



Madness: A Bipolar Life

By Marya Hornbacher

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An astonishing dispatch from inside the belly of bipolar disorder, reflecting major new insights

When Marya Hornbacher published her first book, *Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia*, she did not yet have the piece of shattering knowledge that would finally make sense of the chaos of her life. At age twenty-four, Hornbacher was diagnosed with Type I rapid-cycle bipolar, the most severe form of bipolar disorder.

In *Madness*, in her trademark wry and utterly self-revealing voice, Hornbacher tells her new story. Through scenes of astonishing visceral and emotional power, she takes us inside her own desperate attempts to counteract violently careening mood swings by self-starvation, substance abuse, numbing sex, and self-mutilation. How Hornbacher fights her way up from a madness that all but destroys her, and what it is like to live in a difficult and sometimes beautiful life and marriage -- where bipolar always beckons -- is at the center of this brave and heart-stopping memoir.

Madness delivers the revelation that Hornbacher is not alone: millions of people in America today are struggling with a variety of disorders that may disguise their bipolar disease. And Hornbacher's fiercely self-aware portrait of her own bipolar as early as age four will powerfully change, too, the current debate on whether bipolar in children actually exists.

Ten years after Kay Redfield Jamison's *An Unquiet Mind*, this storm of a memoir will revolutionize our understanding of bipolar disorder.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Hornbacher, who detailed her struggle with bulimia and anorexia in *Wasted*, now shares the story of her lifelong battle with mental illness, finally diagnosed as rapid cycling type 1 bipolar disorder. Even as a toddler, Hornbacher couldn't sleep at night and jabbered endlessly, trying to talk her parents into going outside to play in the dark. Other schoolchildren called her crazy. When she was just 10, she discovered alcohol was a good mood stabilizer; by age 14, she was trading sex for pills. In her late teens, her eating disorder landed her in the hospital, followed by another body obsession, cutting. An alcoholic by this point, she was alternating between mania and depression, with frequent hospitalizations. Her doctor explained that not only did the alcohol block her medications, it was up to her to control her mental illness, which would always be with her. This truth didn't sink in for a long, long time, but when it did, she had a chance for a life outside her local hospital's psychiatric unit. Hornbacher ends on a cautiously optimistic note—she knows she'll never lead a normal life, but maybe she could live with the life she does have. Although painfully self-absorbed, Hornbacher will touch a nerve with readers struggling to cope with mental illness. (Apr.)

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From [Booklist](#)

Like a horror-movie sequence that threatens never to end, Hornbacher's testimony grabs and doesn't let go through episode after episode of bulimia, substance abuse, and promiscuity. Mania with its attendant voices plagued Hornbacher ever since she can remember. Extreme mood swings finally led to diagnosis at 24 of bipolarity. Possibly genetic, given a family history rife with anecdotes implying mental instability going back for generations, Hornbacher's bipolar disorder is a label she initially rejected, though she responded to medication for it. She married, and threw herself into overworking that triggered recurrences of the mood swings, two years of repeated hospitalization, then electroconvulsive therapy. With cutting perception and skill, she makes palpable not only madness' losses but the things gained as well. --Whitney Scott

Review

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medication for it. She married, and threw herself into overworking that triggered recurrences of the mood swings, two years of repeated hospitalization, then electroconvulsive therapy. With cutting perception and skill, she makes palpable not only madness' losses but the things gained as well. (*Booklist -Whitney Scott*)

Users Review

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