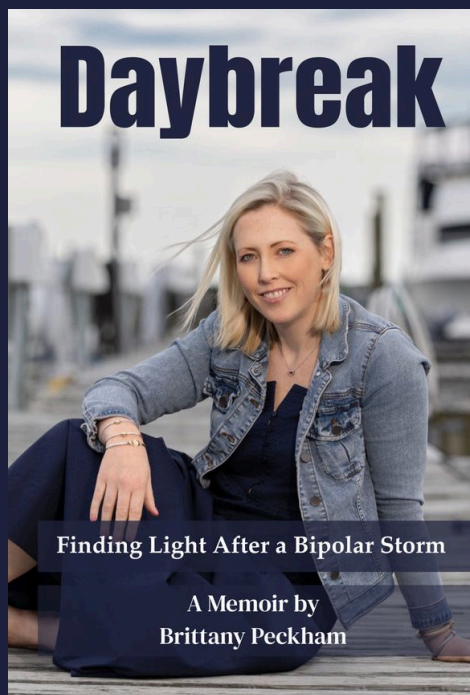




A FREE SAMPLE

Daybreak

Finding Light After a Bipolar Storm

A Memoir by Brittany Peckham

This sample contains the Author's Note, the Preface, and Chapter One.

Author's Note

This book is not a clinical guide, a medical manual, or a formula for recovery. It's a survival story—*my* survival story. It's a raw, unfiltered journey through bipolar disorder, psychosis, grief, and healing. While I hope my story is ultimately an uplifting one—I'm still here, fighting for myself every day—this book does contain sensitive content—such as death, suicide, violence, and a psychotic break from reality—that may be disturbing or triggering for some readers, so please with compassion, whether for yourself or someone you love.. I share these chapters not because I have all the answers, but because for most of my life, I felt like I was screaming into silence. If you've ever felt alone in your mind, trapped in your body, or dismissed by the world—you are not alone.

Mental illness can shatter everything you know about yourself. But healing, though never perfect or straightforward, is possible. This journey is my truth, told

without shame. I hope it helps someone else find their footing when the world begins to spin. If you ever find yourself in the pit of despair, I hope this book can feel like a friend pulling up a chair and saying, “I see you.”

Preface

If you were to ask me if I would rather choose a life with or without manic depression, I don't know what I would say. Half of me says that I would choose life with it, and the other half says, "No way in hell would I ever want this life for me or anyone else."

The part of me that says "no way" wishes I could have children and that the damn lithium didn't contribute to my chronic kidney disease. My sensitivity level is at its peak, and friends are scarce. I also spent two months in a psychiatric ward for a psychotic break following a bout of mania that started off with what I deemed to be *America's Got Talent* worthy performances posted religiously on various social media platforms.

The part of me that chooses it loves the emotions that come with it. They are so raw and intense; I have felt more emotion than I could ever imagine experiencing with this illness. Anyone who has been diagnosed with manic depression likely knows what I'm talking

about.

For those of you who don't know, it's like an out-of-body experience where I have heightened sensitivity to other people's words and actions as well as to my own judgments, characteristics, and personal flaws. Episodes of mania can fill me with unceasing energy, which can in turn lead to sleepless nights, breaking down for no reason (and not understanding why), and feelings of hopelessness...but at the same time, it can make me feel like I'm on top of the world. The boundless energy and feelings of grandiosity can allow for superhuman productivity, too. My house was often spotless, I could run for 20 miles without a second thought, and I was a social butterfly—always the life of the party.

Conversely, depressive episodes can send me spiraling into a dark abyss, going from feeling untouchable and unstoppable to completely dreadful and immobile. Even getting out of bed or the thought of showering could be painful, both physically and mentally

What I'm about to share will show you both sides—the battles and the triumphs. Starting with my adolescence and pivoting through meaningful chapters of my life that demonstrate my mental illness, I will lead you through some of the darkest chapters of my life and how I was able to overcome demons that I never in my wildest dreams imagined I would have to face. Coming out on the other side with a strong sense of stability has given me the courage to share my story with others who may be struggling. Thank you for listening.

Also, I refer to both terms—manic depression and bipolar disorder—though I primarily use bipolar disorder, as it is the more commonly used term today.

Chapter 1: Middle School: The Beginning of the Mask I Wore

In the year 1997, I found myself standing on the precipice of a new beginning, a pivotal moment in my life. I had bid farewell to the familiar landscapes of Massachusetts—the place I had called home for so long—and embarked on a journey that would transport me to a new town in a new state where I would build the foundation of my adolescent years.

The reason for this significant transition was a career move my family made. As we left behind the comfort of our old life, I left behind the friends I had grown up with and the memories that had been etched into the corners of my heart. It was a bittersweet departure: a mixture of excitement for the unknown and a pang of nostalgia for all that I was leaving behind.

In the new town, I would begin a new chapter of my life as a seventh grader. It was a blank canvas on which I would create the mosaic of my adolescence—a

place where I would learn, grow, and (eventually) discover the person I was meant to become. I was filled with a sense of hope and apprehension as I stood on the cusp of this fresh start in a world that held countless possibilities and uncertainties.

It was in this unfamiliar territory, at the tender age of 13, that I would encounter the first signs of a storm brewing within me—the early manifestations of bipolar disorder. For most of my adult life, I assumed that the move is what triggered me, but I now think it was my hormones and starting menstruation that really flipped the switch. I went from being a happy, well-acclimated sixth grader to someone neither my family nor I could recognize.

Middle school was a time in my life when I often felt like I was riding a rollercoaster. There were moments of sheer excitement and fun mixed with the occasional uphill battle that tested my resilience. It was a time of change and self-discovery.

In my new school, surrounded by a fresh set of faces and an environment that was

both promising and uncertain, I began to experience episodes of behavior that were extreme, even for someone my age. Despite having no difficulty making new friends and fitting in, I had this gnawing feeling that everyone hated me and began to feel that hatred toward myself as well. At times, I would find myself so overwhelmed by these emotions that I would be left in tears.

The triggers were often illogical and elusive—a whirlwind of feelings I couldn't quite grasp. Oscillating between irrational anger and unrelenting despair, my mood swings were frequent and unpredictable. When an offhanded comment about my makeup or a joke regarding my Boston accent would send me into a spiral, and the weight of the emotions would become too much to bear, my instinct was to seek refuge and escape the place that seemed to magnify my turmoil.

Nestled in the foyer at the back of the school auditorium, there stood a payphone that, to me, became both a lifeline and a symbol of vulnerability. It was a simple piece of technology, but its

significance in my middle school years was profound. I would dash to that payphone and clutch the receiver to my chest as if it held the key to my emotional solace. With trembling hands, I'd dial my home number and beg my mother to come pick me up. In my distraught state, all I wanted was to be somewhere familiar—somewhere that felt safe and knowable.

In the beginning, my mother would come to my rescue, understanding that I was grappling with something I couldn't articulate. However, as time passed and my tearful pleas grew more frequent, my phone calls became just another episode in the eyes of my mother—a situation brushed off as something that couldn't be helped. Her sweet, loving support quickly turned into abrupt goodbyes and unanswered rings. In my mind, a missed call meant a purposeful act of rejection, which hurt me to the core of my being.

Each time, I would hang up the receiver, wipe away my tears, and gather the strength to return to class. The payphone, my temporary escape, would sit in the back of the auditorium, a silent

witness to my inner turmoil. It was an emotional symbol of my struggle to find understanding, both from my mother and within myself.

At that point, I was skillful at concealing these mood swings from my peers by wearing a mask that portrayed me as a typical teenager. To the outside world, I seemed like any other student navigating the complexities of adolescence. Yet, behind this facade, a whirlwind of emotions raged within me. Bubbling beneath the surface of my perfect porcelain smile were feelings of inadequacy, rage, insecurity, desperation, and confusion.

Despite the onslaught of confusing mood swings, one of the positive constants in my life during those middle school years was my circle of friends. Talking on the phone for hours and weekend sleepovers set the stage for sharing secrets, dreams, and the latest gossip—building bonds that would last a lifetime and providing a source of comfort in the midst of the mental

mayhem.

My newly formed friendships were a testament to the duality I was beginning to experience. I was outgoing, friendly, and social, drawing people toward me, but my mother witnessed a very different side of me: withdrawn, moody, and defiant.

In addition to my friend group, I also found support through physical movement. In the winter, I'd strap on my snowboard, hit the slopes, and carve through the fresh powder. It was an adrenaline rush, a way to escape the pressures of school and just be in the moment. During the school year, I found my refuge in dance. It was my creative outlet, a place where I could express myself without judgment. Dance brought me a sense of discipline, grace, and self-confidence that I carry with me to this day.

Middle school was a life-changing transitional period where I experienced a duality of awakening: both a pendulum of uncontrollable emotions and an emergence of the young woman I

was to become. However, when middle school came to an end, attending a whole new school threatened the fragile familiarity I had established with this institution and the comfort of my friend group.

KEEP READING

There are 18 more chapters.

**Chapter One is where it starts. What follows is
the rest of it — the first fracture, the
breakdown, the psychosis, the hospital, and
everything that came after.**

Get the full book

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0H68N6JC3>

Paperback and Kindle • ISBN 979-8-9965878-0-3

**If any of this hit close to home, you are not alone. In the US, call or
text 988 for the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline — free, confidential,
24/7.**