

Living with Mental Illness

Anita Johnson

BEFORE YOU READ: Look at the component parts of the words “bipolar” and “schizophrenia” (below). Write a definition of bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. Look online for definitions of these disorders and compare them to what you wrote.

BI: two

POLAR: related to the north or south pole; diametrically opposite

SCHIZO: from the German verb “to split”

PHRENIA: from the Greek word for “mind”

I have bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. Sometimes people stare at me when I lose my temper or argue with the voices in my head. I have lost so many friends because they don't understand my condition or they don't want to understand. My own family doesn't really understand.

At work, sometimes people complain to the manager about me because I am not acting “normally.” I want people to understand that I need

their compassion, not their judgment. The voices in my head are real to me and they cause major problems for me. I can't drive because they argue with me in the middle of turning a corner. I take medications, but it only lessens the problem. It does not make the problem go away.

I try to eat right and exercise because the doctors say it will help the medicines work faster. It still doesn't take the bipolar or schizophrenia away. My husband is bipolar as well and we always snap at each other because it's hard to control our tempers. It causes friction in our marriage, but we love each other and know it's not our fault. We don't mean to say hurtful things to each other.

Living with a mental illness is not easy. We are human, and we have feelings too. We can't help the way we are. Anyone can have a mental illness and not know he has it, or it can come after many years of being “normal.” Just remember it can happen to anyone!

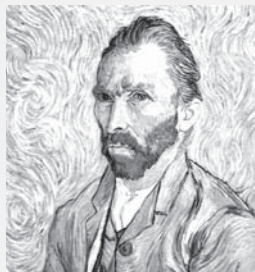
Anita Johnson graduated from the GED program at Bristol Community College in Attleboro, MA.

Did You Know?



Mental disorders are common. An estimated 26.2 percent of Americans ages 18 and older — about one in four adults — suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year. About 6 percent, or 1 in 17 Americans, suffer from a serious mental illness.

Source: <www.nimh.nih.gov>



Studies show that artists and writers may have 2-3 times more incidences of mental disorders compared to people in less creative professions. Researchers believe that the painter Vincent Van Gogh (self-portrait on left) may have had bipolar disorder.

Source: <<http://news-service.stanford.edu>>