

Alex is one of the most special people you will ever meet. Looking at her, you might not expect the unbelievable force-to-be-reckoned-with that is this beautiful, strong woman. Alex has been through hell, but cannot think of anything better than loving others, especially the hurting, broken, and marginalized, warring with themselves.

She barely reaches 5'1" (though her fave combat boots take her to a solid 5'2"), has a beautiful face, a teeny frame, and some really awesome tattoos, which all have a story. Alex has many stories that are important to her, and cherishes the stories of others, especially the ones people are afraid to tell. She has lived her life experiencing fear of her mental illnesses, poor care and treatment, and a lot of misdiagnosis. After bravely choosing to protect herself from physical and emotional violence, and moving across the country, she is now receiving treatment for Bipolar 2, major depression, anxiety, PTSD, and is continuing an ongoing fight against anorexia. Alex has faced more in her short 22 years than most people will in a lifetime in the US, and it is a miracle that she is alive, employed full time, in a healthy and beautiful relationship, not on the streets, not addicted to drugs or alcohol, and working hard for her future.

Despite very difficult anxiety, Alex has stood before school district officials, as an adolescent, to tell about the effects of bullying on the mental health of students. As a teen, who had already suffered in unthinkable ways, Alex began attending **Celebrate Recovery** at a church a short drive from her home, and found herself the youngest person attending regular meetings with people who had seen everything, including horrific addiction, domestic violence, sex trafficking, debilitating mental illness, and so much more. Despite high school becoming some of the worst years yet, she kept going back to CR to slowly share her story, and to love others and walk with them through their own arduous journeys toward healing. Despite her young age, she would become an eventual group leader in CR, ministering to others by leading discussion, reaching out to individuals to love them well, and working with other leadership to coordinate projects. She even became part of a pilot project of in-depth accountability, with a book-based curriculum, whose eventual goal was to reach into schools and other institutions and organizations with troubled youth, to speak hope and be a light. After experiencing repeated sexual violence herself, and entering into the care of trauma therapists and centers designed for abused women and children, Alex has begun volunteering for an organization called **Unbound**, which seeks to free victims of the sex trade in the United States. She is a victim advocate, who, when the opportunity arises, will get to counsel young victims and offer hope of escape and new life. Alex is in the care of a mental health professional working for a center for crime victims and children, but also regularly contributes money, supplies, and time, to help pay it forward to others in need of care at that center. Before leaving her former home, Alex was studying social work in college, engrossed in psychology coursework and learning about mental illness and psychological development, and will, absolutely undoubtedly, continue her pursuit of this degree and at least two more— she will not be stopped until she has a PhD! One of Alex's most passionate dreams is to open a safe house and treatment center for victims of all ages and genders, offering a battalion of care for a variety of different needs and situations, as well as a place to stay, and a location that can help people re-enter their communities with hope, preparing them for jobs, finding places to live, seeking regular care, and finding freedom from

those who brought harm to them. It is her goal to love everyone exactly where they are, show compassion and care, and provide hope. Additionally, Alex and her boyfriend, Patrick, hope to one day adopt a child with a mental illness (and plan to have more than one munchkin in their home!), to provide them a loving and empathetic home and the kind of care they deserve.

Alex has experienced psych wards, emergency rooms, short term treatment programs, therapists, counselors, social workers, case workers, crisis advocates, and more. She has seen and experienced unbelievable hardship, and has listened and loved as others poured out heartbreaking stories to her. While she could turn her back on the world and life in bitterness and surrender, Alex has chosen life and love and hope. While she will be the first to tell you that every day is a battle of its own, and she is still at the beginning of her journey to freedom, she is already a force to be reckoned with, a Light to the world, a beacon of joy, and has the potential to bless so many more lives than she already has. I can attest to her gift of love, kindness, and devotion— she has wrapped her arms around me and helps me bravely face my own mental illness, gives me the courage to tell my story, and encourages me as I continue anew a treatment process that is already a gift to me. Alex has done this for so many others. Her love has been poured out over closest friends shrouded in the darkness of mental illness and addiction and abuse— her heart for them grows daily. She continues to research and share information about mental illness, domestic violence, and sex trafficking, using her own social media, a blog (<https://www.internaldialouge.com>) she just started, and even had **an essay on her experience with bipolar 2 published by The Mighty** (<https://themighty.com/2018/02/right-words-to-describe-bipolar-disorder-mania-depression/>). I pray that the world will know more women and men like her; she is a rare jewel that our society so badly needs, and we are so blessed to have her. The touch of her love and compassion will surely be felt by so many more to come.