

A JOURNEY FROM MADNESS TO LOVE AND MEANING

THE BIPOLAR THERAPIST

"This memoir takes on a serious topic, seasoning it with excitement, humor, and hope."
— Edward M. Hallowell, MD, author of *Because I Come from a Crazy Family: The Making of a Psychiatrist*

A JOURNEY FROM MADNESS TO
LOVE AND MEANING

— A *Memoir* —

MARCIA NAOMI BERGER

"This heartwarming, insightful, and brave story depicts one woman's struggle with and victory over mental illness. Berger inspires us to have hope in the face of seemingly unexplainable symptoms. Beautifully written to touch the soul."

—Lyn Barrett, Author of *Crazy: Reclaiming Life from the Shadow of Traumatic Memory*

When a sudden onset of manic episodes lands her in a psychiatric ward, what is an established, respected psychotherapist to do?

Marcia Naomi Berger, single and twenty-nine, has her first psychiatric hospitalization and then two more in the next year and a half. A series of close friends and mentors stand by her through challenges with abusive colleagues, conflicted relationships with men, estrangement from her mother, and confusion about what truly matters.

Diagnosed with bipolar disorder, after trying several medications, the answer comes in the form of lithium. Under her doctor's guidance, she excels at a new job in San Francisco General Hospital's psychiatric ward. A new patient there recognizes her from their time as patients in another psych ward.

During each manic episode, Berger has a delusion that she is about to marry someone—her therapist, an ex-boyfriend, or a current one. Her maternal grandmother, Yetta, a poor Yiddish-speaking immigrant, was abandoned by her husband when she was pregnant with Mollie, Berger's mother, in 1913. Yetta spent the rest of her life in a long-term care psychiatric facility. Mollie grew up in an orphanage. She was devastated when Berger's father divorced her.

The Bipolar Therapist shares Berger's mental illness story, her conflict about marrying, and her complex relationship with her mother. It is a story of resilience, perseverance, drive, and courage.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marcia Naomi Berger (née Fisch), MSW, LCSW, is a psychotherapist in San Rafael, California, and the author of *Marriage Meetings for Lasting Love: 30 Minutes a Week to the Relationship You've Always Wanted* and *Marriage Minded: An A to Z Dating Guide for Lasting Love*. When employed by the city and county of San Francisco, Berger held senior-level positions in child welfare, alcoholism treatment, and psychiatry.

Berger served as a lecturer on the clinical faculty at the University of California School of Medicine and as executive director of Jewish Family and Children's Services of the East Bay. She lives with her husband, David Berger, in Marin County, California.



TALKING POINTS

- The Stigma of Mental Illness/Why People Don't Talk About Their Mental Illness
- How to Relate to a Mentally Ill Family Member
- How Some People Recover from a Severe Mental Illness
- Why Many Mentally Ill People Stop Taking Their Medicine
- Can a Therapist with a Mental Illness Really Help People?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. You kept your history of bipolar disorder a secret for a very long time. What made you decide to write your memoir, *The Bipolar Therapist*?
2. Bipolar disorder is believed to run in families. Do you have family members who have experienced bipolar disorder?
3. In your book, *The Bipolar Therapist*, you write about having been harassed and stigmatized by your coworkers, mental health professionals, when they learned of your illness. Why do you think sometimes people we expect to show compassion act so insensitively when it comes to mental health?
4. What advice would you give to someone with bipolar disorder or a different mental illness about whether or not to tell people about it?
5. What advice would you give to a family member (or friend or coworker) who is troubled by a mentally ill person's behavior?
6. In your book, *The Bipolar Therapist*, you write that you recovered from bipolar disorder. Yet, experts state that bipolar illness can be managed with medication but not cured. So, did you really recover completely? If yes, what do you think made this possible in your situation?
7. Why do many mentally ill people stop taking their medicine?
8. The title of your book, *The Bipolar Therapist*, sounds like an oxymoron. Most of us expect therapists to be mentally healthy. Can a therapist with a mental illness help people?
9. How did your experience as a psychiatric inpatient influence your work as a therapist for psychiatric and alcoholic inpatients?
10. How can we decrease stigmatizing people with mental illness and increase compassion, understanding, and respect, like people with a physical illness, such as diabetes, asthma, or a heart condition, receive?
11. What encouragement can you offer someone who has a mental illness and believes it defines them and limits their chances of creating a fulfilling, meaningful life?