

## This I Believe

At 17 years old, I was experiencing severe bouts of mood swings, impulsive thoughts/actions, and the inability to express emotions. Day to day activities were draining, and eventually caused me to have considerable amounts of negative thoughts. One day I had enough and decided to seek out assistance. I had a meeting with a psychiatrist who had diagnosed me with bipolar disorder.

At first, it felt great having an answer for what I was experiencing. It was reassuring to have a doctor on my side giving me tools such as coping skills, emotion exercises, and medication to combat my issues. I had been making progress over the past few months and decided that I should share my diagnosis with my friends who had known I was struggling in the past.

When I approached my friends with this information, they were rather dismissive. One of my exercises was to try to be emotionally vulnerable to my friends. They let the traditional “bipolar stigma” cloud their judgement with who I truly was. Fortunately, my much closer friends were accepting, and while they didn’t completely understand it, they were by my side to help me. My friends took rotations taking me to therapy appointments. We would get together and every now and then try something to break out of my comfort zone like going to a football game. Without them, I would’ve still been in a rut.

I believe that we can overcome the stigma of bipolar disorder. Many are only familiar with the misconception that people with bipolar disorder are disrespectful, angry, and rigid. When I wake up, my goal is to prove that’s not the case. I do still struggle with some symptoms

like empathy and mild mood swings but it is nothing like it was before I decided to seek help for myself.