

Bipolar disorder: a story of hope & recovery - Book Review

I'm a health professional diagnosed with bipolar disorder at the age of 51. At first, I was devastated. But thanks to the support of my bemused and shocked family, treatment by my psychiatrist, and the guidance of counselors at Friends for Mental Health, my family and I eventually achieved stability. Recovery became not just a distant dream, but an attainable goal.

My mission now is to fight the stigma against mental illnesses of all kinds, in all ages, and to motivate people with mental illness to play an effective role in their own recovery.

I recount our journey through "bipolar country" in my new memoir, *Mad Like Me: Travels in Bipolar Country*. My goal in the book is to share exactly what it felt like for me as a bipolar patient experiencing recurring episodes of depression, hypomania and mania. I reveal what my family endured. And I describe the detailed steps I took to claw my way back to stability; to claim my recovery. For example, a few of the strategies that were useful for me included learning as much as possible about the disorder; accepting the need for psychiatric treatment; regulating my lifestyle (getting enough sleep, doing regular exercise, eating healthy, etc.); maintaining social contact with positive people; learning about and avoiding mood triggers; keeping a daily mood journal; recognizing the impact of bipolar on my family and friends; etc. All of these strategies

are described in an appendix of my book.

To give you a taste of what bipolar put my family through, one November, my husband Rob had finally collapsed after taking care of manic-me for many days on end. I was still awake at about 4 a.m. so I tiptoed to the front door and left the house.

"I crept out into the still-black, wintery early morning, feeling delightfully light and free. I was suddenly overcome with inexplicable exhaustion. Luckily, there was an old age home nearby, and I knocked. The night nurse looked cautious and concerned when she saw me, wearing a winter coat with sandals, but she kindly let me in to use the phone... The phone rang many times before Rob's thick-tongued, sleep-filled voice answered,

instinctively suspicious and anxious. Trying to sound perky and as if I made this kind of call at this hour of the night quite routinely, I asked if he could kindly come and fetch me by car. There was a stunned silence: he could not believe his ears! He asked me to repeat my request. I did so, half-wondering if he was just trying to make me feel ridiculous, or if he genuinely had not caught the directions first time around. I could almost feel the fumes from him coming down the wire to scald me."

(p. 134-6)



Merryl Hammond PhD studied nursing and community health. She's a public health consultant, was diagnosed with bipolar disorder in 2008 and suddenly flipped from researcher and health worker to locked-ward patient.

Please visit merrylhammond.com for videos (including with her husband, and with two of her adult children), media clips, etc. If you have a bipolar-related story to share, she is starting to gather stories for a future book featuring people with bipolar and their families, friends and caregivers...

Never a dull moment with bipolar. Can you relate?

Thankfully, I am now back from that wild country. I've been stable – on medications, and with the unfailing support of my family – for many calm years. As a result, I was able to write this book to share the experiences my family and I endured. Whether you're "mad like me" or a caregiver, I sincerely hope you find sustenance for your travels out of Bipolar Country. As I wrote: "I'm here to tell you that things can get better, and that you can, piece by piece, build a life where bipolar no longer controls you. You can tame this tiger!" (p. 13)

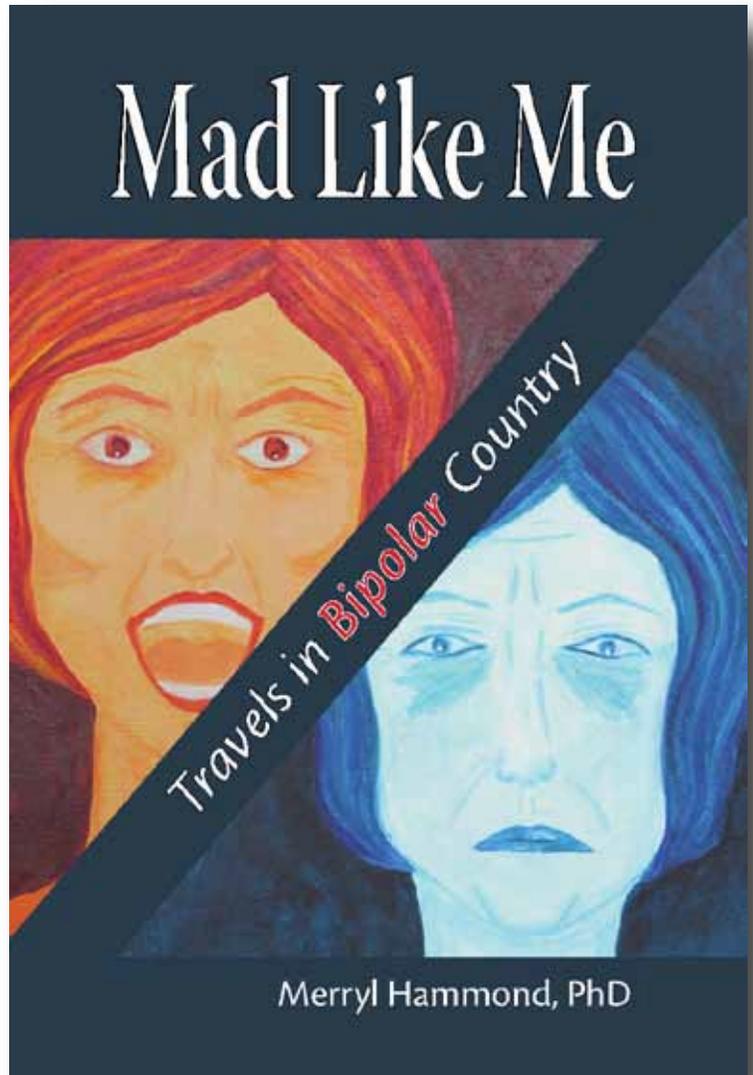
Mad Like Me: Travels in Bipolar Country

By Merryl Hammond, PhD

In *Mad Like Me: Travels in Bipolar Country* the author discloses – in illuminating detail – what she and her family confronted on their unplanned journey deep into "bipolar country" and ultimately to recovery. This memoir fights the stigma of mental illness and gives readers great cause for hope.

"[A] brilliant bipolar disorder patient... chronicles her valuable experience with candour, humour and remarkable clarity." ~Dr. A-M. Ghadirian, M.D., Professor Emeritus, Dept. of Psychiatry, McGill

Please note: The views & opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of Friends for Mental Health.



"A must-read for anyone living with, loving someone, or counseling a person affected by bipolar disorder." ~Michele Noble, LPC

This book is available for \$25 from Amazon, Clio bookstore, and from Friends for Mental Health. If you buy from Friends, Dr. Hammond will donate \$10 from each sale to us.

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