

How treatment made bipolar manageable

Don: My name's Don, United States Coast Guard 1968 to 1972, the wonder years. My bipolar is somewhat unique in that I've had very few depressive situations. Mine has been on the mania side and you get an alternate reality; you think that things are happening that aren't happening. It's a stress-related disorder and any stress, especially severe stress can trigger a deal.

I was dating a woman that I dearly cared about and she lost her husband in Vietnam. Her family didn't want her to deal with anybody else and so, we broke up and I was really distraught about that. I led the police on a slow speed chase for 24 miles and then, finally I went to Fulton County Jail in downtown Atlanta where I spent an entire year waiting for trial. I was found not guilty by reason of insanity. So, I spent a year in jail, a year in the mental institution. I got out on what they call a "conditional release" where I had somewhere to go where people monitored my activities and stuff like that and it was deemed that I should never work again.

When your income goes from about \$6,500 to under \$2,000, and when you first go on disability you have no health insurance for a couple of years. All the things that I used to have are gone. That's when I first went into the VA system in general. I'm bipolar, so what. Here's the medicine. It's not expensive. You take it. You don't seem to have any side effects with it. As long as you keep doing that, you shouldn't have these problems anymore. I haven't had a maniac episode since 2000. That's 18 years.

The VA has a lot of resources to keep you there and keep you happy because the VA doesn't want to lose you. The VA doesn't want to see all your money go down the drain like mine did. They'll do everything that they can so you will understand what your illness is all about and what you need to do so you can resume a normal life.



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