

Beyond the Storm: A Journey with Bipolar Disorder

By Jon Adams

Publisher/Permissions
Beyond Bipolar, Inc. (501(c)(3) Nonprofit)
EIN: 33-2252022

www.beyondbipolar.org

Dedication

For my mother, who loved me without needing answers; for my wife, who always stood by my side; for my children, who showed me compassion and gave me reasons to keep fighting; for my mother-in-law, whose kindness and support have been a blessing; and for my late grandmother, whose love was unconditional and never wavered.

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This book is published by Beyond Bipolar, Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization (EIN: 33-2252022). 100% of proceeds from this book support our nonprofit mission.

Disclaimer: This book is not intended to provide medical advice. If you are struggling with your mental health, please consult a qualified professional. If you are in crisis, call or text 988 to connect with the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

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Introduction

Bipolar disorder is far from a modern condition. This traces back to ancient Greece, medieval Europe, and across cultures, yet true understanding has always lagged recognition. Growing up in the late 1970s, I experienced firsthand how far society still had to go. Conversations about mental health were nonexistent, and the idea of “bipolar disorder” was something just whispered about and never acknowledged. My mom, a single parent doing her best, had no guidebook. There were no services, resources, or even shared language to explain what I was going through. To her and others around us, my struggles often looked like “bad behavior.” She loved me deeply but love alone could not replace the knowledge or tools we needed. From my mom’s perspective:

“I knew something was different, but I did not know what. There was no one to call, no one to ask. When he acted out, people told me to discipline harder. I was raising him alone, and I often felt like I was failing him, even though I was trying with all I had.” Fast forward to today, and while we have seen incredible advancements in treatment and awareness, stigma still lingers. It hides in conversations, in assumptions, in broken systems. It frustrates me not only for my own journey, but for the younger generations growing up in a world that should know better by now. This book is my attempt to bridge that gap, to share my story honestly, the good and the painful, the sacrifices and the lessons. My hope is simple: that by reading these pages, you will see yourself or someone you love and know you are not alone.

Chapter 1: The Storm Mind

Everyday life, for me, has never been simple. What others consider “routine” can feel like climbing a steep hill in the rain. Forgetting to buy milk, missing an appointment, needing constant reminders, these were not small oversights. They were symptoms of a mind that did not work coordinated with the world around it. My brain often feels like a storm. Thoughts can whip around like gusts of wind and can blow away, and others swirl endlessly until I am exhausted. When people say, “I already told you that,” they are right, but in my storm, the words sometimes get lost, before I can grab it or hold on to them. I did not always understand this. For years, I thought I was just careless or lazy. It was not until I began reflecting later in life that I realized these were patterns connected to my bipolar disorder. Somedays, the storm would be quiet, and clarity came easily. On other days, chaos took over. What fascinated me most was the contrast. In personal life, details often slipped through the cracks. But at work, my memory became razor-sharp. I could remember projects from decades ago as vividly as if they happened yesterday. Meetings, conversations, technical details, they seemed etched in my mind like a film reel. This ability carried me through promotions, problem-solving challenges, and even situations where engineers deferred me. Why can I remember intricate test data from thirty years ago but not what I planned for dinner last night? I still do not fully know. But I have learned to accept that my brain works differently, and that difference is part of what makes me who I am. The lesson I have carried forward is this: different does not mean broken. Our minds are unique, with strengths and weaknesses interwoven. My storm mind gives me both

challenges and gifts. And the more I learn to embrace that reality, the more I can work with it instead of fighting against it.

Chapter 2: Breaking Point and Discovery

Living with bipolar disorder has often meant navigating an insatiable, impulsive, and addictive personality. The urges have taken forms, love, gambling, alcohol, cigarettes, and for a long time they left me feeling hopeless. Fourteen years ago, I reached a breaking point. I had been drinking despite the clear warning on my medication label: No drugs or alcohol. It was not the first time, but there was one night that stood out, a particularly rough night that became a turning point. I woke up the next morning, knowing something had to change. There is a part of this story I want to be direct about because it matters. At my lowest times I carried suicidal thoughts, I have walked in those shoes before. I know firsthand the overwhelming weight, the fear, and the hopelessness that can take over. It is a feeling I truly hope no one ever must go through. I am grateful every day that I did not see it through, even though my journey included a couple of nights in the hospital. If I could say anything to someone who is thinking about suicide, it would be this: please do not. You are worth far more than you realize right now. Reaching out for help is not weakness, it is one of the bravest things you can do. It takes an incredible amount of strength to say, "I need help." If you are struggling right now, please use these resources: - Call or text 988, to connect with the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. - Text HOME to 741741, to reach the Crisis Text Line. - If you are in immediate danger, please call your local emergency number right now. Focus on the moment, try to put the rest of the problems to the side, even if just for now. The bigger picture can feel impossible, but step by step, moment by moment, it becomes more manageable. One day you may be the person sharing your story to give hope to someone else. I know this because I am still here, and I am so thankful I am, and now sharing my story with you. I made the decision to quit drinking. Not for anyone else, but for myself. That was the first time I chose to prioritize my mental health over the temporary relief of numbing my pain. It was not easy, and I am still not sure how I managed to stick with it in those early days. But step by step, I did.

Chapter 3: The Road to Healing

When I finally committed to taking my mental health seriously, it was not a straight path. Healing rarely is. It is a road with twists, turns, and detours, and for me, it started with medication. At first, the idea of medication terrified me. I had always prided myself on pushing through, on working harder and longer than anyone else. Taking a pill wanted to admit defeat, like handing over control to something outside myself. But the truth was, I had already lost control. My cycles of mania and depression were steering my life, not me. The first medications did not always work; some dulled me so much that I barely recognized myself. Others came with side effects that made daily living difficult. Finding the right balance was a lengthy process, filled with trial and error. I remember wondering more than once, Is this even worth it? But then there were glimpses, days when the storm in my head

quieted enough that I could breathe. Days where I could sit with my kids, laugh with my wife, or simply walk to work without the weight of panic pressing on my chest. Those glimpses kept me going. They reminded me that balance was possible.

Now there is genetic testing for medications, known as pharmacogenomic (PGx) testing, analyzes your genes to predict how your body will respond to certain drugs, helping your provider select the most effective medication and appropriate dose while minimizing side effects and improving safety. Is something worth checking into?

Therapy added another layer to my healing. Talking through my thoughts, my impulses, my fears, it was not easy. I can tell you that connecting to a therapist makes all the difference. Good therapists can bring tears to your eyes, but in an effective way from unpacking things that were very deep. For years, I had bottled up so much, convinced no one could really understand. But opening gave me a mirror. It helped me see patterns I could not see on my own, and it gave me tools to navigate moments when my mind felt like it was running off the rails. Healing also meant making practical changes in my daily life. I started leaning on tools like reminders, alarms, and routines. Simple things like remembering a doctor's appointment or grocery shopping became more manageable when I accepted that my brain needed extra support. Instead of beating myself up for forgetting, I began creating systems that helped me succeed. Lesson learned: Healing is not about perfection. It is about progress. Some days, balance feels easy. Other days, it feels impossible. Both are part of the journey.

Chapter 4: Family, Community, and Support

Bipolar disorder is never a solo journey. It touches everyone close to you, whether they understand it or not. For me, family has been both a lifeline and, at times, a mirror reflecting the pain I could not see in myself. When I was a kid, my mom was raising me alone. She did not have the resources or knowledge to explain what I was going through. To the outside world, I looked like a boy with "behavior problems." To her, I was her son, and she loved me fiercely, even when she felt lost. From my mom's notebook, remembering Jon at age ten: My youngest son, Jon, was a beautiful baby with soft, silky blonde hair, I can still close my eyes and feel it in my fingers. His eyes were a striking blue before they turned a deep, beautiful brown. He walked at a year old and was full of energy, might even say hyperactive. I do not recall if he had a temper early on, but in school it became more apparent. He was social and loved being around other kids. Every day after school he would rush home, change clothes, and head straight outside to play. He played hard, and by early evening he often had meltdowns.

Eventually I realized he needed a transition, time after school, so I made a new routine: change clothes, have a snack, find a quiet activity to unwind, and then go outside. One afternoon I heard a loud noise from the living room. I asked him what he was doing. He replied, "You told me to relax! I am rearranging the furniture!" I laughed and said, "Jon, you can go outside now." Geesh. Jon's energy and personality were vivid and memorable, but he

also struggled with frustration and emotional regulation. His feelings were intense, and he did not know how to manage them. Sometimes he would warn, "I am getting mad! I am getting mad!" And too often I would respond with frustration instead of help. I wish I had understood then what I know now: he needed help calming down, learning to name his feelings, and talking about them. Sadly, no one had taught me how to do that when I was growing up.

Chapter 5: Impulsivity, Addiction, and Sacrifice

Impulsivity has been one of the most difficult aspects of living with bipolar disorder. At times, it has felt like a shadow following me everywhere, whispering that one more gamble, one more drink, one more rash decision would give me the relief or excitement I craved. When I was younger, those impulses often won. I chased the heights of love, the thrill of gambling, the comfort of cigarettes, and the escape from drinking. I traveled to work, and these impulsive thoughts drove me to bad decisions repeatedly. Each one felt like a quick fix, but they always left me emptier than before. One of my hardest battles was with cigarettes. I was not a casual smoker; I was a two-to-three pack a day smoker. For decades, nicotine had its hooks on me. Quitting was not hard, it felt impossible. But as the years went on, my body started sending me warnings: breathing problems that made me realize I was slowly killing myself. At 51 years old, after 30 years of smoking, I finally had my wake-up call. I had tried to quit before, patches, gum, even cold turkey, but the habit always came back. This time, I tried nicotine lozenges, and for the first time, something worked. The cravings eased enough for me to finally put the cigarettes down. One year turned into two, and today I can proudly say I have not smoked since.

Okay, I still have a vice and its coffee. I do try to regulate it but usually have whatever that day gives me, it varies. That victory did not erase the addictive pull I still feel at times, but it reminded me that change is possible when the reason is strong enough. For me, the reason was breathing, living, and being here for my kids.

Not all my impulsive choices had such clear victories. Fifteen years ago, I left my wife and children for two weeks. My medication was not keeping me balanced, and I spiraled into distorted thinking. What started as small worries grew into irrational beliefs until I convinced myself my marriage was over. Without warning, I drove from North Carolina to Florida, leaving behind the people I loved most. Sadly, I have done this many other times; it is heavy on my heart. It is not easy to admit that. My wife was my best friend, my anchor, and my children were my world. But in the grip of bipolar disorder, I could not see clearly. My thoughts twisted reality until it felt like leaving was the only option. Two weeks later, I returned home. That experience taught me something I wish I had known sooner: thoughts are not always truth. When your mind is spinning, it can feel impossible to separate reality from distortion. That is when help is most needed. Lesson learned: Impulsivity is not weakness; it is a symptom. And symptoms require treatment, not shame. Over the years, I have made sacrifices to keep my mental health in check. I gave up alcohol. I gave up on cigarettes. I gave up gambling. Each one wanted to lose a piece of myself at first. But with

time, I saw that what I was really losing were chains, chains that kept me trapped in cycles of shame and regret. Recovery does not mean I do not feel the pulling of those old impulses. I still do. But it means I have learned to pause, to reach for tools and people instead of vices. It means I no longer let my impulses decide the direction of my life. Bipolar disorder may always carry the risk of impulsiveness, but I have proven to myself, and to my family, which sacrifice, and self-awareness can turn the tide.

Chapter 6: Work, Drive, and Identity

Work has always been more than a paycheck for me. It was a place where I could prove myself, push limits, and channel the restless energy that came with my bipolar disorder. In ways, my career was both fueled and sabotaged by the same fire that burned inside me. My first job was as a stock boy in a grocery store at sixteen. On the surface, it was ordinary work, but even then, I felt the stirrings of something bigger. When the boss reprimanded me unfairly, I bristled with a sense of justice. When I saw peers get into trouble, I felt compelled to defend them. That fire to fight for myself and others never left me.

I bounced between jobs in my early years, sometimes quitting, sometimes fired. At the time, I did not see the pattern. I thought it was just bad luck. Looking back, I realized it was the unmedicated cycles of bipolar disorder, overanalyzing, clashing with authority, chasing the next opportunity, which fueled those constant changes. By my mid-twenties, I found myself in a role that truly challenged me: RF Engineering starting at the bottom as an assembler. Within five years, I supervised RF electrical technicians, solving problems that even engineers struggled with. Problem-solving came naturally to me, and I thrived on the challenge. My ability to recall details, visualize solutions, and push projects forward earned me respect. I traveled across the country diagnosing problems, creating fixes, and getting systems back on track. That drive, that intensity, it was both my gift and my curse. Because while my work was shining, my health suffered. I could go for days without sleep, chasing the high of accomplishment, driven not by bosses but by an inner compulsion. I cycled through jobs in the same industry, always restless, always on the move. By my thirties, I was spending weeks on the road, coming home only a few days each month. My family life strained under the pressure, and eventually, I crashed. The crash came in the form of panic attacks and overwhelming symptoms that I could no longer ignore. I left the job I loved, a job that gave me purpose, because my health demanded it. That decision was terrifying, but it also became the turning point that pushed me to seek help, to begin medication, and to face the reality of living with bipolar disorder. Lesson learned: Bipolar disorder gave me extraordinary focus and creativity at work, but without balance, it also took me to the edge of burnout. Success achieved at the cost of health is not true success. I still carry pride in what I accomplished. I learned that my bipolar mind, sharp, fast, and creative, was also fragile when left unmanaged. And while my career path shifted, my identity began to change too. I became the man who chose health over hustle. It took me years to make peace with that shift. But today, I know that my jobs were not for nothing. Every job, every challenge, every crash, it all shaped me into the advocate, the father, and the nonprofit founder I am now.

Chapter 7: Lessons for Others

Telling my story is important, but it is not just about me. My hope is that the lessons I have learned, sometimes the hard way, can serve as guideposts for others walking their own path with bipolar disorder, or supporting someone they love. 1. Your brain is far from broken, your brain works differently, not worse. It also brings strengths, creativity, empathy, problem-solving, that I would not trade away. 2. Support is Oxygen, no one gets through this alone. If you do not have that support in your family, find it in community. Connection is treatment. Isolation is poison. 3. Healing is Not Linear, some days the storm quiets. Other days it roars back. Progress is not perfection; it is persistence. 4. Impulsivity is a Symptom, not a Failure, symptoms require treatment, not shame. Learn to pause and reach for tools and people instead of vices. 5. Sacrifice Leads to Freedom, giving up alcohol, cigarettes, and gambling felt like loss at first. It was freedom. 6. Work Does not Define You, But It Can Shape You. A job title does not measure my worth. You measure it by showing up, even on hard days. 7. Hope is a discipline; hope is a choice. A daily act of defiance against despair.

Chapter 8: Hope for the Future

Looking back, on my journey, there are moments I never thought I had overcome. Nights when addiction felt stronger than my will. Days when impulsively tore me away from the people I loved most. Years when the storm in my mind convinced me I was destined to fail. And yet, here I am. Not perfect, not cured, but alive, healing, and still moving forward. One of the greatest markers of that progress has been the creation of Beyond Bipolar, the nonprofit organization I founded. For me, it is more than organization, it is proof that the pain I carried is not in vain. Every program, every blog, every piece of music or story we share comes from a place of lived experience. It is a promise that no one else should feel as alone as I once did. Starting a nonprofit was not easy. It meant long nights of planning, filing paperwork, building trust, and facing rejection. But it also meant discovering a community of people who believed in the mission. Supporters, partners, volunteers, and families came together, proving that healing does not just happen in individuals, it happens in movements.

When I see Beyond Bipolar's name, I see more than a logo. I see my mom, who loved me when she did not have the answers. I saw my wife, who stood by me when I could not stand on my own. I see my eleven children, whose struggles remind me why this work is urgent. I see every person who ever felt judged for the way their mind works. The future will not be without challenges. Stigma still lingers. Resources are still too scarce. Families still feel lost, like my mom did in the 1970s. But I have hope, not a fragile, fleeting hope, but a discipline I practice every day. Hope that with each story told, each life touched, and each barrier broken, the world shifts a little closer to compassion. Lesson learned: Hope is not about believing in tomorrow. It is about building tomorrow, brick by brick, story by story, until the world reflects the compassion, we all deserve. The work is far from over, but Beyond Bipolar is just the beginning. My journey brought me here, and together, we can carry this mission forward.

Conclusion & Call to Action

Telling this story has not been easy. Reliving the storms, the impulsive decisions, the losses, and the sacrifices can be painful. But it has also been healing, because every chapter reminds me of something else too, resilience, growth, and the strength it takes to keep going. Bipolar disorder has shaped my life in both difficult and extraordinary ways. It challenged my family, my work, my health, and my sense of self. But it also gave me creativity, empathy, and drive. Most importantly, it gave me a purpose: to use my journey to help others feel less alone. That purpose is now alive in Beyond Bipolar, the nonprofit organization I built from this lived experience. What started as my story has become our story, a community dedicated to advocacy, support, and hope. Through blogs, programs, music, webinars, and resources, we are building spaces where people can connect, heal, and grow together. If this book has resonated with you, I want to leave you with two invitations: one. Know you are not alone. Whatever stage of the journey you are in, whether you are struggling with your own mental health or supporting someone who is, remember that connection changes everything.

Beyond Bipolar exists because of people like you, people who believe in compassion, in storytelling, and in building a future where stigma no longer holds power. You can support in diverse ways: by sharing your story, volunteering your time, or donating, that helps us expand our programs. Every contribution, big or small, is effective. All proceeds of this book go to Beyond Bipolar. As I close these pages, I leave you with this truth: hope is not a feeling, it is a choice. A discipline. A daily act of defiance against despair. My hope is that in sharing my journey, you have found pieces of your own reflected here, and that together, we can create a future where no one must walk this road alone. Thank you for reading. Thank you for listening. And thank you for believing that healing is possible, for me, for you, for all of us., Jon.

About the Author

Jon Adams is the founder of Beyond Bipolar, Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to breaking stigma and building community around mental health. Drawing on his own lived experience with bipolar disorder, Jon shares his story of resilience, recovery, and purpose. He is a father of eleven, a writer, musician, and advocate for families impacted by mental health challenges.

About Beyond Bipolar

Beyond Bipolar, Inc. (EIN: 33-2252022) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to advocacy, support, and education around mental health. Through lived experience storytelling, music, blogs, and community-driven programs, we create safe spaces where people can connect, heal, and grow together.

Our programs include the Parent Advocate Program, the Beyond Center initiative, and the Music & Mental Health project. Your support helps us continue this mission and reach more families who need hope.

Learn more at: <https://beyondbipolar.org>

Resources

If you are struggling with thoughts of suicide or overwhelming distress, please reach out:

- Call or text 988 to connect with the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.
- Text HOME to 741741 to connect with the Crisis Text Line.
- If you are in immediate danger, call your local emergency number.