

## **You Are Not Alone**

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Everyone has personal stories to share.

Sometimes these stories are about their hobbies and interests (mine are knitting and watching TV), or about their sport, or even about that time they got a small triangular tattoo above their right hip. You know, the usual stuff.

But today, in this short moment I have been given, I'm sharing a story many people might not find comfortable sharing, one of my mental health.

Freshmen year, during which I had heard about my brother's diagnosis with bipolar disorder, I ran into statistics stating that bipolar disorder could be genetic. I told myself, "that won't be me." My brother is 6'3", 240 pounds, healthy, athletic, and pretty lazy and obnoxious. We were nothing alike, and surely our medical histories would reflect that.

Truth is, however, from the moment I heard about my brother's diagnosis, I knew. The mood swings, the hypomania, the depression, the episodes—the signs were all there for as long as I could remember. But I told myself that I was fine, that I could handle it on my own. I wasn't going to burden those around me. However, the more I tried to hide or suppress my symptoms and episodes, the more intense and frequent they grew. I thought I was losing my mind.

Moving into sophomore year, on the night of our infamous Opening Dance, a friend of mine noticed that something was wrong. And in what I used to believe was a moment of weakness, I accepted their help. We talked for quite a while, and my friend suggested I seek out more help than they could offer. This was the rational decision. Although I wanted to refuse, to continue hiding, I was more afraid to reject and push more people away from me. After being unable to find the faculty I agreed to talk to, I was led in the other direction: towards the health center. This is an oversimplification of what happened, but my friend and I sat and waited in the health center for the rest of the night, I talked to a counselor, and over the course of the next several months, I got the help I needed. Again, an oversimplification: these things aren't resolved overnight. There is much more to this story, but my point is this: I changed my willingness to open up and receive help.

For the last two and a half years, I've always thought about how I can't thank this person enough for what they did, for not only silently sitting with me in that isolated room for the rest of that night, but for everything they did for me later on down the road. I don't know where I'd be or if I'd even be here if not for them as well as others.

This story of mine may seem to only talk about mental health, but what I emphasize is the fact that you don't have to endure something like this. The more it hurts, the more painful it is to

burden, the more you shouldn't do it alone. Since this is easy to forget sometimes, I'd like to say this: I am bipolar, I am gay, and from this point forward, I do not and will not carry this burden on my own. To continue the message and legacy of our friend who came out last year: *you aren't alone.*