

Bipolar Professional

The archetypal hero returns from the abyss with a bounty for all humankind.

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and Speaker

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Dad, Mom, Julianna, Isabella, Brandon, Collin, Jessica, Erin, Meri, Laurence, Professor Heping Zhao, and all the humans I know and love who've encouraged and supported me along this long and winding yet indescribably wonderful road, my life. It's because of these people and others such as these that I am enabled to share this now, my second book.

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Prologue

With the right medication and self care I firmly believe high functioning bipolars like myself can thrive and make immense contributions to humankind in the professional world. As a person diagnosed bipolar type 1 at age 29, I still had inherent reservations about publishing this book. There has been a stigma against manic depression, its first name, since the 1940's when it was so named. So why am I putting my diagnosis out there at age 54? Quite simply because I think there is a need for it and I see this book as an extremely positive and much-needed force in the genres of humor, personal development, and mental health.. You might wonder if I take medication, yes. I have enjoyed a perfectly normal range of emotions on the miracle drug Lithium since 1999. I'm not "zombified." That is a myth that has hung on since the 1950's when doctors were overmedicating and discovering the right dosages. Mine has been status for 25 years and I will probably never go off Lithium. I recommend finding the right dose for you under the close and careful care of a psychiatrist. This book is a sharing of stories and advice from my bipolar journey. Some say the stigma is a taboo you should keep quiet about. Maybe so. Ultimately that is a personal question. But here I am speaking to bipolar professionals, their families, and all the friends they know and love. I want the world to know what is evident to some already: bipolars are often gifted, sensitive pathfinders, trendsetters, and trailblazers in their fields. Bipolar has been called a broken mood thermostat, causing extremely high and low moods. Joseph Campbell might label them archetypal heroes who bring back a bounty from the abyss. The disorder can feel like a dark, lonely and scary ride but here I've

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fashioned a lighthouse of sorts, an infusion of hope as you follow your professional dreams. There is something here for all humans, I hope you find it useful and encouraging. If you are a friend or loved one of a bipolar, I hope you find inspiration so you might understand their mercurial needs. We are special people, please help us by attempting to understand. We need you and maybe you need us. One note before we start, some of this book is pieced together from decades of blog posts. I've tried to make it fluid. If it jumps around in time, just know I may have missed gluing some parts together correctly. I hope you can get the main idea in those spots. Thank you! Now, here we go! (If you look at that it says "Nowhere, we go!" I hope that's not the case.

-Damien Riley 12/2023

Chapter One

To Come Home I Had To Go Away

“They wouldn’t listen to the fact that I was genius.” Jim Croce, *Workin’ at the Car Wash Blues*

Why was my hometown the center of innovation? Maybe the fact that we were 20 minutes from the beach attracted consumers, let the sociologists meditate. Whatever the reason, Mission Viejo was a Petri dish for new business models, not the least of which were restaurants. My bipolar disorder had not yet been recognized but when I look back I can see it almost everywhere on the map. It would rear its manic head over a decade later when I was over stressed, not sleeping, and taking on way too many projects. In a way Mission Viejo was a good basic training for bipolar. I had a great pair of parents, wonderful siblings, and lots of safety nets if I tried and failed at anything. The only negative was that we were always told to push, push, push and for a bipolar not practicing self care, that can prove deadly.

Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.”

Mark 6:4 New International Version (NIV)

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Have you seen “King Richard” the Will Smith documentary chronicling the super sports stardom of his daughter tennis players? There’s a scene in that when the local thugs in Compton beat dad Richard up because they feel his attempts at stardom for his daughters are an insult to the locals. We bipolars so far in the ascent of humans don’t get support. We’re viewed as loud and raucous. AS a result of feeling up all the time, sometimes we keep an unnatural low key. WE are still usually seen as loud and obnoxious. Esther Hicks has said Bipolars are a higher form of evolution where we are able to create high levels of vibrations of what we want more than normal brained people. Of course, when the mani stops, there is that unevolved depression that follows which hurts almost physically. So we are role models of vibration then, if we are high functioning which is a daily struggle sometimes.

All that doesn’t mean we’re lazy or weak either, it means we just can’t stop. When our mood gets high it can’t come down, not for hours or weeks, or sometimes even months at a time. The depressive stage hits at least as long. Like I said, full bipolar was just peeking above the water like a tip of the iceberg in my twenties. It would rear its ugly beautiful head in my life soon enough. I feel it important to note here what bipolar disorder is NOT. It is never the result of an injury. It is always the result of DNA coding. It can skip generations, I feel relatively sure some ancestor of mine was bipolar. It lays dormant in the body until usually the mid twenties to late thirties. At least that’s what the books I’ve read all say. But back to my pre-professional life in Mission Viejo I’ve got a story to tell.

When the Pizza Hut delivery concept came to town, I quit my job at the Alpha Beta grocery store and hopped on board. I wanted to be part of that action. I was twenty years old. Happy young people were standing outside the renovated

Winchell's building with flags and free samples. And, there was a booth with employment applications for drivers. Hmmm, kill myself working in a deli freezer and bagging groceries or listen to Pink Floyd in my car delivering for cash tips ... It was no contest. Pizza Hut won. It was where I would cut my teeth on life, business, people, and honesty. I worked there for 10 years as I faced off with adulthood and went through college. Even though the pizza wasn't that healthy, I wouldn't trade those fortified memories for the world. On my third delivery I told a lie that probably should have got me fired. I had that personality that could get everybody on board. That's probably why they published my lie in the Pizza Hut Newspaper! Let me explain.

I got a donut when I was supposed to be delivering someone's dinner. Then I got gas. Yep you guessed right, the pizza was getting cold. I didn't know they were tracking my time! When I rolled in, three of the highest level Pizza Hut area coaches in California interrogated me about the lateness. I whipped up a super creative, highly convincing lie. It was something about a child severely hurting themselves on a popsicle stick so I had to drive the mom and kid to the emergency room. I've always been credulous. Guess what? They bought it. I got a 100 dollar check, a pin, and immediately was crowned LSD driver of the month (legendary service driver). I know it sounds terrible but it reveals the kind of scrappy indefatigable spirit I had at age 20. I might have been a late bloomer in appearance but I had an extremely likable and energetic personality. This would prove to be a bad combo with bipolar but we'll get to that later. I'd like to take you further into the mosaic of my childhood here at the beginning because as we say in character analysis: "Everything is relevant." Perhaps I'm trying to show I'm a smart hardworking man who has learned to live with and

thrive despite a mood disorder.

Ah the life of a boy of ten in Mission Viejo, California. When my brother and I would reach the bottom of the grassy hill above the creek, it was pure freedom. No “do this or do that,” only a space without frontiers. The freshly cut grass grew as far as the eye could see and a break on the horizon we knew as only “the creek.” There was a certain rock, actually it was a boulder that the frogs would lay their eggs under every season. We knew about it and their rhythm and we showed up on time when they became tadpoles. Some had started legs and they all had varying levels of frog-like eyes. There were minions of them. We cupped our hands and filled them to the brim with this dark gray life. I remember pouring their wiggling bodies back into the creek as they darted a thousand different directions over my hands and arms. And then there were the freshly changed frogs. Their bony legs and backs lay almost still in our hands as we pet their tiny heads watching them blink in apparent hedonism. We’d dream as children of growing up and finding a place in the world someday, even as we played with tadpoles. It was mecca for a child.

Then there were the locusts. Actually they are probably better named as grasshoppers. At certain times they would appear as fresh hordes at the base of bluegrass. I would pull back the grassy hair to find them a very light green, some white, undisturbed. There is hardly any wind there. They weren’t as threatening as the full grown ones we would see every day on our way to school. These were new life, in the ever renewing grass. Is it any wonder I found this beautiful as a child?

Finally, there were lizards. We wanted with all our heart to catch some. A friend showed us the way. By taking a wheat stalk, you could create a slip knot that caught them fairly

easily. We learned they played dead until you walked away. Much to our good fortune, we walked away with many a lizard. We made them pets for a day then released them.

Speaking of day's end: the parental call from atop the hill would inevitably come: "Boys, come up it's time to eat." We would succumb and run to nourish our biology but nothing could ever willingly draw us home from the place we called the Creek. Flash forward to now in the backyard I had where a pool replaced a creek, I would teach both my daughters at about ages 4 and 6 how to make a lizard catcher. Note: The stalks of grass don't grow as soft and bendable as they did in the Mission Viejo of my youth. There were a lot of different things in fact. Sometimes I wonder if I should have stayed there as many of my family and friends did. But when the wind said go, I followed. I have memories that even predate Mission Viejo. Before I get into the spacious bipolar hangar, I want to take you back a little further once more. To understand my message, you need to be a little familiar with who Damien is and where he came from. I think you're getting it.

I recall my first dog, Friday. I remember as an older child hearing of him and barely remembering. Now I remember the street all too well from all the telling. I spent the first 4 years of my life there. In the pictures they showed me it had a white picket fence and a white wooden look to it. It must have been built before the days of "stucco" because it was all wood. It had a front porch and as I said a tire swing attached to a large sycamore tree visible from the street on the side. It was a place an open mind could originate from (and did). I would need an open mind to accept things like, but not limited to my disorder.

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They told me of another boy I used to play with next door named Martin. They told me about Mrs. Fitz. Apparently her last name was longer . . . Fitzpatrick or something, but so the kids could say it, they called her Mrs. ``Fitz.” She was elderly and in a wheelchair but whenever we would go over and knock on her screen door she would say: “Well hello, here comes Damien!” and give us warm apple turnovers. We would sit and listen to her tell us stories. That part I remember vividly. My brother is 14 months younger than me so I doubt he remembers Kroeger street more than I do. Nonetheless, we have 8 millimeter film footage of him and I in the grass with the cat and dog. My mom looks so young, it’s really amazing to see those pictures now. My dad always had a Freud-like beard. He was wild and wacky in those days (and you see it in the film). He’d throw me up in the air and put my face right in the camera lens. He was, and still is, so proud of his family and kids. I know it’s been hard on them accepting my diagnosis. I tried denying it to myself at least twice. Enough happened in the absence of Lithium to prove to me it was real. I think they accept it now. I remember wanting to tell them: “Mom, Dad, I screwed up because it’s hard to remember things when I panic and when I’m ultra depressed,” but I never did because I knew how self-pitying it would sound. The fact is anyway, you don’t get too much slack in a professional job. You have to manage those weaknesses, nobody else can do it for you. Maybe love from afar is the most acceptance a bipolar can expect. My parents are wonderful liberal minded people and I’m very lucky to be their child. Thanks mom and dad.

When I would close my eyes and envision Kroeger street I’d see gutter flowers, grass growing through sidewalk cracks, the house as they told it to me, and of course the people they told me loved me while we lived there. One day at the age of

26, I decided to go back! I rode my bike past the house, since I was going to college close by working on my graduate degree in English at California State University, Fullerton. It was all boarded up and Mrs. Fitz's house had been razed. I've always loved that word "razed." It's a homonym meaning sounds the same, not a homograph meaning it's spelled the same of "raised" and the two mean exactly the opposite of each other. The fence sign around my first home read "Starbucks coming soon!" I suppose in a way that is all too fitting. I think they serve apple turnovers don't they? Even so, I doubt any barista would call me by name from the front screen door with the halting, enchanting hello of Mrs. Fitz.

It's amazing how we as humans can attach so much meaning and soul to simple places. The soul is eternal, but places come and go. They are not static, yet they are inseparable from the soul. As I looked at the old Kroeger house I could see the tire swing was gone. The huge branches and leaves of the tree had been sawed off. It was just a trunk now with the cut areas spray painted over to prevent the tree from healing and regrowth. There were no animals, no children, no families of any kind. The street is short and it appeared many houses were also boarded up and for sale. I wished I could walk in the front door to see if some memory would come back. A smell, and sight, a vibration of the wind through the house . . . something that might take me back to those wonderful years I have seen and heard too much about, something to make me find out who I am. The rose bushes in front of Kroeger street have long faded, I treasure their memory and that's why I'm writing about them here now. Down the road, I'll be telling my kids in ages hence how it was on our mystical sequel to the long gone Kroeger Street. But these are vapors that will one day evade my brain, and anyone's. That's sad. That's also why I wrote them in a book.

Chapter Two

The Dark Night of the Soul

"Not everyone can carry the weight of the world."
-Michael Stipe 1984 "Talk About The Passion"

Carl Jung had a lot to say about this phase called "The Dark Night of the Soul" as did many many other consciousness teachers including Eckhart Tolle, Deepak Chopra, the list goes on indefinitely. It usually isn't just one night, it can last for days, months, or even years. It was so painful for me, I am very thankful the few times I have experienced it, the duration was short. It's a time when your soul gets shredded for a good cause. Everything you saw as a pillar or truth in your life (almost everything but sometimes everything) get logically disproven. A good example is a death of someone you loved or a better one in my case is a divorce. The "Oh sweeties" get replaced with "I want you dead." You get the idea. The dark night of the soul was painful but I'm thankful it showed me she was never someone I should have

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connected with. For bipolars, this is excruciating because you feel everything exponentially. I made it through a few of these, another was my childhood born again faith. In losing old foundations, the soul is cleared out for new, better, more authentic ones. Bipolars have a hard time with it but everyone gets through it, usually.

Learning of my bipolar disorder diagnosis forever changed my life. Remember a lot of idiots out there claim they are bipolar and it causes so much damage in the form of a stigma. You say you're bipolar? Check out the DSM V requirements:

To be diagnosed with bipolar disorder, a person must have experienced at least one episode of mania or hypomania.

To be considered mania, the elevated, expansive, or irritable mood must last for at least one week and be present most of the day, nearly every day. To be considered hypomania, the mood must last at least four consecutive days and be present most of the day, almost every day.

During this period, three or more of the following symptoms must be present and represent a significant change from usual behavior:

- Inflated self-esteem or grandiosity
- Decreased need for sleep
- Increased talkativeness
- Racing thoughts
- Distracted easily

Increase in goal-directed activity or psychomotor agitation

Engaging in activities that hold the potential for painful consequences, e.g., unrestrained buying sprees. The depressive side of bipolar disorder is characterized by a major depressive episode resulting in depressed mood or loss of interest or pleasure in life. The DSM-5 states that a person must experience five or more of the following symptoms in two weeks to be diagnosed with a major depressive episode:

Depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day

Loss of interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities

Significant weight loss or decrease or increase in appetite

Engaging in purposeless movements, such as pacing the room

Fatigue or loss of energy

Feelings of worthlessness or guilt

Diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness

Recurrent thoughts of death, recurrent suicidal ideation without a specific plan, or a suicide attempt

Credit:

<https://www.psycom.net/bipolar-definition-dsm-5>

Please note dear reader that bipolars only exist in 2% of the

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population. Multitudes of those claiming to be bipolar are self diagnosing incorrectly. Learning and accepting I was bipolar would require everything I was taught about life but I had to find a way to decipher its meaning through a prism of my own existence. Unfortunately, that's what every bipolar person has to do. It sucks but I can tell you in my case it was all worth it. You can't become the best athlete until you are aware of your body's limitations.

Bipolar Disorder, according to NAMI, presents in 2% of the US population. Depression (Unipolar types), on the other hand, presents in over 8%. Most people will agree these figures are higher in real life because not everyone gets sampled or reported. For the purposes of this book, I am also touching, therefore, on depression since it widens my scope and will in theory reach and hopefully help more people. Besides that, Bipolar has two demons: mania and depression. The depression we as bipolars suffer is the same as that of unipolar depressed people. I must reiterate that three different psychiatrists have diagnosed me as "very high functioning." I don't want to appear I am bragging when I talk about my 25 year career as a professional. There were times I thought I was out of the game for good. Some people won't have my success. This book is just to offer basic actions I took in my field of teaching to survive and thrive as a professional. Tread cautiously. At the same time, normal brained people can benefit from this book as well by implementing my simple strategies. They don't just work for bipolar professionals, they have universal truth to all humans.

Jobs are threatened every day by depression. While most people can attest to having the blues now and then, major depressive disorder can cause everything from sleeping through a job interview but not on purpose to the dreaded self-harm that has been written about in Time Magazine

raising record levels of suicides. We are told "snap out of it" and "you are just lazy" among other uninformed consternations. We can let it get to us and get riled up, which can have disastrous results in public, or stay cloistered and isolated through those extreme times which can prevent us from earning a living which leads some to suicide. Bipolar disorder has the highest rate of suicides pound for pound. Depressed brains can't shake themselves awake. No amount of caffeine can permanently lift a brain out of depression. There are a growing array of medications that can temporarily stop the tears and agony but most have side effects which some people judge to be worse than the medication's benefits and they stop their medication.

As a bipolar or depressed person, you have to manage your chemicals. We are like "soup." Sometimes it's bland and needs salt. Other times it's too spicy and needs to be watered down. The bipolar brain cannot change itself. Most require medication as do some forms of depression. It's far and above the issue of a stigma or embarrassment. It's life or death for the individual. Jeers at work or from one's friends and family are to be ignored, even when their comments hurt deeply. If one is to make a living in this world, she/he must take care of her/his brain first, disregarding and detaching from all external opinions. Only you know when you are ok. This makes a job nearly impossible. From that, stems the stigma. For this reason, it is recommended by this author to not disclose your disorder to a potential employer. Especially in the 20's and 30's because you are still getting to know how to live with your monster.

While documentaries and special reports tell us the stigma of bipolar is lessening, I stand before you stating the stigma of mental disorders probably will always be with us. People assume bipolars are getting a "free ride" when they need

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special time off etc. In reality, they are drowning below a glass bottomed boat while catty peers observe them unable to help and they rather just laugh. This is why I say a bipolar person must learn to appear normal. This is a lifelong quest and it's never over though I myself have found it to grow easier in some situations, like with neighbors. Relationships are impossible unless your partner knows about your illness and is willing to carry the load for both of you sometimes. That is why, in addition to carefully choosing whether to be a professional, you must probably give up the traditional idea of a romantic relationship. Before you combine as one with a mate, please read them this chapter. I don't think mine knew what she was in for. But then again, it says something about a person who leaves a marriage. Not to boast but I never would. When she left it hurt badly but that's another thing about being bipolar, what normally hurts you intensifies exponentially because you don't really have control over your moods in time of trauma. I should say that you don't know how much control you'll have. After she left me, I took an antidepressant for a while which did help quite a bit. If you feel the weight of depression after a life event such as a divorce, talk to your doctor. I kept taking my lithium along with the antidepressant and after about 3 years, I felt ok and stopped the antidepressant. I think I'll be on Lithium the rest of my life. I don't recommend marriage for a bipolar person but I always have hope I'll meet a life partner. As I have said, depression is a terrible beast but it can be managed. I have shared in this book that I am Bipolar type 1 and my mood tends to be super alert, it is called mania. More on mania in my next chapter. It may sound fun being "up" but it has a curse all its own. Before we get into mania, here are some thoughts on how to be professional at work and hopefully avoid disarming depression. The following are lyrics from a song by my guitar hero:

"You've seen him down in the alley
You've seen him on TV
You've seen him selling candy
On the corner of the street
He's everywhere you look
You don't know his name
But you hear him coming for miles
He's dragging a long heavy chain"

-Dave Sharp

Did you ever see a superhero movie where the hero finds the villain's lair only to hear upon entry:

"Welcome. We've been expecting you."

Then there is a ghoulish laugh like "bwah ha ha ha ha" or something like that? That scene is pretty common in superhero shows. It's possible audiences relate with it so well because we all have metaphorical villains that we fear. When our fear materializes it seems composed and set on destroying us. In those scenarios, fear has control, we do not. Wouldn't it be great if when depression shows itself we could say to it:

"Hello depression, I have been expecting you, tough little guy! And guess what, I'm going to take care of you. I know you are in pain so you are my responsibility to take care of."

Preparation to meet our "villain" is the key to good mental health. You should do all you can to prepare for the villain. If you care for yourself, you care for him and he doesn't have to be your villain at all. The Chinese have a saying "To defeat one's enemy you must first make him/her beautiful." That's what the dragons in parades represent.

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Our belief about adversity is what determines our action and consequence. Wrong beliefs about things defeat us. If your greatest fear is to lose your job, which was probably mine in all honesty even though I had a pretty secure job, then ask yourself why that scares you so much. Is your worth 100% in your job? I know mine isn't, though I had to learn it the hard way. As you begin analyzing that fear and asking "Why?" you can become prepared for the fear when it comes up. Classic example: Your boss calls you into his office. Do you panic? This is your villain manifesting itself. There is no need to panic if you meet him prepared. I recall the humorous yet inspiring Indigo Montoya from the movie "The Princess Bride." He is inspirational because he prepares every day to meet and avenge his father's killer. In the end, he is successful because he makes himself ready EVERY DAY.

Your greatest fear is probably not even going to happen and imagine how much trouble you'll save yourself by not being so concerned. You can beat that villain and another and another until ideally fear no longer has a hold on you (I am not there quite yet). It's a great thing when you defeat a villain, no matter his or her size. Joseph Campbell would be proud of me I think.

In recent years I've taken on the practice of meditation. As I have done so I've started to study Buddhism. The Buddha spoke of not being reliant on temporal things. It's a practice of emptying the mind of thoughts. I contend that thinking is our biggest enemy. If we practice "not thinking" enough, it becomes a habit. It becomes a place to go in our heart where we are emptied of thoughts. You'd be surprised how dangerous our thoughts can be. I want to emphasize emphatically though that meditation should be considered an ongoing practice and certainly not a quick fix. Allowing fearful thoughts to pass through and then go away on their

own is the best way to prepare to meet depressive thoughts at work. A mantra such as “I allow mistakes as part of my journey” will work if they are spoken over several sessions. That is why they call it the “practice” of meditation. If you’re looking for an instant fix, close this book there’s none of that. Meditation and self checks are far more important than the gym to a bipolar professional. Incense, candles, a clean well lighted place to meditate are all excellent ways to find peace through meditation. The buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh makes breathing in and out and paying attention to the breath a sure fire way to return to the present moment which clears the mind. We have all we need in the present moment. There are other activities that reduce racing or negative thoughts but for me, meditation works quite well. In addition to overthinking which can lead to panic and depression, we can sometimes fixate. This is a terrible habit. One way to avoid fixation in the face of change is to keep an open mind to changing for your boss. But next I tell you about the most important thing to any professional, especially a bipolar one.

I’ve practiced relaxation for years and it’s paid off with huge dividends. There should be a study on psychology and the teacher. I am glad I’ve made relaxation a priority as a teacher, I only wish I would have done it earlier in life. Do you think relaxation could help you in your life as it has me? You’ll never know until you try. I grew up knowing that naps were important and so were the 8 hours of sleep I was supposed to have every night. What my mom and dad failed to do however was teach me relaxation techniques. I don’t blame them, they were children of the 50's where relaxation was frowned upon and seen as “laziness.” No one then seemed to know what I know now: relaxation yields productivity.

When you are relaxed, you think more clearly. you become a better problem solver and a better friend to others. When I

neglect relaxation, my creativity is stifled and even basic problems are difficult. Relaxation requires discipline. A person can make a chart of chores for the week and think himself responsible but how many charts will you find for relaxation? For example” “3pm Wednesday – meditate by the pool for 30 minutes.” I dare to say the former chore will do more for the person, his family, and environment than a page full of completed tasks.

I urge my reader to relax whenever possible. There are many ways to do it but everyone has to find their OWN way that works best. Knowing two things is essential to discovering the benefits of relaxation: 1) Relaxation is good for you and 2) Relaxation is a discipline. Now that I have made this case for relaxation I feel it fitting to note that religion is NOT relaxation. In fact, they have little to do with each other. If you find yourself “unfulfilled” in your life, I recommend relaxation. I would hate to see anyone waste a day in church when they could be developing a lifelong fulfilling practice of relaxation.

I use a few methods for relaxation and I am always curious to hear what other people use. The foundation of what I do is the Relaxation Response. It provides many health and psychological benefits to my life. That’s why I wrote this article. Trust me, it pays dividends! If you insist on “beating your body into submission so it wont sin” as a bipolar man or woman prepare to meet your most dreaded manifestation: mania.

"Mania starts off fun—not sleeping for days, keeping company with your brain, which has become a wonderful computer, showing 24 TV channels all about you. That goes horribly wrong after a while."

– Carrie Fisher

In my first memorable manic episode, I imagined I was like a horse, more than a young man. It was after high school and I was in the best shape of my life. I couldn't sleep so I walked through the neighborhoods of Mission Viejo, CA most of the time staring at the milky white moon. I didn't know it then but this was one of my first manic episodes. I think the horse idea came from looking at my calves. Instead of a normal kid, my bipolar disorder saw them as the calves of a boy horse. For a little while, that's what I was. Most bipolars are hyper creative types. Edgar Allen Poe was bipolar for example. His short stories send chills up readers' spines and no doubt because they were living in his bipolar mind long before they were penned for posterity. Bipolars often take humanity to lofty heights and lowest of low places. WE are entertained by them but often so at the expense of their health. Science still only understands the symptoms of Bipolar disorder. The most common prescription of it is lithium, a salt found naturally occurring in nature. It is prudent to mention that I am referred to by doctors as "high functioning." I can interview for mainstream jobs, attain degrees, "blend in" and often prosper in mainstream society for a time. I wish to warn readers that I've failed at many endeavors because of my disorder and this book should not be a license for you to go out and try mammoth things without fear and reverence for this profound disorder. Most bipolar people I have known have found it a mammoth task to simply leave the house, feed themselves, and not annoy family and loved ones. Bipolar for me often presents as sarcasm and has the potential to destroy family and friends in many other flippant ways. It's an art to live with it and not everyone can thrive under its weight. Now, let's get back to mania, specifically I'm going to tell you a story of how I found out I was bipolar,

one of the most horrifying experiences of my life. I share it to warn you to be aware of your profound disorder and so you might take care that you don't have a destructive manic episode.

I was teaching at Saddleback College in 1999. It was a freshman composition class that I had dreamed of teaching all my college years. I was on the other side of the lectern now. I got to present all my little tricks I had invented to make writing possible. Even way back then at age 29 I was criticized as an "easy professor." This was likely due to the fact that bipolar chaotic minds often have to break everything down into primary steps. While apparently elementary, this type of teaching works amazingly well for all levels and most students receive me well. In English however you always get the high achievers that think you are wasting their time. It helps to have writing samples that you have published. Showing them on your syllabus usually shuts them down. When I would later teach 4th grade, I learned in a training to say to these complaining types: "Good, if I'm easy then I'll expect 100% on every paper,"

At the same time I started teaching college part time, I was teaching on contract in Santa Ana Unified. I had several classes at Century High School, "the prison" people called it. I dealt with indifference there all day and only a few students seemed to care about the lovely English literature charms and writing I was teaching. As bipolar mania arose out of stress, not eating, and most important to consider: I did not know I had bipolar disorder yet. As a freeway flier 50 miles each way daily, my nerves started fraying. I was dating a young lady who was truly beautiful inside and out. She genuinely cared for me and that put off the inevitable manic episode that was bubbling over like a witches kettle. To make a long story short, I began sending weird emails all hours of the night so

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friends and family were likely questioning my mental health. When 2 district agents came to my darkened door at 10pm one night, I lost it. I became paranoid thinking I was going to lose my job or something more sinister. Everything looked black and white as if I was in a Twilight Zone episode.

I called my good “lifelong” friend and he allowed me to sleep on his floor. I needed to be near people and my girlfriend wasn’t available. Mostly I didn’t want to bother her and I was afraid she’d reject me if she saw how scared I was. I drove 2 hours to Tower Records in Los Angeles. I had been fixating on the Ricky Martin song “Bella (She’s all I Ever Had)” and knew I could get it there. I saw the video and it was hypnotic as if saying it was an interstellar message to only me. Repeating songs over and over can be a symptom of a manic episode. You might limit that. Some accounts say they thought they heard the voice of God in a song.

As it turned out, my inner being knew what was going to happen. I went into the district at 5am in response to the agents’ request that I report to the superintendent in the morning. I was in fight or flight mode that was quickly giving way to indignant anger. While there, I became highly agitated and I threatened I would take my own life if they took my job. I remember a kind faced employee at the district telling me “Damien, you are ill but we are going to help you.” Thank God for district psychologists. I was led out to an ambulance, given a shot and the next thing I knew it was 30 days later in a Costa Mesa mental hospital where I had been non responsive and given “toxic” levels of lithium on a daily basis until I finally would calm down. Dr. Ross looked me in the eye and said, “There you are, finally.” I asked him what he meant and he replied “WE kept giving you Lithium and other drugs. You were toxic.” To this day I’m not sure if that was an adjective about my personality in there or a medical term for

over the normally accepted dosage. Probably both.

I would soon find out I was Bipolar Type 1, the worst kind that manifests mania. I had no idea what they were talking about and several times in the next decade I went off my medicine in hopes they were wrong. Luckily, I never had anything that intense again. I just went up and up and I didn't know what was happening so I couldn't control it. Before you seek to take on a profession as a bipolar person, you must understand mania and the signs that show it's coming. It took a while to regulate my Lithium and get the right dosage but once I did, I was just as effective as anyone else. In fact, due to my mood sensitivities, I could empathize more with students in my class suffering with disabilities.

It was in that therapy I learned about my diagnosis of Bipolar 1. Mania gave me "superpowers" at least in my own mind. I learned the powerful bent Bipolar can awaken in a person. I learned there is a depression with it too that makes you lose your appetite and suffer suicidal thoughts just like major depressive disorder does. I went to a new college of sorts, outpatient CBT therapy and monthly visits to a psychiatrist who tried many drugs on me and later settled on just lithium. I am a rare case in that lithium alone worked for me. Most bipolars need numerous medications to keep them stabilized. Very few bipolar people can hold down jobs. I was bound and determined to not let that happen to me. Mania keeps you up like speed. You may hallucinate. You lose your desire to eat and enjoy normal pleasures like taking a shower. If you take your meds, you can regulate the disorder and fall back into what looks like normal. But the wolf is always at the door. It is a vicious dictator that takes over everything in your life. It is very difficult to tame mania, or depression for that matter. Regular therapy and medication can mask it but you must always be on the vigilant lookout. Family support is

crucial and indispensable. That week of mania forever changed my life. Only now can I see it was for my best. Many end up in jail, wounded, or dead because of mania. My school district paid for my transition. Mania feels good for a time but it leaves the destruction of relationships and professions in its wake. Be wary. The amazing speed like "mania needs to be controlled and that quickly. That's why it is so important to establish care with a psychiatrist. So, that was how I learned I was Bipolar. I would fight the diagnosis for at least a decade but ultimately I am so thankful to my doctors. They always told me I could have a normal job and I had faith I could as well. The stories that follow are distractions from mania that I experienced as I left education for 2 years and worked as a Pizza Hut Manager BY CHOICE in Dana Point California.

Around 1990, most every strip-mall-concept "Winchells" donuts mysteriously disappeared from Orange County. You might think this was good for all of our arteries. Of course I was 20 at the time so arteries weren't really a concern. Again, you might say this phenomenon was healthy for us Orange County (OC) folk, but a real estate transaction with a pizza racket called "Pizza Hut " just challenged our collective vascular system further. In an unprecedented and mammoth OC industrial purchase, Pizza Hut purchased most all strip mall Winchells and uniformly transformed them into an exciting NEW (yes, it was new then folks) restaurant concept of "Delivery/Carryout " only. There were many innovations, some based on another budding enterprise called "Dominos Pizza: 30 minutes or it's free." But the most significant was the chain-mail conveyor-belt oven. This cooked pizza begins to end in 7 minutes. With a make-table time of 1-2 minutes, this "theoretically" would make the 30 minute promise time a piece of cake, or pie if you will. What came later was the

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profitable stuff McDonald's founder, Ray Kroc only dreamed of. Furthermore, the mecca called Disneyland, just 30 minutes away (if you're going 90 mph) smiled at such a people-pleasing invention as this. I remember reading that his grilling system could make a hamburger in 2 minutes.

The yellow signs that once lured us in for sugar, flour and cholesterol became red ones that drew us to our phones for flour, sauce and cheese like starved zombies. Instead of "brains brains . . ." It was "Large Pan Pepperoni and a 2 liter." This transaction and subsequent pizza delivery behemoth called Pizza Hut (corporately based locally in Irvine, CA) is a signature business model of the OC. Think big, plan big, buy big, roll big. That might have been a better slogan than the one we had: "Makin' it great."

I took a job as a delivery driver at Pizza Hut #709485 in Mission Viejo, CA in August of 1990 as I have said, when I was two decades old. I can recall hearing significant events announced on the radio while delivering such as: "The LA Riots, the Rodney King beating" (this still beats all Super Bowl records for delivery dollars) and Kurt Cobain's suicide. When something was happening in a family or t.v. culture, the OC ordered pizza. Pizza Hut leadership had the vision to see how their product could make a profit off of an armchair population. And, this population tipped!

I worked as a driver for a couple years while playing nights as singer/songwriter/guitarist in a rock band. After 2 years of not achieving my rock star dreams, I went back to school at Saddleback College. My dad let me live at home rent free as long as I carried a full load and passed my classes. My AA came in 1993, then I transferred to California State University Fullerton where I earned my BA in English in 1995 and my MA in English with emphasis in "Language, Writing, and

Rhetoric.” (Okay, it sounds like bragging but that was the actual emphasis) Alongside my schooling I continued at Pizza Hut for what would become a 10 year “transition” job.

After starting work as a 5th grade teacher in the Santa Ana School District in 1997, I later returned to try my hand at restaurant management running the Dana Point, CA Pizza Hut As RGM (Restaurant General Manager) for 2 1/2 years (#705489). I learned more about people and getting them revved up to make money than in any other time of my life. It sometimes takes a person a stretch to find his meaning in life. There’s nothing much you can tell me I don’t know about the company or about pizza for that matter. I learned the “bonus” business wasn’t my bag. Now after being in teaching a good long while, I know my calling is outside the “Hut,” but I remember it fondly. In many ways, working there made me who I am today. I started teaching again in the high desert in 2002 and have been at it ever since. I have an entire book of material I've learned as a teacher. It exists in my prep time every week

To close this post on pizza, the OC is full of entrepreneurial endeavors. Sometimes they work, sometimes they flop. When it comes to OC businesses, change is the only constant. Take it from someone who was born and raised there for 33 years, you can place a bet on the pizza business model continuing ad-infinitum there among the beach-close humans.

Julia Roberts and Oprah are told us all to “Eat Pray Love” I’m glad I’m in a place where I've earned the value of people over profits. As a child of the OC, I have been sheltered. At the same time, I’ve seen the dark side of an indulgent culture. I can take it or leave it I think. Mostly leave it.

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Owners do “walk-throughs” starting at the storefront. Then, they adjust and repair things accordingly. I have always seen a parallel in a storefront to the self (if you will). Taking responsibility for yourself and how you invent yourself for the world is a huge key to success.

When you enter a store, hopefully there is an owner who thinks about you, the customer. If you need something, he’ll guide you to that place. If you have a complaint, or if someone treats you unfairly, he’ll step in to make it right by you. Owners accept responsibility for everything. Do you own yourself?

When I was an area coach designate for Pizza Hut, I used to love to see managers out in front of the store picking up slips of trash and sweeping. It showed ownership. We as ordinary people seeking self-improvement need to step back and check our own storefront, which in this case I am using to refer to “the self.” Learn to let go with Buddhism or something like it. Still you have to mind the storefront as a bipolar. The demands are exponentially higher for self actualization, relaxation, and self care. This is all because of the threat of mania which is sometimes the final nail in the coffin of a profession. I can’t stress enough how important it is for your to not get overly stress and therefore you have to be obsessed with your own self care.

Here are some points you might find on that sort of checklist:

Appearance: A big one. How do I look? The way we present ourselves to the world affects the way we are received.

Success isn’t all luck as many failures would have us believe.

Friendliness: Do I look people in the eye? Do I show concern for their needs? Am I interested? Being friendly with

the world outside the storefront develops our reputation person by person and often brings in to us better opportunities. Owners commit themselves to listening then finding solutions.

Service: Was I able to help people around me today? Did I steer people in the right direction? Did I engage in conversation that was helpful?

Relevance: Was I relevant? Have I striven to become effective in relevant areas of my work, my friends, my family?

If I am a storefront then how do I look? If I am the store, how am I inside and more importantly, how would others want to come in? Ultimately we should strive to pass our own rating since the crowd can be fickle. Still, let us never forget that every person's view of us, at varying levels, is important.

Now, step back and look at yourself: If only for this day, own the storefront, the world will notice. As a bipolar professional especially, be conscious of how you present as a "storefront." This can avoid problems.

This is a funny story about human nature, customer service, and really hot buffalo wings. I'll never forget an amazing and true pizza story that happened five minutes before closing. It was the marvelous year of 1993 and I was 23. I'd been working through college as a Pizza Hut shift manager and they'd transferred me to a city, Lake Forest to be exact, where they couldn't find a closing manager who wouldn't steal from the till. Apparently recruiting from day-labor zones wasn't going too great for them. Anyway, they pulled me in and the story that follows should ring true with anyone who'd worked retail or food service with that glorious lot we all know as "the customer," I hope you enjoy it.

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Pizza Hut closed around 11-12 depending on the city and the business at those hours. This particular one closed at 11pm and so the closing cook and drivers started getting

all the closing jobs were done about 9:30-10p. This was for obvious reasons, if we had it all done at 11, they could leave and I could stay 20-30 more minutes to make the

deposit and head home myself. Anyway, this was the routine and as most people in customer service jobs know: routines often change :)

Our entire make-table was cleaned and the food was all stored in the walk-in fridge. We kept a few things out just in case like a box of pepperoni, some shredded Mozzarella, a couple disks of crust, yadda yadda. You learn the basic ingredients the late nighters order. When the clock showed 10:55pm we thought an 11pm close-up was imminent ... then the phone rang. A collective sign rang out among the four of us in the store. It was an order for one order of buffalo wings. These cost under the bare minimum of our delivery cost so we told the customer they needed something more to get it delivered. We all hoped that would turn them away (my apologies to my old Pizza Hut superiors but sometimes \$3.99 wings for the company minus labor and costs just isn't worth it at five minutes to close.) Nonetheless, we took the order anyway and got ready to send it through.

That was when the drunk customer began to get surly. He said in a gruff husky voice: "Make these wings hot dammit! You guys never make 'em hot enough!

I explained to this customer that our wings are prepared by the commissary so all we do is cook them. We have no ingredients to make them hotter or milder. He of course

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carried on that was all BS and he wanted his wings hot. Mind you by this time it was after closing and his order was about \$5.99 which he would have delivered and most likely not even tip the driver. I told him I would see what I could do. As I started his order I was dreaming of getting home in time to watch the end of Johnny Carson.

As I started putting the frozen wings into a pizza pan, I glanced up and had an evil thought. Sometimes those make your life miserable but other times they make a good life story! I saw the giant jalapenos we used to fill out the ingredients table with. I recalled THE JUICE we strained off. I told my night cook Julio to pour the straight jalapeno juice over the wings before and after the cooking process and then put them back in for 3 minutes after that.

Long story short, I got a call as I was sealing the deposit bag. Does anyone know what I am talking about? The plastic things that can only be sealed once and if you mess it up you have to use another one? Anyway, amazing how I had not remembered those up until now. Back to the drunk wing customer: He called me and told me he wanted my boss' phone number to thank him for the best wings he'd ever had and to give me some form of recognition.

I gave him the 1-800 number. Hung up the phone. Laughed a good laugh and ended up getting a Big Mac and missing Johnny Carson that night. It all reminds me of a Tale of Two Cities opening line by Charles Dickens, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."

Whether it's pizza or something else, if you've worked with the public ... you probably know what that means. Next is an

introspective piece I wrote about the area I grew up in, and what it means to me.

turning off PCH, the city bus used to drop us off with our surfboards. Sometimes we had our wetsuits half on. Walking past the liquor store,

we'd see Oscar, a grumpy bum who'd take refuge in a giant tree. We'd sometimes jeer at him, which was terrible to do I admit. I'll never forget a friend of mine saying: "What's up old man?" and Oscar yelling in a drunken stupor: "Get Gone!" Poor guy, I feel for him now. The Oscar interests lasted only about 60 feet when we passed the wall that reads "Welcome to Dana Point." We'd carry our boards, aged 14 eager to reach the beach.

The beach we'd surf at was Doheney. It was and probably still has the smallest breaking waves on Earth. Ironically, it used to be called "Killer Dana" because before they built a jetty it had huge and dangerous surf. Not so in our day. We would tiptoe through the rocks and pebbles until we were about knee-high in the water. Then we'd lay on our stomachs and paddle out to catch these small but reliable waves. Out in the water you can look back at the jetty and the harbor. You can see the Jolly Roger restaurant where I had my 16th birthday party and where my folks bought me a wood colored Aria electric guitar. That thing played so well but after a while it would always go out of tune. I saw a Fender Telecaster on a Coors tv commercial after that and knew that would be the only guitar I ever needed ... and I was correct.

Later on past 16, the harbor had more significance for me. I enjoyed chips, salsa, and enchiladas at several "to die for" restaurants there with parents, friends, and sometimes alone. At 22 I was baptized in the harbor, and at 30 I was the

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restaurant manager of Pizza Hut in Dana Point. I was a substitute teacher at several schools in that area, including Dana Hills, San Clemente, and Capistrano Valley High School. I'd wake up at 5 to get a call and end up in a class by 7:30a sometimes teaching lessons a sick or otherwise unreachable teacher had left for me. The ocean air was always inspiring. It is never discouraged. In my ocean days, in my 20's, I began to flex my grownup muscles. I explored the idea that anything is possible. Since then I have never forgotten it is true.

I taught 5th and 9th grade in Santa Ana for three years between the ages 27-30. This was my first time making my home away from the ocean. Life was a little harder. People seemed to care a little less. I'd escape back to the beach periodically to do somersaults in the salty water. It felt like rebirth when I'd come out and dry off with a big fluffy towel. After three years of teaching, I thought perhaps my BA, MA, and teaching credential were all three a waste of money. I stepped aside from my career and became the restaurant manager I mentioned earlier. Once again, the sea breeze wafted through my nose and through my mind every day. It was wonderful. Once again, my faith was restored ... in all. But one day a kid walked in from a Santa Ana classroom and said: "Hi, Mr. Riley." In that moment I recalled this Jackson Browne verse:

"Across my home has grown a shadow of a cruel and senseless hand but in some strong hearts the love and truth remains. And it has taken me this distance and a woman's smile to learn that my heart remains among them and to them I must return."

-From "Our Lady of the Well."

I realized looking at that ocean I was not "Damien the Pizza

Hut manager” but rather “Mr. Riley the teacher.” Since I moved to the High Desert at 33, I’ve regained my belief in the ocean and in people. I know it’s not the ocean that inspires people but the ocean in all of us. My memories of Dana Point live on thickly. This is true even though now I have a family and a classroom of students calling me “Mr. Riley” or now “Professor Riley” in a land covered with dust and Yucca trees ... no ocean for hours. I recall those somersaults at Doheney beach in Dana Point Harbor. I recall the bum, Oscar. I recall Jolly Roger and so much more I’ve not covered in this post. Like Richard Henry Dana, I am the captain of my own Pilgrim ship. I am headed out to my sea each day, making a difference in that ocean that lives forever in my mind. And that wraps up some key thoughts on the OC and how it formed my character in those early years of my first three decades. Lessons about work are true for any kind of brain, especially the bipolar one.

More lessons for all professionals coming next, especially bipolar ones

“We are all time travelers moving at the speed of exactly 60 minutes per hour. - Spider Robinson

It’s Thanksgiving in 2 days and everyone in my family is abuzz with plans of turkey, stuffing, bread, and sweet potatoes (well, that’s the stuff I like anyway).

Turkey day has always been an amazing time of memory for me throughout my life whether through watching Rod Serling’s Twilight Zone marathon or playing guitars with the relatives and visiting, it has always been a smooth calm place to center. I remember things and people like the teachers I am thankful for, the mentors, my parents, and all the material things that I am blessed with on Thanksgiving. But “turkey

day,” as we call it, is not so much glitter for some. Many are homeless in my town, state, and country this season and I think about them specifically on this day. I try to volunteer what I have whether it be time or money to help offset this tragic reality. I have volunteered in the L.A. Union Rescue mission soup kitchen and though I was giving, I gained so much empathy, thankfulness, and understanding in return.

But it should never be a sad time.

The lines at the soup kitchen, their long tired faces with stories too long that no one could ever fully hear, should serve as an equalizer. They should remind us that we all stand at the doorway or poverty. We are not “better” than them, only different in what we have. Their hidden world goes on 24/7 all around us in the streets, back alleys, and even in cardboard boxes. When it comes to life and we see it up close, we are reminded of our fragile security.

In essence, it all boils down to a cosmic soup kitchen: we get what we’re served. Have you served others lately? Maybe this Thanksgiving could be a time for you to start. Or maybe take time to be thankful for what you have.

Why not start a tradition this year to go around the table and share what you are thankful for. Remember that some folks are whiffing in hot soup with their eyes closed and thanking God for it. Remember them at your table as well. Their faces are our faces at some cosmic soup kitchen unseen. Think of it as an image to balance out the manic holiday for you in the level of wealth that you enjoy.

There are many ways to make a difference. One way is by donating a meal online at the Union Rescue Mission for \$1.64. They are doing great work there.

In the past years I have lost people like my grandfather and I've seen some friends lose spouses and other relations: it's been rough. I know many people reading this can relate with the death of a loved one. I remember my grandfather, and these other people as so vibrant, so a part of life. Now that they are gone it is sobering to realize that I will never see them again. It has gotten me thinking about what really matters in life.

There are accolades at my work to strive for if one chooses to. You can do what it takes and get a small plaque presented to you etc. Or, you can think about those who have gone ahead of you and what they have left behind that matters. In the entrance to our auditorium at the school where I teach there is a photo case. In that photo-case is a montage picture of the teachers when the school opened in 1985. I was 15 at the time. The teachers in the picture have retro 80's shirts and most of the men have beards. The patterns on the clothes are the kind you just don't see nowadays. It was a different time but the teachers were flesh and blood as I am now with my staff. Losing my grandfather got me thinking more about what I will leave behind by way of legacy and less about what I can get out of life while I'm alive.

Leaving something behind is my biggest concern. I'll admit, while writing blog posts I think about how my kids will one day read them. I think about whether to include all my rants when I don't see how they will offer them any help in life. I think this is a good filter. This mindset also filters out the drama of my work. When I am only concerned with making a contribution, the gossip lines fade in order of importance. I want to leave behind a model of passion for teaching, for blogging, for guitar and piano and the appreciation of many kinds of music. I want people to be encouraged by what I have done and believe they can do even better. When I think

of how animated and gregarious my Grandpa was in his 85 years, I get inspired to live fully. If I can encourage even one other person to do that, then I will feel my life was a success. That kind of influence is what I hope to leave behind. If you could leave behind just 3 things, what would they be? Here are mine:

1. Finish Bipolar Professional.
2. Build abundance and wealth for my 3 children..
3. Seek the Buddhist form of “awakening” by dealing with my challenges in meditation.

Keep doing those hobbies, topics, and pet projects that excite you, even if they bring in little or no money. If you’re a writer, write on that stuff you’re most passionate about, despite the popularity “ranking” of the subject matter. Even something as droll as chewing gum has produced rewards in due time. That’s what my next story is about: Soap, gum and doing what you love.

I read about Wrigley, the famous gum mogul, tonight on a website. He started selling soap as his main source of income, but kept a secret hobby of making it in the chewing gum market that began in his basement. He never thought chewing gum would bring in enough money to be a big business, so he poured himself into the soap as his career. After a time however, the soap didn’t sell as he had hoped. Before long, he would be in chewing gum orbit.

To better market the soap as a novelty, the family started adhering a small package of his tasty gum to each soapbox they sold. After a short time people were buying the soap just to get the gum. You know the rest of the story. Spearmint chewing gum and gum in general is synonymous with his

name.

I think the energy in our jobs and in our writing, should not always be spent on what we think will sell, but rather on our pet projects we truly feel invigorated about. We may find, as Wrigley did, that other people like them as well and they may even end up paying us money to continue doing them! Thanks for the life lesson Mr. Wrigley and thank you Wrigley's chewing gum.

This next section is to all professionals working to be their best. Trying to be great at what you do in your 80 years or so on Earth is often met with ridicule, jealousy, and sometimes even, believe it or not, getting fired. Don't pay attention to that fear ... just be great at what you do! When you get leadership promotions, be ready for opposition. As far as I am concerned, the best and only quote you really need to follow is this one: "Be great at what you do."

At work we have a single job to do but everyone knows there is so much more to work than that. For example: 1. Performance evaluations make us anxious, we wonder if we'll measure up, 2. Co-worker dramas of people getting their feelings hurt can put stress on us and alter the decisions we make, and finally, 3. The job at hand is often changing in today's marketplace, forcing us to be innovators in our chosen fields. There are no simple solutions for these stresses at work. Try as we might, we can't please everyone all the time. Notwithstanding, there is a mindset, or a mantra, that can guide us through the stormy waters when they rise up against us. Don't be scared of success:

Just be great at what you do, no matter what you suffer from as a challenge.

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Performance evaluations are probably one of the biggest stressors in today's workplace. With downsizing and restructuring at an all time high, everyone is worried if they will make the grade. And I can't lie to you, in my line of work and several people I know layoffs are happening, they are real. So what can we do to relieve the anxiety of a performance evaluation? Recite the mantra morning, noon and night. When we strive to be great at what we do, bosses notice. It also creates productivity for the bottom line. Envisioning being great changes the fear of the performance evaluation that was once: Will I lose my job? to the empowered thinking of: How can this evaluation make me more great? Turn fear on its ear and be great at what you do. People, when getting fired, never think about how they showed too much leadership. Quite the contrary.

Co-worker drama is always lurking around the corner. If you're a teacher, it's in the teacher's lounge. If you're in business it's at the water cooler, or down a row of desks. The fact is that wherever you have people, you're bound to have drama. Sometimes the pull is so strong, you can't help but get wrapped up in it. Other times you will try so hard to avoid it that your work peers will think you pompous or conceited for not talking to them about the latest gossip. The solution to this conundrum? Once again: Just be great at what you do. There was a psychological study done in the 70's where a guy looked up in the middle of Central Park. He was looking at nothing but he never looked down. People would walk by and most looked up with him. This is kind of what will happen when you focus on this mantra. Even if you aren't clear where you are headed, you know your mantra and people will follow that. Gossipy coworkers will become meaningless and they will respect you as you strive to become great.

Last, being innovative is not always easy. In today's

marketplace, the products change as fast as the tools. This is also true in education where learning theories come down the pike faster than you can catch them sometimes. We need defining statements, a rule to help us keep learning, growing, innovating the way we find solutions at work. Don't get anxious or frustrated, recite the mantra: Just be great at what you do. If you focus on how much change you are forced to make, you'll lose your edge. On the other hand, if you simply focus on being great, the changes in the marketplace will be seen as tools rather than hindrances or chores. After all, change is supposed to make us better and our lives easier. Unfortunately it isn't always seen that way. If you heard there was a way to do what you do easier and more productively wouldn't you do it? So it is with technology and new thought in the 2000's. Don't fear the changes, teachers today have an amazing set of tools to make you greater. So why is it that so many people are scared of success?

In conclusion, everyone in their heart wants to be successful. Unfortunately there are a host of forces working all the time against our success. Succeed small or succeed big but succeed. The fate of humankind depends on you. I have addressed only three in this post. Getting focus is key to weathering the storms at work and for keeping your calm when it looks like your ship is going to hit the rocks. You need to strive to be great at what you do. This will help you get through your performance evaluation with more knowledge, dignity and success. You need to lead your peers by focusing on being great. This will make their gossip evaporate and they will respect you above those who don't have vision. Last, you need to be an innovator in today's workplace, there is simply no room for followers anymore. As you see your greatness as the goal, the changes in the workplace will become your tools instead of your stumbling

block, like they are for so many. In doing so, you'll be working your way toward leadership promotions or just plain "success" at your job.

I took a nice long walk around my neighborhood today admiring lawns and pink flamingos, trying to make sure the next post was helpful and relevant to the book. The subject I realized today is another key tip in practicing an open mind. As creative, enlightened people, we should actively practice an open mind by listening as much as possible. I hope that will make perfect sense to you after I have given you many ways to do it through the course of this series. Please feel encouraged to subscribe to this series. I'm excited about how valuable this is in opening one's mind. Sometimes we shut people out as if we were using custom blinds for our psyche. Those are great for our house, but not for our heart and mind. We need to listen more.

We've all heard the statistics about how women have larger brains and how they are better listeners and better at many other things than men. I am not here to argue that at all. What I want to stress is that I believe women and men, based on my experience of family, work, and life, are all generally poor at listening. In fact, it might be a cultural thing that we as Americans do not like to listen. Many are like me, we like to talk, fast, hard, and loud, no matter who gets hurt or shut out.

What if you could be more enlightened about what the people around you think? In short, to survive through a bipolar professional career, one must learn to "stop" and be a listener.

Once I caught myself lecturing my son on how his things were in every room in the houses where they didn't belong

(including a shoe at the bottom of the pool). As I rambled on and watched his bulbous brown eyes begin to well up tears, I listened to myself and it was not the ideal I have for myself. Ever done that?

It is phenomenal how much our mind is opened when we listen fully to someone else. Active listening is when you say back what the other is saying periodically and that is a good idea. But can you listen to people for half a day and not have a response? I've tried it and friends, it aint easy. Just let what they are saying penetrate your mind, don't respond except for the normal, OK etc. This is crucial to the experiment.

I could give you many statistics on how listening makes you a better person and such, but let's just try the experiment. What do you say? Starting right now at 11:26am until 6 or 7 tonight when I am doing my evening laps and jacuzzi time, I am going to listen. We haven't been to church in a while and we decided to go to Saturday night services tonight ... I might have picked the perfect day ;)

At any rate, whatever you do and whoever you interact with, this is a good exercise. I think you will be blown away at the paradigm shifts you experience and the broader, more open mind that you enjoy as a result.

Next I want to talk to you about respecting the art of other people's life.

Sometimes pushing aside someone's creative idea can feel like a mortal wound to them. Some of us are traveling in limousines, others are at the freeway on ramp with cardboard signs. Regardless of the means, we are going from point A to point B every day of our lives. It is easy to look at other peoples work and art in life as nonsensical and bad. Have you

ever seen a car with a million poorly placed stickers on it and gone: “Why? It is such a nice car.” That is their art and you should respect it. Once we were down at the beach years ago and I was making sand castles with my niece. I saw the remnants of a sand castle with sticks like towers and assumed the creator was long gone. It was in a good spot so I swept it away as if it never existed. I think the creator must have been mentally ill because she came screaming at me and my young niece as if we were the devil for destroying her sand castle. We got through the scene somehow and relocated. Luckily, I thought about it for weeks after. I really felt bad about it. Make sure you meditate on things you regret, otherwise you are doomed to repeat them.

The sand castle wasn’t the real lesson here. For me, it was a lesson about other people and respecting the art they create along the journey. My recommendation is to be very slow to criticize the art that people make whether it is their bumper stickers, their sand castles, or ... the way they do simple things in life. It never hurts to give compliments, you can find one for anything. Another way to grow in this area: do a listening experiment. I hope the sand castle incident will have the same effect on you as it had on me and make you less reckless with other people’s art and hence other people’s emotions.

All people have fears. Sometimes those fears can prevent us from success. When I have fears at work, for example, they can stress me out so much that I miss the creative, innovative solutions that are right before my eyes. One way of dealing with these debilitating fears is through visualization and practice. I call this the “Tar Baby” approach. If you go to Disneyland, you’ll find a fun water ride there called “Splash Mountain.” The ride has a backstory going on in miniatures all along the way. It is the story of how Brer Bear wants to

beat up Brer Rabbit and Brer Rabbit says: “Do whatever you want, but please don’t throw me in the briar patch.” Of course this is silly to the viewer because Brer Rabbit was born in a briar patch.

The thing that scares us is the briar patch. To conquer the fear we can visualize us getting along with the things that cause us fear. Imagine yourself having success instead of failure. When the moment you once feared comes, you will not fear it. Like Brer Rabbit you will laugh and say: “I live in the briar patch.”

Enjoy the ride.

How do you face change? When you are told at work there will be new ways of doing things, do you cringe or do you get eager to find out what they are? With your spouse, when they sit you down and say they have something difficult to tell you, do you cringe or do you get curious to hear what it is? I have found that adversity has one of two effects on people at work and in relationships. Let me explain them and you can decide where you stand.

One response to adversity is to ignore it. Playing aloof about the need for change is like ether, it puts a person to sleep and retards growth. At work these people react with phrases like: “Oh well, just another thing” -or- “I’m not going to do that” -or- (my personal favorite) “I already know and do all that.” These people are frozen in the past, unable to change their habits and energies to be in sync with “now.” In relationships these people ignore issues of failing intimacy and assume they are right all the time. If their partner is passive and enjoys abuse of this nature, they will stay and enable the person. On the other hand, the spouse may not be so forgiving and she/he may leave the marriage. The ignorant person will

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make excuses for their lack of action. They will refuse to see the need for change as an opportunity to be happier in the relationship and instead ... blame

Chapter Three

The More You Learn the Less You Know

"It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are."

E.E. Cummings

Our parents occupy a space in our psyches that determines so many of our thought patterns. It starts when we are very young babies and continues on until even after they pass away and we ourselves become the unique parents and grandparents. If we are fortunate, our parents are people we can and should trust as children and into adulthood. For me, and many I hope, our parents give us unconditional love that enables us to do the great things we dream of. You see that kind of love in church and on religious stickers and jewelry, but rarely do we run across it in life.

When I meditate, I invite my father in me to relax with me. I have his genes inside me. I do the same with my ancestors. I seek to find peace for them in me they never found. This idea came from many teachings on the buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh.

When we are kids, mom and dad's discipline is usually dreaded. It makes us angry. They tell us to not run across wet tile and to make sure we wear a coat outside when it's cold. We of course resent these demands as children and automatically assume our parents are ordering out of spite,

envy, or just plain meanness. The craziest thing is that when we slip on the floor after disobeying or when we catch a nasty cold and cough for not heeding our parents' commands, we still resent them. It flies in the face of reason but I see it often in my own son and I remember the same pattern happening when I was young.

Now, at an older age, I find myself hungering for advice from my parents. They give it when I ask but it is not the same. It's like an unwritten rule that when you do become an adult, you have to find your own way. DOH! Reality bites sometimes.

Wrong much?

I typed that title. I caught myself for a millisecond thinking people might construe it to mean I have been wrong about something I have written on the blog. Naturally, I got defensive. Why do we as people fear being wrong so much? Maybe it goes back to our childhood when we would be sent to "remedial" classes to "remedy" us if we did poorly (wrongly) on tests. Nowadays the kids are almost 100% judged by their standardized test scores so they can probably relate. But as a whole I think you'll agree that we as adults are very afraid of being wrong, it shows in our toxic words and actions.

I teased my mom the other day about how she was wrong about something ... a pop-culture factoid that I don't even need to mention (it's too complicated). Anyway she felt the need to explain that I had it wrong and not she. That was okay, especially now that I've thought this post through. Ring any bells about discussions with your relatives? Who cares if we are wrong? Unfortunately, we all do.

Think about what you lose when you are wrong. Is it so

valuable that you would give up your sense of peace and well-being over it? Is it worth arguing your case over?

Folks, it's okay to be wrong. I am wrong about 70% of the time in my marriage and I can still wear a smile on my face. I am wrong at work quite a bit too, sometimes it is my 8 year old students who point it out to me. Have you ever argued with a child about how you are not wrong? I have. It's embarrassing when you have time to realize how stupid it was. I TRY TO look at those types of moments now as teaching moments to model for them how to be wrong gracefully. Let's face it, it is not automatic.

We grow through being wrong, we stagnate through always being right. If you want to be right all the time, go live on a desert island ... it's not gonna be possible even there. You will find however that no one is there to see you become "humiliated." Funny how humble and humility come from the same root. The best people through history had humility and were not afraid to admit when they are wrong.

The next time it comes to your attention that you have been wrong, don't hide from it. Look them squarely in the face and say: "Thank you, I want to know when I am wrong so I can be better." Being wrong is not the worst thing in the world, being afraid of it might be. How do you feel about being wrong?

I want to talk next about the power of recognition. If you are a boss out there, you should know how much recognition means. If you're not a boss or just a part time boss, you should have the chance to be recognized at some point. It gives life to the bones.

This past month I received some excellent recognition. It

reminded me why I should recognize my students. I think there should be an ongoing recognition system that gets every student some sort of attention at least twice a week. Then of course there are the larger, more substantial recognition pieces like a 10 year pin or a comment from the top. When I worked in pizza management, they would tell us that employees craved a pat on the back more than money. My wife's raise showed us all that wasn't true. Sometimes monetary recognition has its place. Having said that, sometimes a note or just a pat on the back can infuse inspiration. This is what we want to see across the board.

As long as it's genuine, any recognition is powerful. It increases one's motivation. In this world today where there is so much negativity and fear, we all could use more recognition.

I've been learning that being complex and "smart" does not equate to being understood. Below I elaborate on what simple means to me.

When you walk into a room, look for the small things to appreciate. The air you breathe, the colors, the decor. These are all things people can unite on. Say things like "great room" and mean it and watch people agree with you. On the other hand if you say things like: "Oh my gosh, my niece has a friend

with a wine rack like that!" Your sentiment will be lost on most.

Simple words unite

This is the main reason I use repetitive phrases, or mantras, in my day. They help me refocus on the simple goals I have and want to see through. Asking about the weather is popular for

a reason ... It connects people. If you are trying to bring healing to a room, use simple words. Don't get caught up in too many details. Fight the urge to. If you are a detail oriented tech person like me, you'll agree that is easier said than done.

Let others draw you out

At times in my life I've been quite loud in public. I have learned this is no way to be. Back in grad school c.1996 I had an advisor who wrote me a recommendation. In that letter he called me "unassuming." In the time since then I have tried to live up to that. I appreciate people who make no judgments and assume nothing. This should be a personality trait I continually strive for. Thanks to Dr. Zhao, I have that amazing vision. Let others draw out your complexity and keep the details of your thoughts veiled until people ask for them. This is a key element of being understood.

Don't forget your "firsts"

Remember the first time you took the bubble wrap off something electronic? How about your first kiss? People around you throughout the day are at varying levels of "firsts" such as these. Enjoying with someone at a low level of understanding can be even more rewarding than learning from someone more advanced than you. When you start your day, ask yourself:

"What 'firsts' can I relive through others' experiences today?"

It used to be my intention to make rooms better with my knowledge and input. After a time, I am proud to say that I made a new more evolved goal: to be understood.

Chapter Four

Dynamite Lesson Plan, AKA My Field of Teaching

"We don't need more rules for kids, we need more dynamite lesson plans."

My vision of the: "Dynamite Lesson Plan" aka great Behavior and Classroom Management. I started blogging on education in early 2007 and it's evolved to something I am quite proud of today. I named the blog after something my master "teacher-school" teacher told me after observing me the first time. My class was out of control and it was borderline embarrassing. I asked him for strategies to keep their behavior under control and he said:

"The best classroom behavior management is a dynamite lesson plan."

It's been 11 years since he told me that and it is the truest thing I've ever been told in teaching.

People are drawn to passion and form like a moth to a lightbulb. If you tell a kid he has to learn math he might buy in. If you tell a kid that every chair in the world will fall apart if people don't learn math, you'll have buy in.

A dynamite lesson plan is a direction. It simply inspires a plan. After that, the effective teacher must get creative and

use a method. I use EDI as my lesson template but there are other good ones. This blog has become a place where I explore ways to create dynamite lesson plans. I appreciate the input I have in the comments and I hope to get more teachers and students involved in what I do here. My hope is it will inspire teachers and empower students to be great and score high.

The Words of a Teacher Matter Much

We as teachers should recognize that our words matter. It can be difficult to rein in every thought in the teaching day but we should make an effort to. Words we speak can shape realities in our students and even help define their self-esteem be it high or low. The worst part about reckless words is that we often can never gauge what they do to our students. When I hear that something positive I said HELPED a former student, I feel energized to continue being the best teacher I can be. On the other hand, when I get the occasional complaint, discover my words were misunderstood and it hurt someone's feelings, I am often devastated. It can sap my motivation to be the cheerleader of kids I know I should be. Yes that's right, a teacher should be a cheerleader with her/his words.

Pick a random way to share positive words. I am a big fan of using playing cards to pick random non-volunteers. I also use them to share what I call "positives" with my kids throughout the day. This in turn becomes a modeling exercise and they see how they can share positives with me and with each other. I even wrote a "Morning Positive Song" on my guitar and we sing it almost every day when we start this intermittent activity throughout the day. It sets the tone. A positive can be as simple as "I like your shoes." After someone gets positive, I always ask them: "How did that

make you feel?” This shows the class that even the simplest of words can produce good feelings that we all crave.

Think before you speak. This may go without saying but I think we all can use a reminder. Once in a while, times arise in my lessons where I am tempted to say something potentially negative toward another person. As I pay attention to these times, I become better at turning them into positive messages. Example: I was coaching pairs through reading back and forth to each other and the kids did not understand the word karma. I knew that one child’s parents were Buddhists and I was tempted to make them the example. I caught myself due to the potential embarrassment there and made another analogy more suited to a universal positive. As teachers, we really really really need to think before we speak. This is true even in the face of a culture that thinks negatives and put-downs are ok and the norm.

To close, make a note to yourself tomorrow to try thinking more about what you say. I think you will find your day much more satisfying and chances are your kids will get a lot more out of what you have to say. Thank you for reading my post. I hope you will take the time to comment. What do you think of the power of words in the teaching profession?

Here are: Five Altruistic Values of Teaching

Being a teacher is a wonderful career choice if you value the intrinsic rewards it brings. There can be a place for you and there are also online teaching job openings as well. Before you seek employment however, you should examine the reason people become teachers and the nature of the job itself. I’ve always thrived on seeing a student grow in academics or social skills.. This is what I think of as the “human-profit” margin. For example, one of my goals is

always to see each kid improve scores over the preceding year. There are many altruistic values of teaching that motivate and keep us on track in our job. If you are a new teacher, take a look at these occupational traits. They are five things I value above and beyond financial compensation that make me want to come to work every day. I will retire from teaching in about 6 to 10 years and my monthly pay will be surprisingly high. They always told me teachers don't make money. But teaching fit me. Not so much k12 and the behavior problems from hell but college teaching as an English professor. I just got here the long way. BUddha has that smile I get when I get to lead a class in a Robert Frost poem study, and other hedonism. Follow your bliss and remember these guidelines in this book and you'll be fine financially. Also meditate on a vibration of "abundance" not want. Deepak Chopra has great teachings on that.

Kids are now what we once were and they will one day run society: This can be both exciting and daunting. Knowing one day the child I am teaching long division may one day perform open heart surgery on someone. On the other hand, they could become homeless and jobless if I don't do my part to give them the skills and motivation to succeed.

Many times you are the only role model of a normal life: I had a parent conference a few years back where the parent had told me right there at the table that all 5 of her kids had different dads. That alone is staggering. I grew up in a house where my dad was always there for me: tucking me in, coaching my soccer teams, teaching me guitar ... I know not everyone has it that good but this was a lighter shade of pale. I felt sad for the confusion the child must live with each day. I couldn't be that child's dad (who wasn't in the picture) but I started paying more attention to him and giving him the best advice I could during that year about life and academics. I

hope I made a difference. Each day I have that opportunity as an educator. This one reason you might look for teaching opportunities as your career.

Students need a frame of reference to understand art: We forget sometimes how much kids do not know about the world. Most adults can tell you the difference between classical and pop music ... Most 4th graders can't. Unless someone explains the difference between an 18 century painting and something modern, maybe a cubist such as Picasso, or Andy Warhol for that matter ... it's all just blurs of sensation. A person may go their whole life and never appreciate art until someone tells them about it.

Students don't always know how to be nice: We as adults get a million thoughts in our heads daily that are negative and self-defeating. If we are lucky (as I was lucky) we learn about positive self talk and talk with others. A person can go their whole life and never learn how to speak positively. I get to teach that every day (not always a walk in the park let me tell you).

Kids need to learn respect for authority in order to be successful. A person can get to 15-18 or even 80 without that and suffer greatly because of it. As a teacher you are like a "soft" police officer, or judge. You represent authority and if you don't teach then what respect is, chances are they will not have it when they are older. I like to think that every child who passes through my classroom in a given year knows how to respect her/his elders and her/his superiors. I know this will save them much trouble.

To close, these are 5 reasons I come to work each day. I am not rich by monetary standards but the reason I don't feel poor is because each day I get to act on altruistic values. They

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are what give me the most satisfaction in my career. As a final note, I have found keeping an online teacher journal very helpful in measuring my progress toward altruistic goals, I highly recommend it. At the same time, it isn't for everyone. Please note there are more online teaching opportunities manifesting daily. This new "tech" kind of teaching may really be worth looking into for the right type. Is teaching for you or someone you know?

Conclusion

“Those are my principles. If you don’t like them I have others.”

Groucho Marx

OK bipolar folks and the sensitive, gifted people out there who just want to succeed in a profession. We’ve gotten through the majority of my book. Congratulations. Remember how powerful your mind and warmth is to the world. Now also remember how fragile we are. Only we can care for our hurts, mania, and depression. Are you ready for the ride of your life helping others?

The writings in this book are 100% mine and 100% heart felt. I always knew I would one day write a book about my bipolar disorder but never imagined it would be after a journey to the abyss and back again, I hope bipolar and their loved ones read this. It’s also likely to be helpful to anyone seeking to survive and thrive as a professional. My words are meant to be inspiring, motivating, and humorous. I have written thousands of movie reviews and many more posts than that about the human condition. I’ve written about everything I’ve done that was worth sharing but not everything made it into this book.

When I started blogging I wrote about orange groves and treasure walks around our then trailer home. I got the family to pose at Disneyland and wrote about the trip there and

back and the magic in between. When iphones started going into full swing, I even did mobile blogging from my phone. I loved it from the start. Unfortunately, it just wasn't the type of writing I always aspired to do. As I began to realize that more and more I learned that just spewing gut reactions onto a blog is not the best way to convey deeper, more soulful thoughts. Now that I have written this book, I plan to start blogging anew. Sure, I will be using Twitter and posting those small thoughts. Mainly however, I will be thinking of each blog post as a serious page in my next book. I hope to publish that in the next few years.

If you are interested in making a book like this, I recommend blogging. It has been as much therapy for me as a way to make money and connect with others. There was a low point in my life when I was told I should settle for a menial life. Writing is powerful. Linda Flower did a study that showed writing actually produces brand new

knowledge in writers. I can attest that is true. My wife Sarah withstood a lot of frustrating moments putting up with my late nights and drawing away as my blog went hither and to. She's a strong and lovely person.

As for you, have a great life and enjoy your journey as you become great at what you do. Woody Guthrie said "Take it easy or take it hard but TAKE IT."

Now as for the Bipolar Professional conclusion, I have these final words:

If you have been diagnosed as Bipolar type one, I want to give you a virtual hug and tell you I love you. I know the pain that sits on your chest in bed at night and never lets up. I know the clarity you have when your coworkers are confused

and how by most people's accounts you are a leader and a high achiever. I also know the dark thunderclouds that come in unexpectedly. You may have thought you'd beaten them but they come in as a flash flood. I know the divorce thrust upon you and the inlaws that see you as lazy and unable to do the most simple of tasks. Simple minded at best. Hateful and wrong at worst. When they say it behind your back, tell them to stay away, that's a really bad sign. You don't need that energy around you. I know your family comments as they try to "teach you lessons" when they don't believe there is really anything wrong with you. I know the pain your children sometimes bring when they don't understand why dad is sad all the time. I know the ulcers your lithium sometimes causes and your adventures going off it that result in horrifying, paralyzing fear causing you to retreat from everyone and stay in bed waiting for a normal perspective to come back. This rarely happens to me anymore. You keep on because there is no other path except disability which should really be a last resort. I know it because I've lived it as a bipolar professional. You are the only one that matters. Do not be beholden to anyone else. I choose to follow Buddhism because I sought to find a way where you can calm down, apart from the ways of the world. If you can take all that on and your doctor agrees, you might have a snowball's chance as a bipolar professional. Thank you for reading. You can check in with me at my blog and hear about my latest projects in music, podcasting, and writing at RileyOnFilm.com. Now, go take on the world within, breathe in tasting your breath, because for all humans, that is all there is, the present moment. You'll like what you find living in your body in the present moment. Take very good care of yourself in the mad world out there, and never forget that you matter to the world. You matter to me because you're here. You have the utmost of worth. If you understand the points in this book? My money is on you. I

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encourage you to seek your own career as a bipolar professional. You can do it, Professor Riley believes in you.

The End