

FIGHTING FOR MY LIFE

DYLAN TEATOR

All of my life, I have had to fight. Since the age of four, I have had high anxiety. By the age of seven, I was diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), Tourette's, depression, and tactile disorder. I used to wash my hands 20 times in a row. Every time I saw a crack in

the floor I would have to step on it 15 times before I could go on. Because of Tourette's, I felt trapped in my body with all its uncontrollable ticks. I couldn't concentrate in school, and I was bullied a lot due to my odd behavior.

By the time I was 21, things got tricky. Those were dark days. I would be awake for days at a time with lots of pent-up energy. I was severely depressed, and I had impulsive behavior. At one point, I attempted suicide. I spent

four months in an intensive inpatient care facility and was ultimately diagnosed as bipolar.

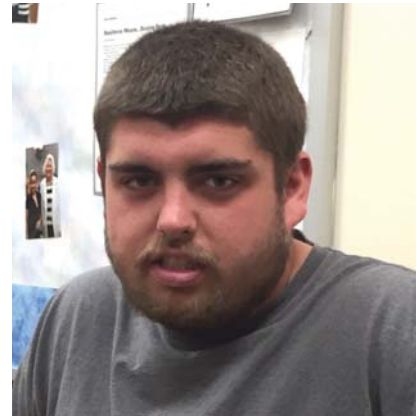
My saving grace was that I always had my mother in my corner and she never left my side. She helped me to realize that it is okay to get the help that you need.

I also had two best friends, Chris and John. Chris helped me to realize that you can accomplish anything you set out to do in your life, disability or not! John was always there for me and in my corner – he stood up for me when I was continually bullied and couldn't defend myself. In addition,

You, too, can have an impact on someone's life. Having a support system is invaluable.

I have an amazing manager at Shop Rite named Bill Sterling, who has encouraged me to go back to school. He has helped my confidence so much because he has faith in me and what I can do. I have a long-time counselor; who I now consider my friend, Erin. She has coached me on how to deal with my anxiety. She has made me realize it is okay to get help and use medications if necessary to deal with the symptoms that were wreaking havoc with my life.

I believe in myself and my support system, and I have hope for the future. My hope is that people may read this story and see themselves in it. Maybe you have a disability, or maybe you are supporting someone who does. You, too, can have an impact on someone's life. Having a support system is invaluable. My support team has seen me through my darkest hours. I consider myself a "winner" because I was lucky enough to have the "A Team" in my corner. "A" is for Angels on earth!



Dylan Teator is a student at New Brunswick Public Schools Adult Learning Center. He has been a presenter at Dare to Dream Student Leadership Conferences. He speaks to other students and adults with disabilities on self-advocacy and leadership skills.

YOUR STORY OF THRIVING AND SURVIVING

Sharing stories is a good way to notice your struggles and accomplishments. As we live through even our hardest stories, we often show power and resilience. We often gain friends and community as we work our way through a struggle. After reading some of the stories in this section, **WRITE** your own story about how you are thriving and surviving. **START** by sharing your story verbally and letting people ask you questions about it. Then write a first draft and share it with friends or classmates. **ASK** for feedback. **FIND OUT** which parts need more details. **WRITE** a second draft taking into account the feedback you have received. **CONSIDER** publishing your stories in print or on your school's or organization's website. Your story will likely have a big impact on others. It will remind them that they are not alone.



Illustration by Rini Templeton