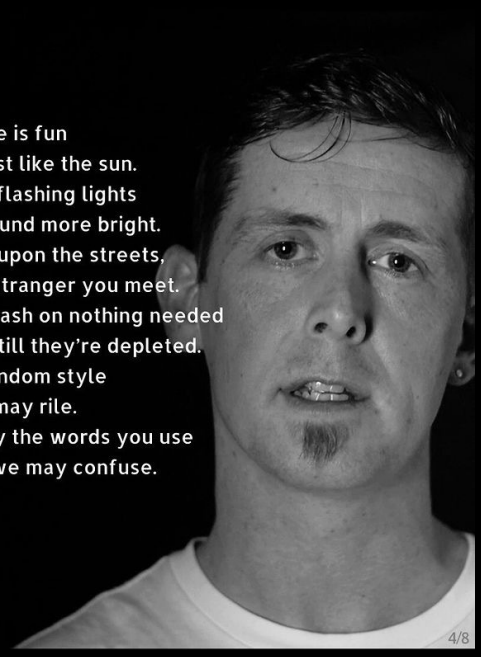
isolation island/SUPER ME



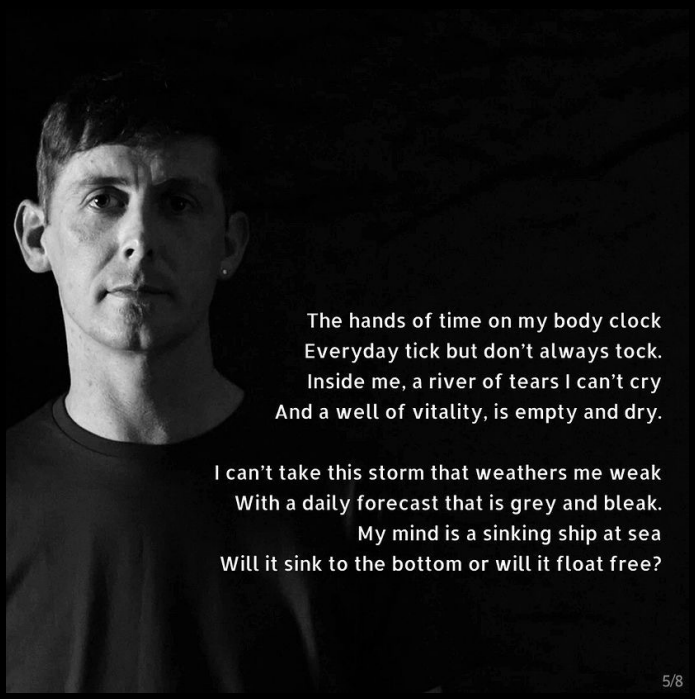
No dawn in my day, no dreams in my night
I can't find a switch to turn on the light.
My mind weaves a sadness that it can't unspin
A cloth of darkness, that wears under my skin.

A breeze bellows slowly, over the land
And whirls a whirlwind in my sand.
The stars twinkle anxious, the moon moans in pain
And everyday brings rain, rain, RAIN.





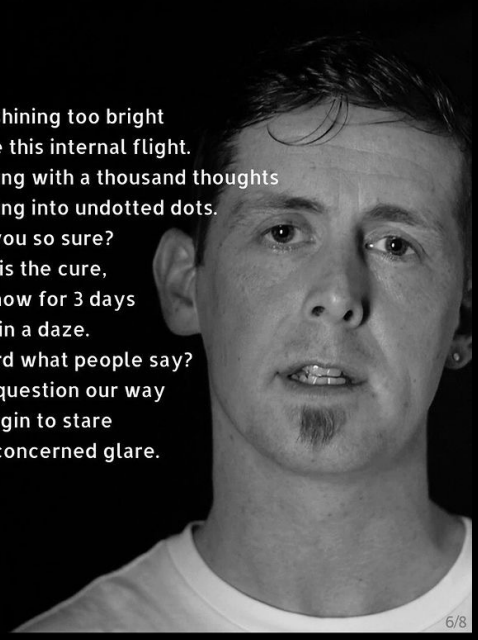
SUPER ME, this sure is fun
I feel your heat just like the sun.
Colours neon and flashing lights
I feel the music sound more bright.
We dance around upon the streets,
We talk to every stranger you meet.
We spend all my cash on nothing needed
Max out my cards till they're depleted.
You talk a lot in random style
Using rhyme that may rile.
We chatter quickly the words you use
People listening, we may confuse.



The hands of time on my body clock
Everyday tick but don't always tock.
Inside me, a river of tears I can't cry
And a well of vitality, is empty and dry.

I can't take this storm that weathers me weak
With a daily forecast that is grey and bleak.
My mind is a sinking ship at sea
Will it sink to the bottom or will it float free?

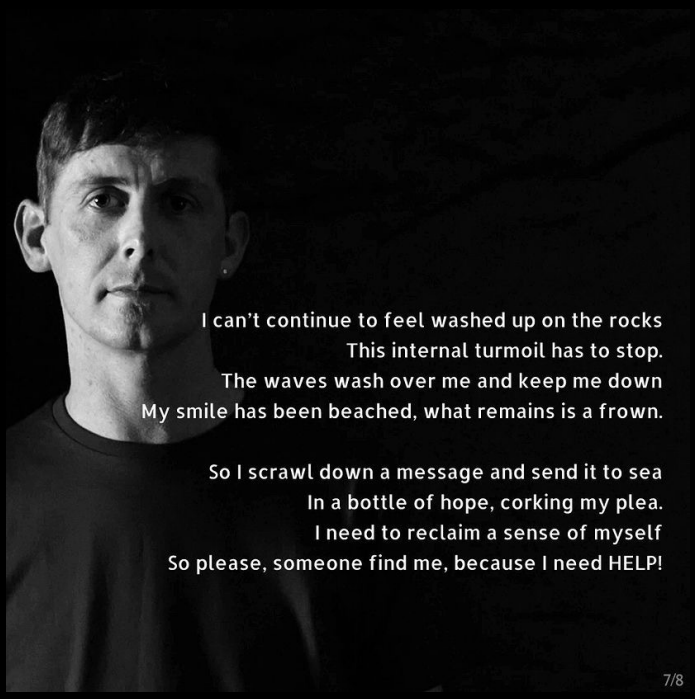
5/8



SUPER ME, you're shining too bright
My body can't take this internal flight.
My mind is expolding with a thousand thoughts
All quickly imploding into undotted dots.
So my friend, are you so sure?
That this madness is the cure,
We haven't slept now for 3 days
My mind is racing, in a daze.
And have you heard what people say?
Now they start to question our way
They even now begin to stare
Their eyes with a concerned glare.

6/8

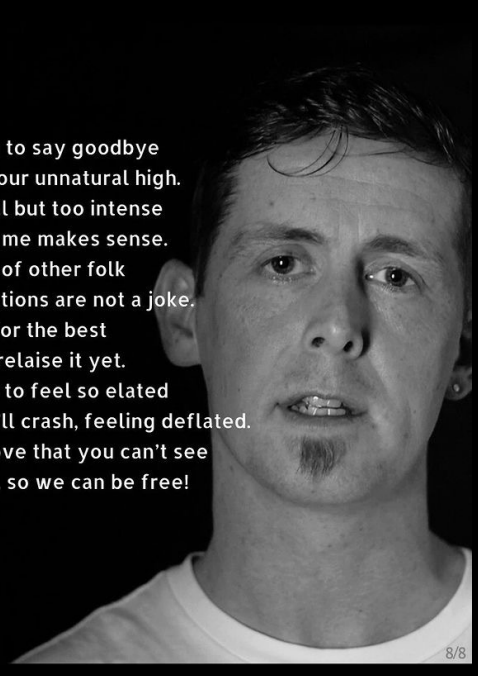
# isolation island/SUPER ME



I can't continue to feel washed up on the rocks
This internal turmoil has to stop.
The waves wash over me and keep me down
My smile has been beached, what remains is a frown.

So I scrawl down a message and send it to sea
In a bottle of hope, corking my plea.
I need to reclaim a sense of myself
So please, someone find me, because I need HELP!

7/8



SUPER ME, It's time to say goodbye
And put an end to our unnatural high.
Your passion is real but too intense
So breaking up for me makes sense.
You need the care of other folk
Who know your actions are not a joke.
I know it really is for the best
But you just don't relaise it yet.
You can't continue to feel so elated
Because soon you'll crash, feeling deflated.
I'm showing you love that you can't see
I'm locking you up, so we can be free!

8/8

# MAHRINNA

**A lot of your paintings are very surrealist/abstract. What does this type of art allow you to do that more photo-realistic art could not?**

First off, I feel like making photo realistic art is boring to me. It's great to look at, but for me it's not enjoyable. After all, my life is surreal and abstract. I see hallucinations of Mario and toad on my ceiling, see cheerios when I close my eyes sometimes, and even see giant Gatorade bottles in my room. Of course, I'm talking about the happier hallucinations, although they are still terrifying.  My life isn't normal- it's strange and  not at all realistic.  This colorful, weird and graphic art allows me to express how fluid my emotions are while holding on to the more colorful and happier aspects of it. Also, I can use glitter and that's always fun.

**Introduce yourself!**

Hi! My name is Marinna Shareef, also known as Mahrinnart on Instagram. I'm 22, live in Trinidad and currently am working on my art to survive this very weird world.

**Your art is extremely colorful. What's your favorite color and why?**

This is a tough one, but I love a nice, bold orange. I just love to buy all my clothing in that color. The love for it comes from a part of my life where I felt like I was manifesting only orange and blue things- representing the duality of life and how things can be good and bad at the same time. Back then I looked at it as a sign of hope, as I was seeing two colors I loved everywhere. I associated it with the universe going the way I wanted it to. Now, I recognize orange as a powerful and inspirational color ,while the blue feels like a neutral evil.

**What's your favorite quote? (It can be about anything)**

The first quote that came to my mind was "Blue skidooed, you can too," but for a more serious answer, it's "The world doesn't need another painting, so make yours count," from my Fine Art lecturer, Nikolai Noel. It reminds me to keep making my art authentic and strange.

**What small (or big) thing happened today that made you smile?**

I was mad at my dog for walking into a place she wasn't supposed to be in, and my other dogs started to bark at her and put her in her place haha.

**When were you diagnosed with bipolar and which type? What was that experience like?**

I was diagnosed around 2017 with type II bipolar disorder. It was absolutely relieving to hear. A lot of people get scared of finding that they have a mental illness, but I was so thankful that I really had it as I was in so much pain that I had no idea what to do with myself anymore. Being able to know that I had a diagnosis and could get the help I needed (despite the long, ongoing journey) felt like a breath of fresh air after not being able to breathe for a long, long time.

**Who are the biggest supporters in your life and what do they do that helps the most?**

My boyfriend Stephen and my cousin Cassie. They really know how to listen and not suggest things to make it better, or just simply be there. It's really important with bipolar disorder to have someone to talk to without trying to hear unsolicited solutions, because trust me when I say I have tried it all. Also they've dealt with me being both manic and depressive for so long (especially my cousin Cassie) and I have no idea how they handle me. I do keep a lot of it from them, but it shocks me how much they've witnessed and just stuck with me through. Stephen also ensures that I take my meds when we Facetime nightly which is very helpful during manic or depressive episodes. I'm extremely grateful.

**You also often incorporate your own face into your artwork. When did you start this technique and what inspired it?**

I began to use it when my lecturer critiqued my painting and asked why I didn't use my own face. It was only then I realized that while I always used my face in digital pieces, I never even thought of painting it. After that, I never turned back.

Painting other people makes me focused on trying to make it actually look like them. Painting myself almost feels like Photoshopping or using makeup, I'm accentuating my features but have the freedom to turn myself into anything.

**How has your educational, cultural, and social background played a role in your bipolar? In your life?**

This is a question I have many answers to so i'll try to list them as best as I can:

Educational: Depression hampered my motivation and will to do tasks often, and so really impacted my work at certain points. I was also known as the 'girl who cries for everything', because well, I legitimately cried for everything, they just never knew the real reasons why- and I guess at that time I didn't either.
Cultural: It definitely made me look at Trinidadian culture and notice certain aspects of it where stigma against the mentally ill is deeply embedded in the traditions and language. For example, locals call the mental hospital the 'mad' house almost exclusively, and if using the proper name of the institution , it would be used as an insult towards the other person it was directed towards. For example " You need me to take you to St Anns awah?"
Social: At my worst point mentally, I stopped being able to regularly keep in contact with people and it has affected me to this day. I feel like I can't talk to people via social media as it feels so nerve wrecking and exhausting. It even is difficult to communicate with friends.
Life: Having bipolar disorder and then being diagnosed with it has affected so much of my life. I would even dare to say it has affected every part of my life. It is tough, but there are glimpses of greatness. I must admit I love the productivity mania brings in those very short and fast paced times. It really does make me feel like a superhero. As soon as it's over however, the realization that I have been both delusional and extremely annoying sinks in. It is embarrassing.

**What are two stereotypes about bipolar you've come across? What do you think of these stereotypes?**

One stereotype I often see, especially online is that "all females have bipolar disorder because of how quickly they get mad." Now don't get me wrong, anger is a big part of bipolar disorder for some individuals, but this implies that getting angry easily equates to having bipolar disorder, which is very complex and consists of different states. I really hate this stereotype and try to educate those who use it in the best way I can, but it seems like I waste my breath on those who insist on continuing to spread misinformation while belittling women. Another stereotype I have encountered has unfortunately come from a health professional. I was visiting a primary care physician who was interested in any medications I was on and my reasons for taking them. Upon telling him that I needed them for my bipolar disorder, he insisted that I should 'learn to control my emotions', and stop taking the medication. This still makes me incredibly mad to this day and shows the height of ignorance even in the healthcare community about mental illness.

**What do you do to keep yourself healthy?**

Medication and accepting my depression. Stressing about not being able to get the energy to get off my bed or not being able to communicate with friends is pointless. It makes things so much worse. Accepting your depressive episodes can allow you to get the rest you need without adding more stress or pain. Despite this, it is very important to try to do the little things to help. Try to brush your teeth, make your bed and eat on time. Balance what you need to do with things that are not necessary to your mental well being. When it comes to mania, it's being able to recognize when I need to force myself into doing activities that calm me down. I'm still having a hard time with that one.

**What words of wisdom would you share with someone newly diagnosed with bipolar?**

The same advice I'd give to anyone who was diagnosed with a mental illness. It is not a message of hope- but a message of preparation. This is the first step to a very hard, lifelong journey. It doesn't go away, but can be managed. It takes guts, it takes bravery, and it takes acceptance. However, it does indeed get better once you do, and it is worth it. The glimpses of normalcy I've had makes everything worth it. Being able to live the life I've dreamt of, even for a little while feels unfathomably great. It is worth the pain, despite not feeling like it right now.

**What is the best piece of artwork you've ever created, in your opinion?**

'The Attack' room installation. To quote my art statement, "'The Attack,' is a maximalist installation that aims to immerse viewers into an intense sensory environment that is modeled after my bipolar mixed episode experience. With bright colors and unconventional usage of Trinidad-esque shapes, the bedroom stage setting attempts to mimic my experiences with psychosis, specifically my self mutilation visions in a less gory manner. It aims to educate viewers about my bipolar experience, and create informed conversations about the mentally ill in our local context." Having it displayed in the National Museum of Trinidad and Tobago allowed creatives and non-creatives to view it. Some people's views were opened about bipolar disorder, while others actually ran out of the room out of fear. I'd love to run out of my own brain sometimes as well, so I can't blame them. The conversations I had with people were honestly so eye opening. From the security guard who opened up to me about her struggles and wishing that I didn't go through the things I did because I appeared to have it all, to the supposed 'biologist' who told me that God could cure me if I prayed. I think it's funny that she assumed I never tried that after going through so much pain. Also there was that one artist who immediately greeted me as 'an artist that has been in the design sector for 30 years,' while insulting all of my pieces except one which reminded him of an anime he liked. Wow. That really was the most interesting time in my life.

**Who's your favorite artist?**

Yayoi Kusama is a huge inspiration to me due to her colorful work to escape her reality, but the person whose work I'd love to have in my home is Bruce Riley. His fluid work with resin and acrylic fluid (I assume) is unpredictable and utterly beautiful. Not being able to control how the color reacts with how it is applied onto the resin is inspiring, as I do not have the courage to experiment in that way. It is courageous, and when I tried to do something similar, I had this dreadful feeling of messing it up although it is supposed to be mostly instinctive and freeform. His skill is inspiring. I hope one day I can display a giant piece of his in my own home.

**Anything you'd like to add?**

Answering these questions were therapeutic. Reflecting on my experience as an artist living in a place that is so ignorant towards mental illness weirdly made me happy.

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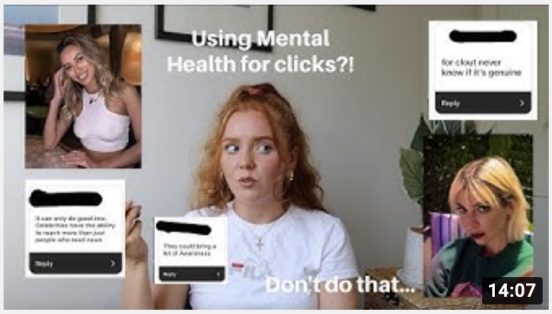
# KATIE KENDALL

"I just want to say – that whatever you are struggling with at the moment, keep pushing through. I know it's hard and sometimes the easy option seems to be giving up. When I was in hospital dealing with one of the worst depressive episodes of my life, one of my friends, Rory, told me: 'there is always light at the end of the tunnel, but because the tunnel has turns you may not see it yet'. I guess what I take from this is that there is always a pathway out, but it's not an easy one. Always remember this and keep pushing – you got this!"

"

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Cactus Kat

Episode 1 of my new series where I discuss popular topics surrounding mental health. This week we are discussing the positives and negatives of celebrities talking about mental health. Let...

**Tell me a little bit about yourself—**

**Where did you grow up?**

**What are you up to now?**

My names Katie, I'm 23 years old and I grew up in London in the UK. At the moment I'm working on my mission to end the stigma against mental health issues. I also love expressing myself through my style / fashion. I do youtube and run an Instagram blog called Katie's Corner where I basically document my life and try to educate people on the realities of bipolar disorder.

**When did you start your YouTube channel? How's it going so far?**

I started my youtube in February 2020. It's going okay, I really enjoy making content for it and I'm aiming to start a new series soon covering various issues around mental health and social media.

**On your YouTube channel, you talk about your bipolar disorder as well as general advice and updates on your life! Which video you've made is your favorite, and which one did you find the most fulfilling?**

I think my favourite video so far has to be my life update where I shared my experience with being in a psychiatric hospital. I was scared to post it but I created this platform to destigmatise mental illness and be real to myself – so I felt like it was important to film.

The most fulfilling video has to be my most recent video on women's rights. It was by far the most difficult to film but I felt like it was needed. It felt right to stand up for women and to show my support for so many of us who have felt in danger.

**You say that you like fashion in your bio! Do you have a favorite designer or brand? What's your favorite outfit in your closet right now?**

Yeah! I love fashion, it's one of the main ways I feel like I can express myself. It's hard to pick a favourite brand, but if I had to choose it would probably be Daily Paper or Pieces*. I feel like both brands are revolutionary in their approach to fashion. Pieces* especially brings a whole new energy to the world of denim.

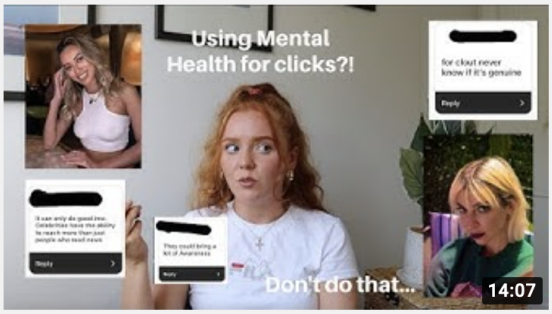
**What are some of your favorite things to do? Do you have any creative outlets beyond YouTube and fashion?**

To be honest I really love creating content for my Instagram and spreading awareness around mental health. Also, I love shopping (although this isn't always a good thing for my bank account lol).

I like drawing / painting, and going for walks as well – as cliché as it sounds. I find that it really clears my head and takes me away from all the stress.

YouTube

I've always loved watching YouTube, for as long as I can remember, and I've always been interested in creating content. I feel like the platform enables anyone to be what or who they want to be, and I love that about it.

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**Do you enjoy music? What's your favorite song and genre?**

Yes! I love music. I usually listen to rap / drill / r&b. My favourite song at the moment has to be Vibe by Sinai – would 10000% recommend checking it out. She's a new artist but I think it's only a matter of time for her to blow.

**Who inspires you?**

Probably my sister. She always has a way of looking on the positive side of things and her energy is unmatched. I am so lucky to have such a close relationship with her, she's like my best friend.

**Who is most supportive of you and your mental health and how do they help?**

My mum and sister. They put so much effort into trying to understand my experience and helping me manage my mental health better. Of course, I have to mention my amazing best friends too – they're always there for me when I need them!

**When were you first diagnosed with bipolar? What was that experience like?**

I was diagnosed in January 2019 after months of trying to understand what was going on with me mentally. It was a very tough experience to be honest. The doctor who diagnosed me basically ghosted me as soon as he gave me my diagnosis, so I was really thrown in the deep end – no meds, nothing. But I eventually managed to find a new one who has really helped me get back on track.

**What do you do to keep yourself healthy mentally and/or physically?**

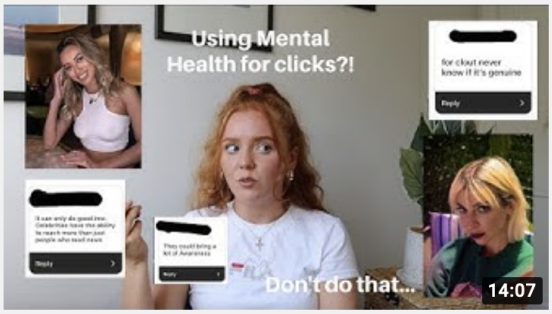
I work out a lot and try not to overthink my diet. If I'm not careful I do get a bit obsessive can develop an unhealthy relationship with food – so to me it's really important that I avoid this and just eat when I feel like it.

**What do you think is the most valuable lesson you've learned from having bipolar disorder?**

That you never know what someone else is battling with, so you should never judge a person. Everyone in life is fighting their own demons so being understanding and compassionate toward others is the most important thing you can do in this life.

YouTube

I've always loved watching YouTube, for as long as I can remember, and I've always been interested in creating content. I feel like the platform enables anyone to be what or who they want to be, and I love that about it.

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**What are two stereotypes you've encountered having to do with bipolar disorder? What do you think of these stereotypes?**

One I usually get is that it's just mood swings, which is obviously really annoying because it is so much more than that. I'd say the other one is that we're dangerous or that we can't control our behaviour – which is just wrong. Stereotypes are bad, so I think we need to stop generalising and accept that every human is individual in their own way. It would be great if more people could stop trying to fit others into certain brackets based on who they are or what they have.

**I've noticed you often wear a cross around your neck. Would you say that Christianity has helped you cope with your bipolar disorder? If so, how?**

I think it's definitely helped me keep going even in times that I felt like I couldn't. Wearing a cross makes me feel safe and protected. Yeah, I'd definitely say God has helped me through my darkest times – he's reminded me to keep faith even when I felt I didn't have any! That's probably why I'm still here today.

**What advice would you give to someone recently diagnosed with bipolar disorder? What about a fellow YouTuber or mental health advocate?**

To someone recently diagnosed – try not to freak out (if you can). Do some research on it and make sure you have people around you who can support you. Also – reach out to others who have it too, being part of a community who understands you is so important!

For fellow mental health advocates – keep doing what you're doing. We're in this together!

**Is there anything you'd like to add? What more is there to your story?**

I just want to say – that whatever you are struggling with at the moment, keep pushing through. I know it's hard and sometimes the easy option seems to be giving up. When I was in hospital dealing with one of the worst depressive episodes of my life, one of my friends, Rory, told me: 'there is always light at the end of the tunnel, but because the tunnel has turns you may not see it yet'.

YouTube

I've always loved watching YouTube, for as long as I can remember, and I've always been interested in creating content. I feel like the platform enables anyone to be what or who they want to be, and I love that about it.

# TIFFANY ROMITO

Tffany Romito is proudly from New Jersey and now resides in beautiful Washington state, outside of Seattle. She holds her master's degree in special education and has been teaching special education for almost a decade. Tiffany was diagnosed with bipolar I disorder in 2013, after a long battle with addiction. With the help of her support system, therapy, and medication, Tiffany is now living her dream as a mom of four boys. Tiffany lives on a small farm with her pigs and goats. Her life on the "funny farm" and her mental health journey can be found atfarmerish.orgor on Instagram@tiffanyromito.

Farmerish
LIFE AT THE FUNNY FARM

# Lessons in Letting Go

By Tiffany Romito

I have always had trouble with letting go of emotions, people, things… the list can be endless. I tend to hold onto things that are beyond my control and it creeps into my mental health causing me to feel this weight of negativity and self-doubt.

I see myself as an empathetic person, meaning I can truly understand what's causing certain behaviors or aspects within a person or situation. This leads me into hanging onto people who are probably not meant for me in my life. This attitude has creeped into my mental state wherein I cannot let go of self-deprecating notions about myself.

Finally, with self-care and mindful practice, I've learned a few lessons in letting go of what doesn't serve you, appreciate you, or fully deserve your attention & love. Here are some lessons I've personally experienced that may help or at least give some insight on what we can do to fully let go of the negative aspects in our life & make room for all the abundance of love we deserve:

- **Remember that the only people you need in your life are the ones who PROVE they need you in theirs.**

I've always loved this quote. Timelessly in my life I've tried to mold myself into the perfect person that people would like. Likability has always been extremely important to me. I would change aspects of my personality and even sometimes my appearance because I thought it better suited someone else needs.

I needed to let go of what of other people thought. This is still something that I constantly work on today, especially with my use of Social Media outlets. I find some people find my blog and expect me to be a certain way. Then they find my social media accounts and I perhaps appear different than what they assumed. I've lost followers on Instagram and it used to really bother me. Now I remember that I have to remain true to my authentic self and by exposing myself for who I really am- it will hopefully let in the people who prove they need me in their lives.

- **Never rely on codependency in a relationship**

Growing up, I was very coddled. I say this with nothing but love & admiration for my parents

who raised me. They doted on me as a child and I'll forever love them for that. However, it has caused this shift in my relationships with people, including men, wherein I felt dependent on them for their love and support.

I needed to find this love within myself. My husband, my friends, and even my parents cannot make me into the person I need to be. Attaching yourself to a person will never fully make you happy. You cannot rely on someone else to fulfill the needs that need to be met within yourself.

### Things are just things

I love stuff. The movieThe Little Mermaidhas always been my favorite because Ariel loved to collect stuff. In her words, "Look at this stuff, isn't it neat? Wouldn't you think my collections complete?" I've always resonated with that song as childish as it may be. I have finally learned that material objects will never make me happy.

As a person who suffers with bipolar disorder I can get very manic. This mania can sometimes translate in shopping sprees wherein I impulse buy many unnecessary items. I think the temporary joy I feel comes from a place of also trying to find outside outlets to make me happy. However that short lived "high" I feel when I rush to purchase something typically dies moments after I buy it with thoughts of guilt shortly appearing.

Things are just things. I have a beautiful family of 3 boys (soon to be 4) and a husband who is devoted to me and adores me for who I am. They are happy when I am happy. My happiness cannot be derived from physical items.

- **Addiction is just an excuse to escape from reality.**

I have an addictive personality. My mania & depression used to be soothed with the use of opiates & stimulants. I needed to learn to accept my reality for what it is and not run away from it. On the outside, my life appears to be full, rich, and rewarding. And it truly is. What more can I ask for?

I tried to explain to someone that while I know there are SO many things I need to be grateful for, my mind just processes things differently. I immediately go dark at times. I've learned to let go of negative addictions, especially while I am pregnant, which means cutting out nicotine completely and reducing my caffeine intake. I've noticed staying busy and keeping my mind occupied on outlets such as my family, my farm, and this blog has led me to lead a much more meaningful life.

I still have trouble letting go of things I cannot control. Life happens. My anxiety gets the best of me and I always fear the worst. But if we let go of what weighs us, hopefully we feel lighter and brighter.

## I know it hurts sometimes. But let it hurt. Then let it go.

# AYESHA NAVA

## Living with a mental illness in a society that stigmatizes mental health issues

Learning to live with Bipolar Disorder and accepting that as your diagnosis can be quite difficult. Over the years, I have come to accept my diagnosis

I was diagnosed at age 13; and put on a plethora of medications. Each medication had its' own worse side affect. Most of them turned me into an emotionless zombie that I didn't recognize. There was no joy, or sadness. Just a monotony of days that passed by. Most of the medications destroyed my once healthy liver. It was horrible. Throughout that experience, I learned that medication is not the treatment for me – so I began searching for another option.

Bipolar Disorder is more complex than most people think, and everyone's lived experience with it is personal and different from the next person's. The word "bipolar" is sometimes interchanged with "crazy" and that's both incorrect and offensive. People with mental illnesses are not crazy, they are ill and need treatment just like any other sickness. There are two extreme sides of Bipolar Disorder. Extreme suicidal depression, and energized mania. I've had to suffer through both.

During my adolescence I suffered through extreme depression. I experienced more of the excessive sadness of Bipolar. It was a very dark time

I felt worthless and like a burden on society. I truly felt the world would be better without me in it.I was suicidal.I hated myself, and I hated being alive. I saw no future. I went through a time where I never left the house. I had severe social anxiety. I didn't want to see anyone, or for anyone to see me.

In my teenage years/young adult life I experienced more of the energized mania feelings. My behavior became very erratic. Some episodes I don't even remember until my husband and friends reminded me of them.

Some of the symptoms/signs of my mania during my manic episode included:

- Speaking really fast, non-stop.
- Thinking that the radio/songs were sending me messages, directly. And that I could communicate with other people through songs/radio.
- Not sleeping and barely eating, but full of energy.
- Waking up at 4 am to do yoga, and doing yoga numerous times a day, obsessively.
- Obsession with religion – specifically reading the Quran throughout the day. I also had this weird urge and felt like I had to go to Saudi Arabia.
- Severe migraines – and thinking that a hair cut would help. I started cutting my hair daily, and eventually shaved my entire head. I later learned that mental anguish can cause real physical pain.

Now as an adult, I thank God daily that I survived that period in my life. If I hadn't, I never would have lived to see my life today, which is beautiful. I'm happily married with two beautiful kids. I often wish I could go back to a younger Ayesha, aged 13, and tell her it does get better! I credit Electroconvulsive Therapy for literally saving my life. I don't know where I would be without it. More on this in a bit...

During my manic/depressive episodes I did a lot of things that hurt my family and friends. And I still feel guilty about it. But at the same time I know I shouldn't feel bad, because I had no control over my actions or words. The brain is an amazing thing. It's basically a hardwired machine that operates 24/7. But one little glitch, and your entire world is turned upside down. My world was turned upside down multiple times and in my younger years, I couldn't tell anyone why.

When I was younger I felt like I had to hide my illness. Being South Asian, mental health issues were never really talked about growing up. Even now, there seems to be a stigma or embarrassment over this topic. I saw how people laughed or made fun of people for being sick. I'm choosing to help change that by being vocal and unashamed about my own experiences.

While there are more downfalls of being bipolar, bipolar actually does have some awesome side effects as well. I know – that's not something you hear everyday, ha. But it's true! **I'm really creative.** I love to paint.I can multitask really well. I love to read and learn new things. Being bipolar doesn't define who I am, but it is a major part of who I am. I acknowledge my illness, and hope to always strive to better myself

and take care of my mental health. I am bipolar, and I'm a lot of other things, too.

Today I am 33, and I've gone through many manic/depressive episodes.**Being manic feels amazing**. You have endless energy. You don't sleep for a week. You have so many new, exciting ideas. You have extreme self-esteem. You feel so happy. And then, the sleepless days turn into paranoia. You think people are out to get you. You become delusional.You don't trust anyone. And then, if you're like me, you become hospitalized. Being locked up in a hospital and not knowing when or if you will make it out is – terrifying. The last hospitalization I had, lasted two months. Being away from my son and husband for that long was horrible. I missed them everyday.

I had decided that I had had enough of not being in control. Medication wasn't the right treatment for me but I knew there was something else out there. After researching options, I discovered Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT), also known as"shock"therapy. It sounds scary because it kind of is, but like I said before – it changed my life.

While under anesthesia, the doctor administers shocks to certain parts of my brain. Being bipolar means that my brain doesn't produce enough dopamine. It also means that certain signals my brain tries to make to the rest of my body, don't go through. ECT makes my brain grow new synapses over time, so that my brain can properly send and receive messages. It also increases my dopamine levels.

Throughout my entire life,I have never felt as stable as I do now. And the anxiety that once controlled my life seems to have vanished. There are moments, although rare, that I do get anxiety. But now I am able to better manage it with my coping skills. I no longer have extreme mood swings. It just feels like smooth sailing.I have control now.

ECT isn't painless. Besides having to get poked for an IV every visit and going under anesthesia every time; I'm left with muscle soreness that can last up to two days. My jaw feels so tight from clenching down. The shocks cause your body to have a controlled seizure.So, when you wake up you're sore. I get extreme headaches, sometimes migraines after a treatment. And unfortunately for some people, it can cause memory loss. I already had a crap memory, so the memory loss hasn't seemed to affect me that much,yet.

Choosing ECT might seem like a crazy idea to some people. But even with all those side affects, I'd rather go through all that pain and risk than to have a manic episode again. I really hope that my mental health continues to get better. Every day in a new day. A new day to grow. A new day to be better. A new day in control.

Everyone is different when it comes to ECT. Some people need it monthly, or weekly. Other people can go a year etc. When I started Electroconvulsive Therapy in January of 2016, I had to go 3 times a week. Then, it was cut down to once a month, and then once every two months... and then once every 4 months. My doctor kept spreading my appointments out. I now only have to go once every 9 months.

I will have to receive ECT treatments for the rest of my life. And,I'm OK with that. For me personally, it's much better than being on medications that were so harmful. I'm so grateful that with ECT, I no longer need any mental health medications. But that's not the case for everyone. ECT affects everyone differently, so some people still do need to be on medication. And that's perfectly fine as well.

In addition to being thankful for my treatments, I'm also extremely grateful to be married to such a loving, empathetic, caring man. My husband is a caretaker by profession; and he also takes care of me. He's been there for me during my highs and lows. He was there before I was hospitalized, and he was there when I was released. I sometimes feel like I don't deserve his love; but I'm truly grateful for it. Having a partner who is unconditionally there for you is a major blessing. I wish everyone with a mental illness had the love and support I have. I know without it, life can be very scary.

Bipolar Disorder is hereditary, sadly. I often think of my children, and I pray that they don't grow up to be bipolar like me. I would hate to see them suffer like this. But that is ultimately something that is out of my control. Bipolar Disorder can be triggered by stress and anxiety during your younger years. So I'm doing my best as a mom to just keep their lives stress-free.

Being bipolar means I've lost many friends over the years. It's hard to maintain friendships when you have a mental illness. And while it hurts that I've lost so many friends along the way; I'm truly grateful for the wonderful, loving friends that have remained in my life. I don't think they will ever know how much I truly appreciate their friendships.

I remember visiting Pakistan when I was younger, and I remember mental health issues being a hush-hush subject. Lots of people didn't take the psychiatric community seriously. I heard people call those doctors "quacks." Mentally ill patients were just locked up in hospitals and forgotten about. It seems wild, but then again – it happened here, too. People used to (and still) say just pray, and everything will get better. But prayer is not enough to combat mental illness. People need to seek help. And take medication if needed. You wouldn't tell a cancer patient to just pray that their cancer went away without chemotherapy and medical assistance. Mental illness should be treated the same way.

I wish more people were vocal about their mental health issues, so that more people would have the courage to ask for the help they need and deserve. There is nothing to be ashamed of. I was born with the genes to be Bipolar. It wasn't my fault. When I was younger, I felt sad and angry that I had to suffer through these rough, dark periods in life. I felt alone and unsupported. But now, as an adult, I have come to accept my diagnosis. I have an incredible support system – and I want to educate others on the endless possibilities they have even with a mental illness.  I want to let people know that your mental illness isn't a death sentence for a normal life.

**I have Bipolar Disorder, and I am flourishing with it.**

# KIM DIAZ HOLM

I grew up in Norway. I have basically lived my whole life in Bergen, and I'm I guess sort of home sick if I'm more than one month away from the mountains here and everything here. So, I'm very much bound to my home. And I do like the rest of the world as well, and traveling and stuff like that but only for limited amounts of time. And Bergen is a very special sort of place because it's sort of built on hills and in between fjords, and it burned down many, many times, and each time it burned down, people were allowed to build new houses wherever they could. So, there's no such thing as a straight line in all of Bergen. Every street is going this way and that way, and it's a very organic city. It feels perfect for the type of art I do as well.

I started drawing when I was one year old. And I started talking when I was three and a half. So, I had my priorities straight. And, I guess when I was eight years old, I read a daredevil comic by Frank Miller, and I had bought it because it said comics for adults on the cover. And I was eight years old, so I had to read comics for adults. And it was a story about violence in media and it went far over my head and I just felt queasy and sick to my stomach reading it. And, I knew that I had to make other kids feel this way. And I didn't identify what the feeling was until later, and the feeling was that reading that story had changed me. And change isn't comfortable. It's weird and it had made me realize that my ideas before reading it were wrong, and it had forced me to get new ideas, and that's sort of when I decided in my head that I would be a professional comic book artist first. And then, after trying to be a comic book artist for many, many years, I finally failed and a couple of years ago, I became just a fine artist.

I have always drawn a lot straight with ink. I started when I was fourteen, fifteen, trying to learn how to draw American comic book style, and that's very like scripting and penciling and inking. And then, in order to try to master the inking aspect, I decided it would be a good idea to do stuff straight with ink. And then you have a lot of different ways you can do that. So, I've been on the mountain now and drawing straight with ink what I see and trying to capture the beauty of nature as directly as I could in just black and white. And, that's one approach, and another is to improvise and just figure out how the ink wants to work. And I guess my proto-ink monsters were made like twenty years ago, and then, last year, I was finishing the Inktober challenge, and I had been in a very depressive period all through the challenge, and it had been really tough and really hard to manage to draw one ink drawing per day, but I knew that the continuity was doing something good for me, so in secret I started doing one ink monster per day while still finishing that Inktober, so kind of a stupid decision to, depressed and overloaded with work, decide, let's do some secret work as well! And, the continuity of doing that stupid little exercise, making an ink monster, which can take like three minutes on a very good day and 45 minutes on a bad day, just that little bit of continuity and creativity I feel helps ground me. I've tried to do similar things all my life, get that continuity, and it took me so many years of trying to find the balance before I finally found it, which was the right lack of effort for the right gain. So, it has to be in my most depressed, most tired, beaten days, it has to be something that's achievable.

I decided I wanted to draw monsters because monsters are fun. And they can be anything. They can be something silly, like an eyeball with feet, that can take me a minute to draw, or they can be something epic reflecting some deeper human reality. They are items of different parts of our psyche. And they can be just an expression of how I'm feeling that day. So, they can be almost anything and they're fun to do and they can be, most importantly, they can be very easy. They can be whatever you want, and, with how my moods are going up and down, it has to be minimum effort, minimum effort

on bad days, and the same for everything, like having a meditation practice or doing exercise. I have to order it in such a way that I can resort to a minimum effort on some days. And then I don't need to break the continuity. And I'm very bad with routines, and all my life I couldn't keep a routine. So my bipolar cycles started more or less 25 years ago, so I've been using all that time trying to figure out those balances. And I don't know if the balance I have now is a good enough balance. But it's the best I've had so far.

I have a couple of people that I'm mentoring. Right now, I actually have two. And they're both on their own creative journeys coming from very different places and my role there is just to use my experience to hopefully help them figure out a few things themselves faster and better than they would on their own. But they have to do the work themselves.

There is a book, andI don't remember the title of the psychologist who wrote it. It's called Touched with Fire [by Kay Redfield Jamison]. And I know that it has been critiqued by people saying that she's jumping to some conclusions, and using anecdotal evidence and stuff like that, and that's what she says in the text, that she's not doing deep research on this, but she's looking through a lot of different research and getting anecdotal sort of, not a conclusion, but a hint, that there may be something very connected between bipolar states and it's worth investigating, and for me this makes a lot of sense because the creative process, whether you're bipolar or not is an up and down and it's going from the lowest self-doubt to ego highs where you just think you're the best in the world. So, the creative process itself is mimicking the bipolar cycles. And yes, I know a whole lot of artists that are diagnosed bipolar and really suffer with that. And if you think of bipolar as a spectrum, I also really know a whole lot of artists that are sort of, not diagnosed, and possibly, just outside of the spectrum that would be diagnosed, and have a lot of bipolar in their family or stuff like that, and they have those types of tendencies, so I think from other artists I've talked to and other artists who have contacted me when I talk about my bipolar, I think that it's a very common connection.

I'm definitely more creative during hypomanic periods. I have bipolar type 2 ,so I don't have manic periods. I have hypomanic periods. And I feel very lucky because type 1 is ,as far as I understand, when you go into the true mania and the psychosis, you sort of lose either yourself or your touch with reality, so it goes into delusional and psychotic states. And those are real. Those are tough. And I met enough people when they're in psychotic, manic periods that I feel extremely lucky to just have the downs, not the manic periods. And that sort of means that in my hypomanic periods, I think I'm the king of the world. My ego is just incredibly large, and I have had times where I'm definitely bordering on delusion and I'm bordering on psychosis, but it always stops a little bit before that, so I can still remain creative through the manic or hypomanic period. And the problem is, of course, that when I come up to these high periods, I start not needing any sleep. At first, I get like 4 hours a night and then to three and then two and then to not sleeping at all.

And that always ends with a crash. And I'm really good at managing to make that crash come right after the deadline is delivered or the project is done. I can always just kind of hold on, and then the depression comes. And so yeah, it is creative, but it's also uncontrollable, and I've had hypomanic periods where I've had something I need to work on because that's going to bring the paycheck in, but my mind is saying, no, I need to start this new project that will take years to finish, and I just need to focus on that. So, it is creative but it's wild. And I also find the down periods creative but in a very different way. Because when I'm high up I'm not self-reflective at all. And I'm not really a good judge of whether I'm doing good work or bad work. But, when I'm down, I'm super critical and I'm super introspective. And, as much as I hate to admit it, the voice in my head that's saying to me that all you're doing is wrong and you're the worst and those things, when I'm down, it has a point. I'm not saying it's true, but it identifies aspects of my life and of my art and of my thought that I need to work on. So, it is in those deep or depressive periods that I actually manage to solve problems creatively. So, when I'm out of the depressive periods then the problem is solved. So, it's interesting, to say the least.

I'm married, so I have a wife who keeps up with me, and definitely she has to go through a lot, and, I feel very lucky that I can rely on her in my bad periods and also rely on her to say, once in a while, like now you've started talking real fast the last few days, are you going up? But, being a father of a five year old and an eight year old, and balancing that with the ups and downs, that is really, really difficult. And I feel very blessed that I have a wife that supports me, and my parents have always been supporting. And my friends. I know that a lot of people with mental health issues are facing a lot of hostility from the world around them because of that and I have been blessed with reasonably little of that. You get in situations where people are definitely judgmental of that but I've always felt very supported and I don't know if I would be here if I wasn't.

Twenty five years ago, I was just considered a bad student, but the patterns were manifesting sometime then. Then in the early 2000s, I started going to some therapy, and the first thing I got as sort of a temporary diagnosis was ADHD or ADD. And then, around ten years ago, I think maybe twelve years ago, I've got the bipolar type 2 diagnosis. And at first it was thought it was missed with ADD, but they did a neuropsychological test that indicated that, no, probably not ADD, probably just similar symptoms because of the dpepressions. It's hard to keep focused when you have all these thoughts, so it's hard to differentiate. So now, the diagnosis is bipolar type 2 and only that.

My parents were both sort of late-hippies, punk-hippies, something alternative artist types in Norway. So, my father is a great artist, unknown but great, and my mother is an art historian. And I grew up in a very understanding and artistic home. My parents were never married and they moved apart when I was very little, so I didn't understand why people had married parents because married parents only fought and I had two places to live in case I fought with the parents. I could go to the other's, and they seemed to be much better friends than any

of the other parents I knew. And coming from that background and being basically a smart kid, I instantly hated school. And from day one, I did nothing but fight against going to school and I could have or should have legally been forced to take the last year again and again and again, but I didn't because I had understanding teachers who basically saw that I was doing other things with my life.

And, after that, I did try to go one year to a sort of pre-art-school school and I basically only partied and skipped school. And I've always been in this kind of artist sub-culture of Bergen, so Bergen is a small town, so everything has to mix a little bit. So, growing up, you had punks, and I played in a punk band, and you had black metal and the church burnings, some of that, and I knew some of those people. And my brother was a DJ playing, first, a lot of illegal raves and such and then house parties and house clubs as the scene more and more accepted that. And that was the whole culture I grew up in: punks and druggies and school quitters and creative people. Most of them have done really well afterward, and have good, well-paid jobs and are doing the creative stuff still. Of course, a few that didn't survive because there were a lot of strange people in my life.

There is this huge landscape that I did called Nithavellir .And it's the first of a series. It's a huge thing with loads of detail and loads of stuff happening, and I've always worked on deadlines and speed has been important for me. So, a few years ago, I was basically working as a jack of all trades, doing deadlines when other artists missed their deadlines. And this huge, surreal landscape, I decided that I didn't want to have any goals or plans and just work on it until it was done and it took something between 150 to 200 hours and I don't know if it's the best thing I've done, but it still feels like an accomplishment to just work on something until it says to me, you can stop working now, nothing more to be done. I think I did a TikTok video on it and it's on my Instagram and such. I do publish all my art for free use. That's one of the ones that are not in my gallery yet, only for those who back me on Patreon. So, it's not officially released yet. I would like someone, something to use it for good before I release it for free. I want it to find it's home first.

I'm very inspired by everything, basically. You know, when it comes to art, I have a bunch of different inspirations. And some of them are the artists I grew up with in childhood, some of them are doing really good work now. And most of it is this petty envy that makes me go like, "arr, they're better than me, I want to crush them." It isn't healthy, but I can't choose to not feel it. I can choose to make fun of myself for feeling it, but I can't choose to not feel it. And more in general, in life, I'm just so fascinated by people in general.

And, one of the things that makes me the most happy is that you can be really intelligent and well-meaning and a decent person, and still be completely wrong on stuff. Like finding figures, thinkers, people that I disagree with and figure out how they are right as well. Because they're not right on all points, but they are often really smart people, don't think the same way as me. It's a shock every time!

I really like the type of nature we have around Bergen and around my home. It's this very mountainous, wet, green, mossy, area and everything is just soaked with water. One of the fascinating things about it is it's not really primordial forests because those forests were chopped down to make ships a thousand years ago, so it's this weird culture landscape that is starting to go back to nature because lumber isn't Norway's big business anymore. It was for a thousand years. Now, it's oil. And so it's weird, like nature slowly getting untamed again. And, in a thousand years, it will be totally wild, or maybe it will be gone; I don't know. So, yeah, I really get inspired by the type of landscapes we have here. And, I also really like going and looking for those spots where you feel a sort of magic. I'm a very atheistic person, but I like this concept in Japanese Shinto religion. And it's a sort of animistic image that if an object is just at its right place and gets to be there long enough, it becomes a small god. And it's the power of that thing being there long enough that it becomes an object of worship. And I like going around in the mountains there and sort of finding my own little deities and shrines that I can get some inspiration and power from in a completely non-new age way.

For an artist who has just been diagnosed with bipolar, it's going to be a very tough and very long journey. It's important to not beat yourself up. You're going to fail again and again and again. You sort of just have to say, "Okay I failed this time, let's try again." Let's adjust and let's try again. And then if you live like that, always trying to adjust and not be too harsh on yourself for failing but still grab yourself by the neck and get to work when you need. It's such a hard balance, but I have found that, for me, just the fact that I've been living with depressions with these bipolar cycles for so long, makes it in itself harder. Because the first depression you get, you think, "Oh I feel so bad I'm never going to feel so bad again." And the second time you get it you feel worse, you get so crushed by the fact that this isn't stopping. That in itself is making it harder. But at the same time, I'm getting progressively better at handling it.

# VIOLETTE KAY

**When did you start playing the violin? How did you learn?**

I started when I was 8 years old in an awful program at my elementary school. To make up for how bad the program was, I also took private lessons. I entered my local conservatory when I was 13. Then at 17, I started studying music in college, but that's also when my bipolar disorder first manifested itself, so I failed/dropped out. Now I mostly play violin for fun.

**Where did you grow up?**

I grew up in Aylmer, Quebec, largely surrounded by old white people. Not a whole lot of Burmese-Armenian people in town. In fact there were exactly 4: me and my 3 sisters. We have since moved out, i.e. escaped.

**What are you up to now?**

I live in Montreal, Canada, where I do office work for a children's theatre company and work on my own artistic projects in my free time.

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**Why did you choose the violin to focus on? Have you played any other instruments?**

I also took piano lessons throughout my childhood but I wasn't any good so it didn't really go anywhere. The violin was different; it came easily to me right from the start. Music became a way to express and challenge myself, and it carried me through my childhood and teenage years. It was the one thing I really liked and was really good at. (People can't tell from hearing me play now, but I promise I was actually really good at it at some point). After dropping out of college I had a difficult relationship with music for a long time, as I associated it with my worst failures. It took many years for me to find a love for it again.

**Have you ever composed your own music? If so, how do you come up with ideas? If not, why?**

Yes, I have! I composed the soundtrack for my short film A Joy that's Mine Alone, and for a play called Adoration that I wrote a few years ago. Also, a few months into the pandemic I bought a loop pedal, so lately I've been having fun experimenting with that. Sometimes I compose theme-and-variations, where I take an existing piece of music and mess with it. Other times I just improvise until I come up with something I like. My next project will be composing the score for From the Stars in the Sky to the Fish in the Sea, a play for children that explores gender identity in a fantastical and beautiful way through a young character who is supported, loved, and truly limitless.

**What are some of your favorite things to do? Do you have any creative outlets beyond music?**

I am also a playwright and a (bad) actor. My film A Joy that's Mine Alone would have been a play if not for the pandemic, but in making it I also discovered a new interest in filmmaking.

**Can you tell me a little bit about your short film, "A Joy that's Mine Alone?" When did you start working on it? What inspired you?**

In the early days of the pandemic, The National Theatre School of Canada offered grants to support artistic creation for theatre artists while

live performance was not possible. When I found out I was selected, I only had a few weeks to create the final project, so I figured drawing inspiration from my real life might be easier that coming up with original ideas. I wanted to create something uplifting and born out of self-love. I also wanted to show a character with bipolar disorder who isn't currently having a manic or depressive episode, and who has a lot of insight into her illness, because I feel like we don't see that kind of representation a lot. Making this film ended up being quite therapeutic. Not just the final product, but also the process. I wrote and filmed a bunch of scenes that didn't make the final cut because I realized they were mostly for me and had already served their purpose. A Joy that's Mine Alone allowed me to forgive myself for the choices I made while unwell, and feel proud of my journey and where I am now.

**To what extent is the film based on your own experiences as a musician with bipolar disorder? Did you actually decide to buy a music school while manic?**

I'd say the film is around 60% based on my own experiences and 40% fiction. I did buy a music school in the aftermath of a hypomanic episode and oh boy did I regret it! I was 22 with no higher education and not the slightest idea of how to run a business. After freaking out for the first few months, I owned up to my mistake and co-ran the school for just over 2 years, until we decided to permanently close because we couldn't survive the financial impact of the pandemic. I hated owning a school, but that whole experience taught me a lot of things, including the importance of getting my bipolar disorder under control. I'm sure in the distant future I'll look back and laugh, "remember that time when I owned a school, haha, weird times".

**In the film, the protagonist (played by you!) talks about how she feels more joy than other people (hence the title!). Do you also feel this way?**

Sometimes when I'm hypomanic,before the restlessness and irritability take over, I get this feeling of... connection to the universe? I'm not sure how to explain it. It's like I can see connections between things, connections that other people can't see. I see how everything in the universe is connected - including me, I'm a part of it too - and in that single beautiful moment, I am overwhelmed by a joy so pure I'm convinced no one else has ever felt it before. It's my favorite feeling in the world, and one of the hardest things to give up when making the choice to commit to recovery. When I miss it too much, I try to remind myself of the negative side of feeling on top of the world: you're all alone up there. It gets lonely up on cloud nine. Can you really be happy if you're alone in your happiness?

**What's the most important idea you want to communicate through "A Joy That's Mine Alone?"**

I have described A Joy that's Mine Alone as "an ode to a big mistake that perhaps wasn't a mistake at all, and a love letter to the girl who made it." To me, it's a celebration on the road

to recovery. It's about looking back on your life and realizing that even though you kind of took a roundabout way to get there, you still got to the place you were supposed to be, and seeing the beauty in that.

**How did you learn to act? Have you acted in any other films or performances?**

I actually went to theatre school. I auditioned on a hypomanic whim and got in. I'm not really a good actor though. I've been in plays but I don't think I would ever willingly act in something ever again, aside from plays or films written by me.

**When were you first diagnosed with bipolar? What was that experience like?**

I had my first episodes at 17, then endured a few years of extreme ups and downs before being diagnosed with bipolar 2 when I was 22, after a suicide attempt. I feel like I kind of already knew I had it, and I didn't reject the diagnosis at all, I mostly was just relieved to finally know why things had been so hard for me, why I couldn't get through school, why I'd lost so many jobs... It was nice to know that I didn't just suck at everything.

**Is there one particular moment which stands out to you in terms of your bipolar disorder and your own journey toward bipolar/mental health awareness?**

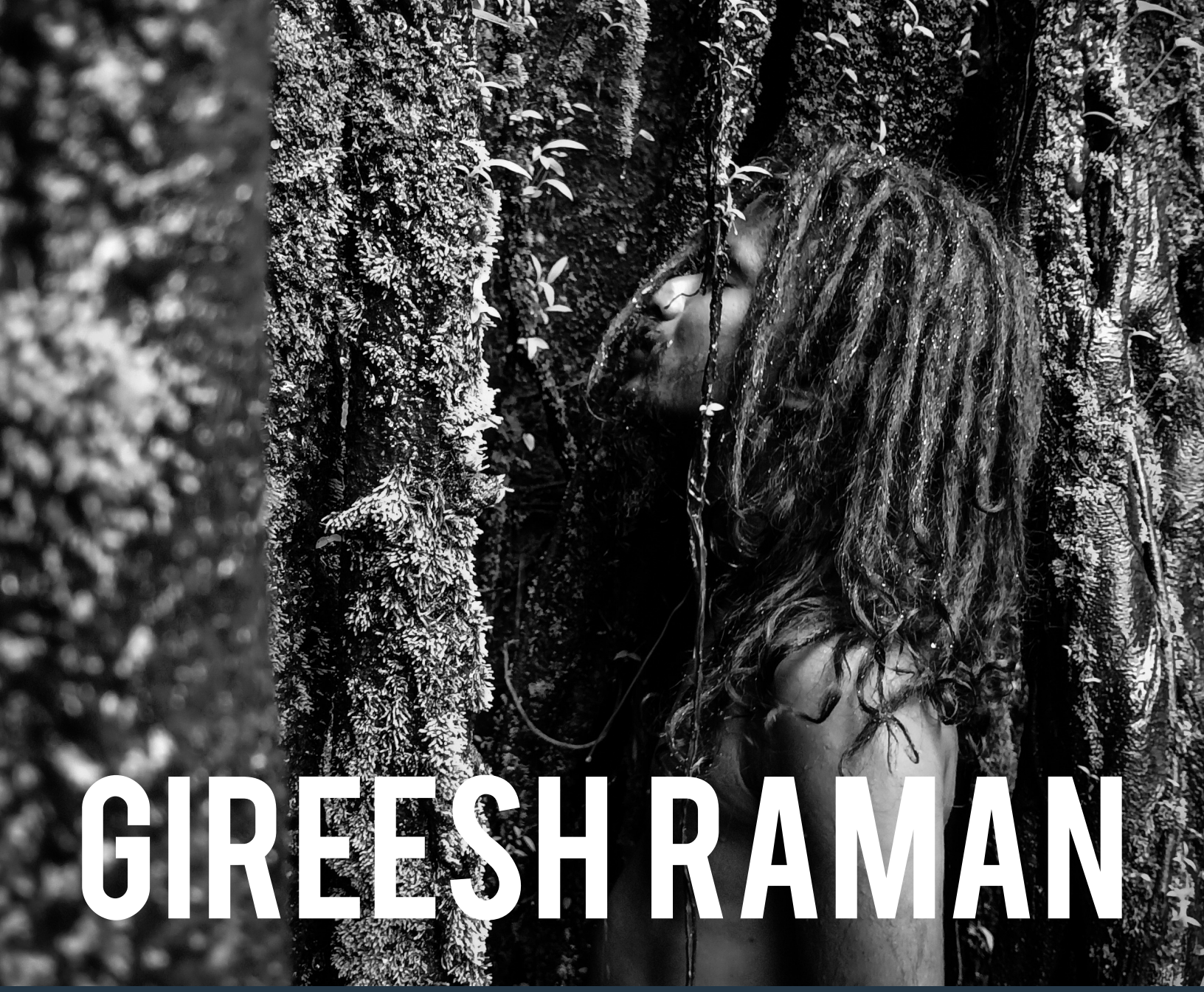
I was hospitalized a couple years ago and that really did it for me. It was such an awful experience and I knew I never wanted to go through it ever again, so I knew I needed to change. I started actually putting effort into therapy, I stopped fiddling with my medication dosage without telling my psychiatrist, and spent the next year painstakingly crawling back up from rock bottom.

**What is the most important lesson you've learned as a result of having bipolar disorder?**

I learned that I should have more faith in my ability to get through hard times. Bipolar disorder showed me the extent of my resilience.

**What advice would you give to someone recently diagnosed with bipolar disorder? What about a musician?**

I would tell every creative person with bipolar disorder to unlearn the belief that they need to remain unwell if they want to keep their creativity. I think channeling your extreme highs and lows into art is great, but i try to frame it as my creativity helping me deal with my bipolar disorder, rather than my bipolar disorder helping me be creative. With some distance I'm able to see that I wasn't "better" at being creative when I was manic, I was just very productive... and produced a bunch of nonsensical garbage. Stability is actually good for my art. It's a lot easier to work on a project when you're not suffering.



# GIREESH RAMAN

I am a visual perceptionist, and so I express my moods and emotions through my texture photography, which is more over a language for me.

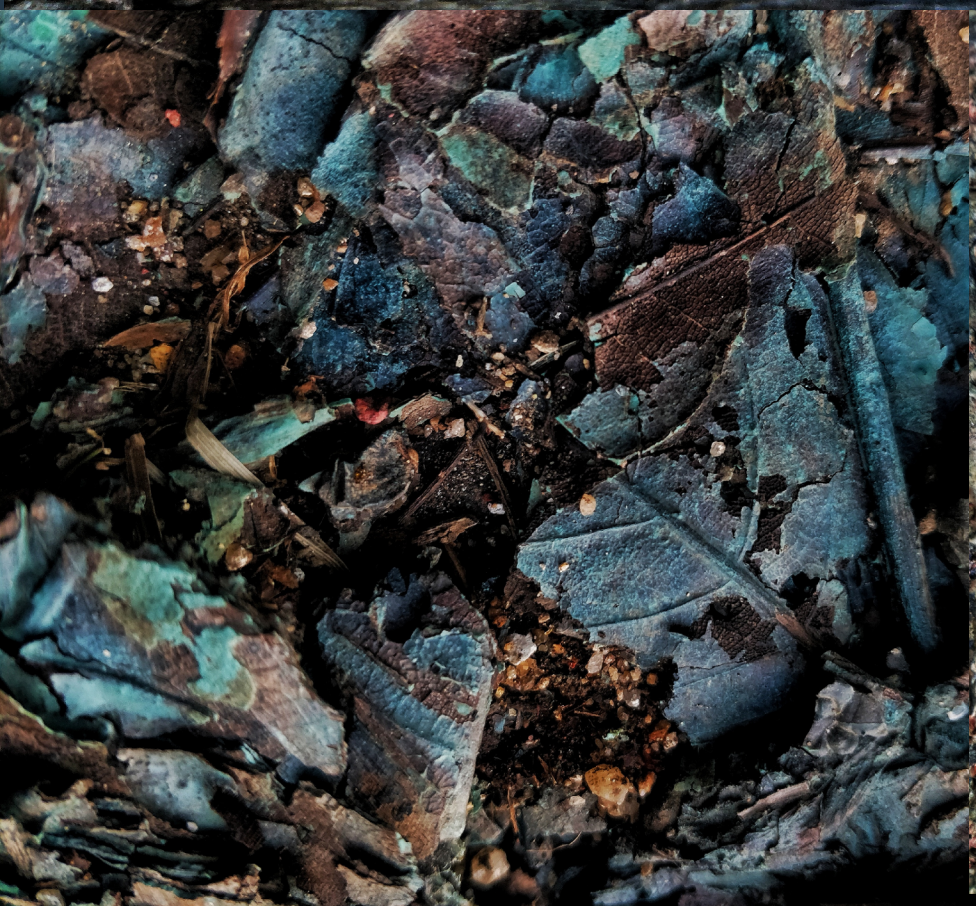
The textures I capture is the transcription of my mind with the ups and downs in it.

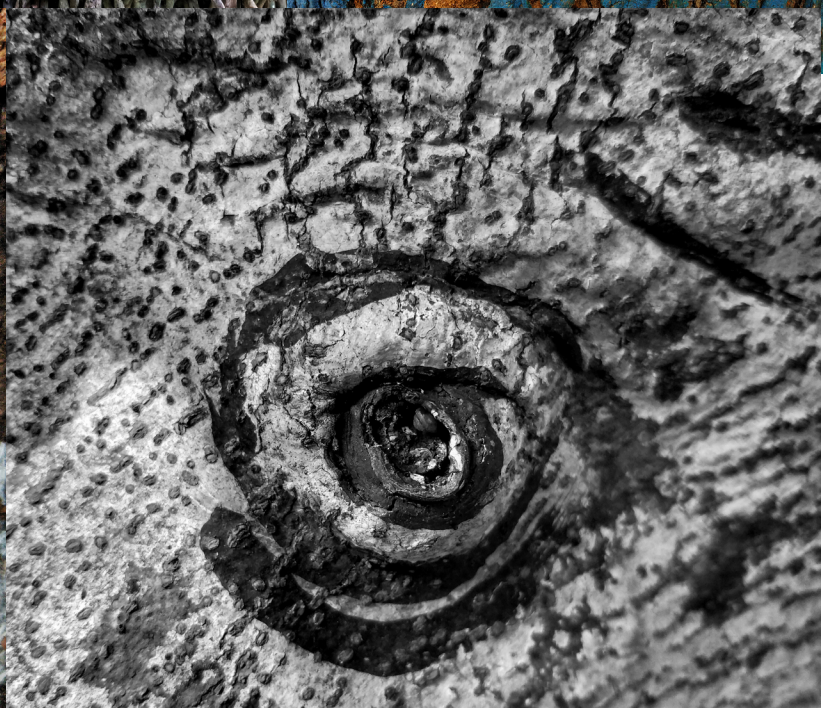
Like any other creative art form, photography too is good for mental health. I felt like it did help me deal with depression, curiosity, and to grow a self awareness inside. From my experience with photography ,the whole process is a peace magnet we create inside us,

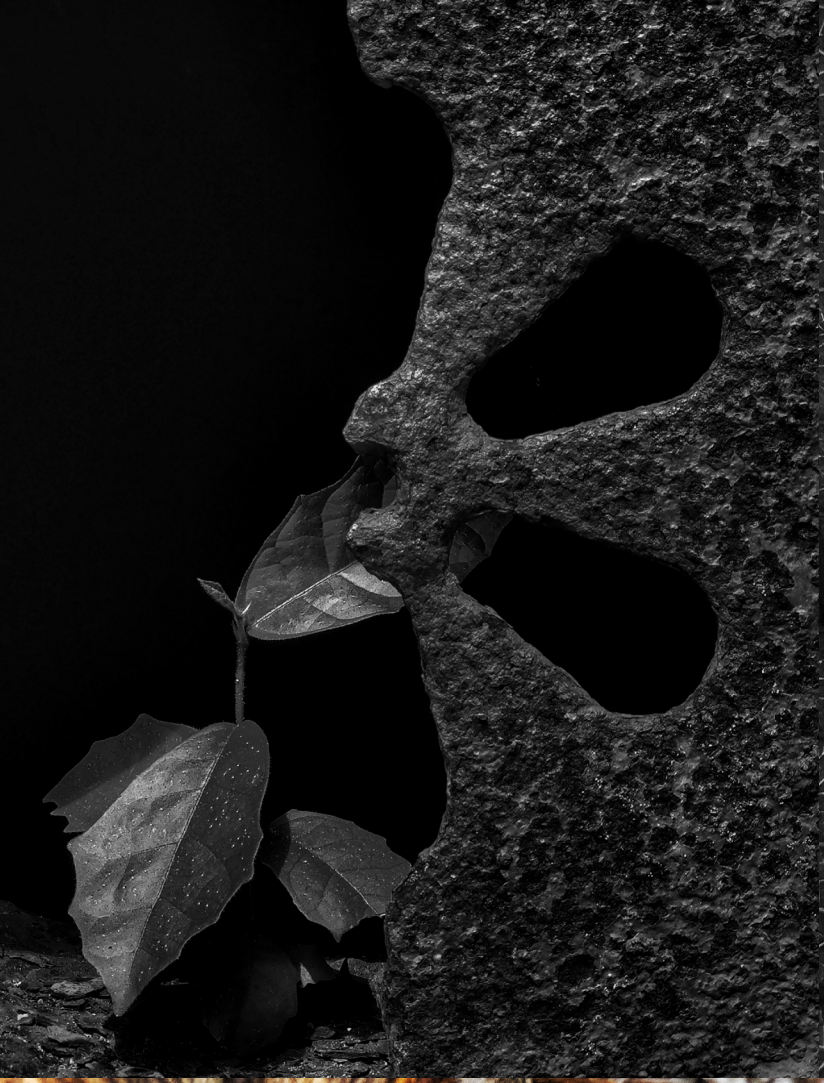
The sprouts of self awareness started blooming from the moment I started evoking imageries into me. It's the same imageries that helped me dodge out of the discomfort of conventional counseling methods for treating my mental health and to express myself in a better way with the world around me.

# Textures

*By Gireesh Raman*







# ANDY RIVERS

Take me back home
Take me back home
Take me back home
I'm on a voyage, out on my own

(Here I am)
I have been lost at sea
Honestly
Hopefully
Will wash ashore

On the beach
Wanna be on the beach
So I am not at sea
And all I see isn't blue

Currently currents
Oceanic currents
Are drifting me
Farther apart

Farther away
Here in the dark
Pitch black night
Only the moon
Is still here lighting the
Ocean in front of me
Hoping to

Come to the shore
A minute more I'm sure
I have been floating for
Way too long

Take me back home
I no longer want to see
only sea
I see that the sea is
always only blue
Its always blue

Take me back home
I wanna go
Take me back home
I'm on a voyage, out on
my own

I'm captain on the sea
Out on an
Odyssey
Bound to explore
All the sea
I can see
In this scene
Is a dream
Now that I'm livin' for

A purpose
I'm searchin'
A place or a person
For where I'm not
certain

But it's picture perfect

Picture perfect

And if I catch the tide in

I could ride it home

I could be there

In a moment notice

Sunrise is risin' on the horizon

Arivin' in time for me come by then

So I

Catch a tide in

So mesmerizin'

I see my island

Take me home

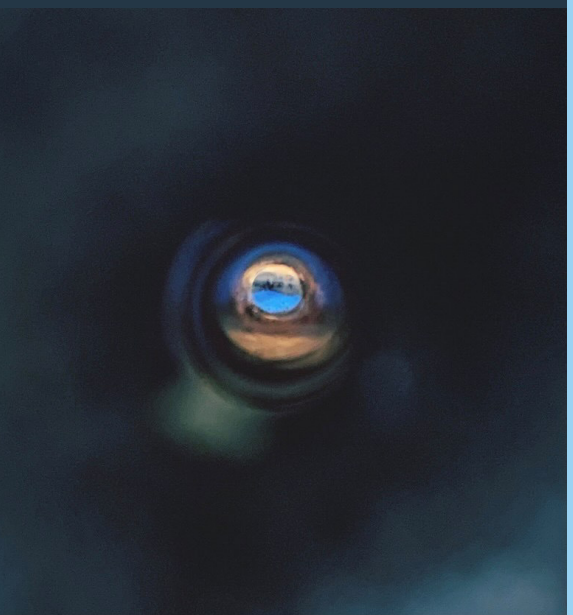
Take me

Take me back home

I wanna go

Take me back home

I'm on a voyage, out on my own



Where did you grow up?

I primarily grew up in Hawaii. I was actually born in LA, but I've lived here since I was 1. I also spent some time in Japan, which was a cool experience. I always moved around the island a lot, so I got to see a lot of different subcultures, which was really cool. Lately, I've just been going to the beach a lot because, with the lockdowns, I've been trying to find some cool outlets to get out there and go have as much fun as possible.

I live in Honolulu, Hawaii, so in the main area of Oahu, and I just finished college last semester. I went to KCC: it's a community college. They have really good arts programs there. I studied liberal arts. I did go into computer design for a little bit, but I really am more of a physical arts kind of person. I didn't like the computer stuff too much.

I've always kind of been into any type of expression. Art was kind of my first thing I dabbled with before music. Now I mostly just do it for fun.

What's your favorite beach in Hawaii?

Ooh. I won't tell you the name, but there's a secret spot. It's like the last secret spot in my area, and I go there almost every morning and watch the sunrise.

When did you start creating music/how did you learn?

I've always been really into music. My dad was from the 60s, so he always wanted me to listen to a lot of classic rock and a bunch of what I think is good taste in music. So, I've always been around it. I did start messing with garage band and stuff when I was really young. I started making my own songs as far back as I can remember. But I didn't actually start playing "music" music, like my own stuff, until about seventh grade, when I started playing the guitar. And year after year, I went from the guitar to the bass to the piano to the ukulele. I started branching out.

Do you have a favorite instrument?

I've been playing guitar the longest, so I definitely think that I am best on the guitar, but I really love the bass. The bass is just fun.

Do you have a favorite song or rap you've made?

Ooh, yeah, one of my favorite lines, I was just thinking about this the other day because I was sitting back, enjoying my friends, listening to music, is—I actually started rapping before I started writing other songs. I had this one song called Lately. It's actually about my band Genreless, which is my side project with my buddy. And there's one line in there, because things have been kind of tough lately: "You've got plenty of pennies, lately, I've been needing some change." All it takes is a little something sometimes, just to help someone out.

Is Genreless still going on?

Yeah. I took a little break from it because I do the song writing, the producing, the promoting, the managing, and pretty much everything, except for the main vocals, and it just got a little too much, so I told him I had to take a break for a second and actually work on my own project, which I just put out. So, that was really nice. And now I'm back to Genreless, working on a new album. Hopefully, it'll come out mid-year sometime.

Can you tell me a little bit about what inspired your most recent, independent album (Peak, Valley, Ocean, City)?

It's a little abstract, the name. So, the literal sense is "peak, valley, ocean, city" is just where I spent my time. I spent time hiking or in the ocean or in the forest or in the city, but it's also a metaphor for the highs, the peaks, the lows. So, there's the highs, the lows, the nature, and the human side. So, there's a lot of dichotomy and balance.

Do you have any songs which speak to you more than others?

My favorite song is definitely I wish I was born before. It's actually the song that started the whole concept. I do trash pickups, and it's pretty much just about how things have changed so much over the years, and how you try to find the beauty in things, but sometimes, it's a little hard. But then, in the end, though, you can still see it.

Some of your songs have sound effects. Where did you get the sounds, and how did you choose those particular ones?

I was actually watching some videos and I noticed that Billie Eilish and other people use these different sounds that they take from around their areas, and it makes it more personalized So, what I did, is when I started

hiking or started going to the beach I was like, that's a cool sound; I'll record that, or I hear something in my room or I hear this and that. I just pull out my phone. I used birds that I got from while hiking and waves crashing with the sunrise. And I think it just makes it a little more personal to me because only I could get those recordings, you know.

What do you like to write poetry about and when did you start?

I was writing raps and a lot of lyrics for a while, which I've always thought of as poetry, but I never took an actual poetry class until my last semester at community college, when I took a creative writing class, and she taught us a lot about form and a lot about structure and a lot about the more proper way to do things. They say, "learn the rules, and then break them at your leisure." So, for poetry, I guess, I usually think of my lyrics as poems, but the one that is on my poetry account is a book of poems that I made for the class, as well as just a few poems that I make sometimes, here and there.

Where do you get the images that come with your poems?

I made all of the ones in the booklet. The most recent post I made, I think it was yesterday—those were just some stock images I got. But the nine in the book of "not so average" poetry, is what I call it, those are all done by me. I was the most proud of the "imagine creativity" poem because that one, I felt like, was a double across. I was trying for a triple, but a triple's a little too hard.

What are other things you enjoy doing?

I do go almost every morning to sunrises, and almost every time I go, I bring a trash bag. I actually just got my hundred and seventy fifth one done. And I'm trying to organize a big one for the 200th. I've been trying to set it up, but there have been some problems with gatherings and things. Hopefully, I'll be able to do it this time.

Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

I've always been very environmentally conscious. My dad was a hippie, so he raised me that way, but I've always looked at it but never really did anything about it, until I saw my friend, actually, picking up the trash. And I thought, oh my God, why don't I do that? And, since I go to the beach every day, I just started bringing a bag with me. I started off just once and then twice and then three times, four times, it piled up to ten, and I posted "hey, if anyone wants to join me," and I had some friends come in and start going and it just started snowballing. By the time I got to 100, people were reaching out to me saying "Hey I did mine because of you" or "you inspired us to use less plastic," and it's just a really cool feeling, when I'm even just walking down. Like "hey, good morning, going to pick up the trash." It's a really good thing to feel like I can give back to my community while also just spending my time when I would already be there.

Who inspires you?

I feel like that's a big question, too, because a lot of people ask me, who are your favorite artists? But I grew up with rock because of my dad,

and then I got really into reggae. I dreaded my hair for a little while. And then I got really into singer/songwriter, like Jack Johnson and folk music. And then I got really into Hip Hop and then into jazz, and now I'm really into Indie. So, I kind of just float a lot between genres depending on the mood, I guess. Right now, I really love the Shins. I grew up with them so I'm just rediscovering all their goodness.

Who is most supportive of your mental health and how do they help?

So that's also a tough question. Lately, it's been me. My family, especially my dad's side, we all struggle with mental illness, and my mom's too. Growing up, we all had a kind of tough relationship, but actually more recently, I've kind of been talking to my family and trying to get better communication skills and understand each other more. This year, I really learned that, without anyone there telling me, you gotta be self-reliant, you gotta do everything you can to—even if you can't help—maybe get it from someone else, like from actual therapy, which helps me a lot. It's really different from when you're talking to your family. There's always some biases, always this and that. But I think, yeah, the biggest thing is to be there for yourself and also know when to ask other people, like professionals, for help.

When were you first diagnosed and what was that experience like?

It was when I was 18, I had an episode with shrooms that made me schizophrenic for awhile, and that's the main reason I went to therapy and they were like, "there's a lot of underlying factors: there's bipolar, depression, anxiety." Just all these different things that factor into the idea of a "weaker" mental state. And that made me start thinking I need to start bettering myself and start analyzing myself and what I do. I didn't like, per se, the way they were approaching it because I was raised in a Native American household—or not Native American, but we were always part of that community. My brother was actually adopted into a Lakota tribe. I'm not; I'm not able to claim that yet. But yeah, I've always been very holistic, and one cool thing too is that even though schizophrenia has a bad connotation to it, in the native culture, they actually believe that most of the shamans were schizophrenic because they could talk to the spirits and they could talk to both sides. I just try to see it as a blessing more than a curse, even though it's hard sometimes. But the past few years, I haven't had any episodes or anything like that. So, that's been good.

Are you spiritual or religious at all?

I'm omnireligious, so I believe that there's truth in every religion, but I don't believe that there's absolute truth in any religion.

What do you do to keep yourself mentally and/or physically?

I recently started eating a lot more vegan meals. For a while, I was a very big meat person, and my vegan friend put it to me in a nice way, he was like "well, you can keep to choose doing that, but if you do, now that you know the facts, you're kind of being willfully ignorant." And I was like, that is very true, so, little by little I started cutting down meat. So, you know a little less red meat, a little bit less red meat, and then I started cutting down a little bit of the chicken and fish. And I still eat some chicken and fish, but I eat a lot less than before, and I try to always keep it balanced and keep it healthy that way. Everyone has their personal balance too. I feel like my being half Mexican, half Asian, I feel like my culture didn't really eat too much red meat. So, when I do, it kind of makes me more bloated, and more this and that, rather than just eating fish or just eating rice and grains.

Would you say that any of your music is inspired by your bipolar? If yes, how so?

My last albums are more indirect. This one is actually more about that. This album is written a lot about suicidal thoughts. And I do fall into heavy depression, that's kind of where it goes. So, the first four songs are kind of this wave of being good/being bad/getting help/asking for help/needing help, and then it kind of ends on this song where I helped myself, and it ends on this song where I do better because I have the strength to do so. Everybody has their own ways they get help and need help, so I wouldn't want to preach—oh, you have to—because everyone has their own different type of support system, I just think that's what works for me.

Do you draw inspiration from anywhere else for your music?

Actually yeah, so I watch a lot of documentaries and I watch a lot of scientific videos, and just a lot of little things where I like to throw hidden messages into my songs and stuff. Yeah I came up with a poem the other day that was actually kind of based off of—I don't know if you've ever heard, but they say that there's this thing called eye twinkles, where when you're staring up at the sun at the beach that's actually just your cells moving. And I kind of wrote a poem, like what if it's not, what if you see it with a better perspective.

Does music help you cope with your bipolar?

100%, yeah. When I get really mad, I play rock, when I get really sad, I write sad songs, when I get really happy, I usually write very manic, upbeat stuff. And also sometimes, too, when I'm having a hard time controlling myself, I like to pick up my guitar and just start playing.

How do you think your background has played a role in your mental health?

So, I think because I'm half Mexican, half Japanese, a lot of people think, oh that's the best of both worlds, but really you're not enough anything to fit in anywhere. And that kind of sucks. So growing up I was the poor kid in the rich neighborhood, and then moving to Japan I was the white kid in the Asian neighborhood, and then I moved here to the poor neighborhood, and I was the rich, white kid in the poor neighborhood, and then I moved to this place and I was the nerd because I was trying so hard to fit in, and I didn't want to be the nerd, so I became the bully, and I didn't want to be the bully anymore, so I just started being by myself, and then I was the introvert, and then I decided I didn't want to be introverted, so I became an extrovert. So, I have all these different things that I think help me to see from different perspectives. And I think that helps me be empathetic to people and think, what if I was in their shoes. Right now, I'm working on just being myself.

Is there one particular moment which stands out to you regarding your bipolar and your journey to bipolar/mental health awareness?

I don't know if I'd say any one in particular because there's definitely a lot of moments. I think, this year, in general, was kind of the worst for me but also the best because I really hit my lowest depression and I realized, like damn, if I keep being like this, I guess I'm not going to make it in music. So, I told myself to at least write a song a day, or make a song a day, so little by little I started that and started swinging upward, and then I started doing the trash pick-ups and going to the beach a bunch of times, and got to this peak, where I was just super manic. And luckily I used that to write a whole album.

Do you want to do music professionally?

Yes, so, I work at a surf shop, which is cool. I love helping people with skateboards and surf boards and stuff like that. But yeah, I've been trying to break into the scene. In Hawaii or anywhere really, you have to have connections. But yeah, especially right now, with how little the live music scene is.

What is one important lesson you've learned as a result of having bipolar disorder?

Breathe. Just breathe. Whenever, you're having too much going on in your head, just breathe. It helps so much.

What are two stereotypes you've encountered having to do with bipolar disorder, and what do you think of those stereotypes?

I guess one would be that people don't really know how I'm going to respond to things, and a lot of people maybe expect me to be super passive or super aggressive because one or

times I spent with them I was one or the other way. And it kind of sucks to be assumed about.

What advice would you give to someone recently diagnosed with bipolar disorder?

Keep trying different things to see what works for you because every person is different, and everyone has their own way of handling things. So, I wouldn't say any specific one way in particular, I would just say try as many things as you can that you're comfortable and see what works.

What about a musician?

Keep going. Because it's hard sometimes, but keep putting in the work. And yeah, I never started singing until a few years ago. And little by little, I've been working on it. And now, I'm at that level where I'm a singer. So, I think a lot of it comes down to persistence. A lot of my friends are really great musicians but they don't have the work ethic. And sometimes, I feel like raw talent will get beaten by hard work if the raw talent doesn't work hard.

What is something you'd like to say about your mental health, music, or yourself that no one asks about?

I don't know, that might be a little bit of a thinker. Well, I guess, a lot of times, because I look more neurotypical, people assume that I am. So, maybe don't assume and try to be a little empathetic. It's a little easier for me because I've been to so many different places and met so many different places.

How was your day?

I woke up and I was going to watch the sunrise, but I came a little early to the roof, and it was dark. So, I though, I wonder what's on that side, and I saw the moon setting. And it was a super bright, vivid full moon. And I know my buddy likes the full moon, so I sent it to him. And he was really happy. And, randomly, my art teacher from high school FaceTimed me, and I was like oh, okay, and I picked up, and he was like, oh, sorry, I pocket-dialed you, how are you? Can we talk for a little bit? So that was nice. Other than that, I just watched the sunrise, did some errands, took a nap.

Is there anything else you'd like to add? What more is there to your story?

I think my story is a lot more to come because I don't even know where I'm going to be. But, I would say to look out for my band Genreless. Stuff should be coming out by mid-year 2021.

# Thank you, Creatives!

*We all have a story.*

*Share yours.*