

**Maria Bamford, standup comedian, actor and star of her own show on Netflix *Lady Dynamite***

Maria Bamford has dealt with depression and other mental illnesses for much of her life.

“I am on a cocktail of medications and I have not felt depressed for about four years. But at age nine or ten I started writing in journals that I wanted to die. I would leave them around the house and my mother would read them and ask ‘Honey, are you gay?’”

“I never understood when someone would say ‘Come on let’s go do this, it’s going to be fun.’ I would think that this is another set of extremely uncomfortable circumstances that I’m going to have to grit my teeth through.” She was treated for an eating disorder and was put on Prozac.

“One of the things I had was agitated depression. I was not only depressed, but I had a tremendous amount of energy while feeling terrible. That’s a dangerous place to be. You have a lot of energy to kill yourself. As a kid I felt that a lot.”

Having depression alone can be excruciatingly difficult. When you add other conditions into the mix, it gets excruciating and complicated. Maria had depression and an eating disorder at a young age. But at least, she thought, those are things that people get. People don’t talk about them enough, but they do talk about them. However, she also had something else that scared her to death.

“I started feeling obsessive and started having unwanted thoughts about violence. Unwanted thoughts and secret rituals are known in the OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder) community. Sometimes mothers who have postpartum depression can get a type of it where you are worried you are going to hurt your baby. I was very worried I was going to act out on my thoughts. I didn’t tell anyone about the OCD thoughts until I was 35 because I was so ashamed. But then I Googled it and found out there are a lot of people who have this.”

Through it all, she built a career in standup, had small parts in t-v and movies and did a lot of voice work in cartoons and video games.

“When I turned 40, I was traveling internationally which can bring up manic episodes and I blew a gasket. The first time I went into the hospital, I thought I’m just going to be here for 72 hours, get on a mood stabilizer, but still make my shows in Chicago next week. But the mood stabilizer made it impossible for me to think or to talk. I was weeping uncontrollably and it was two or three hours to show time. I called my manager and we cancelled the show at the last minute which was super embarrassing. I went into the hospital again and went through outpatient programs twice. But in my experience, the psychiatric ward was not healing.”

She spent a couple of bad years going in and out of treatment. During this time, she thought a lot about suicide. She knew it would hurt people who loved her and were fighting for her, but she could not endure what she was going through.

“It’s like having chronic pain where it is unending. But this is your mind and your mind is gone. You don’t have yourself anymore and you just want it all to stop.”

Finally she got a diagnosis and found a medication that worked. The diagnosis is bipolar II. Bipolar II disorder is characterized by multiple episodes of major depression with some periods of hypomania.

Her advice for people with depression? “Do what you can to get help, but know that is hard. Know that you are not alone in the extremely uncomfortable process of getting better.”