

When Silence Screams: Living with Bipolar Disorder—Journals 1997 - 2011

Katherine L. Fogg

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This much-needed voice provides a raw, real look at life with bipolar disorder.

When Silence Screams: Living With Bipolar Disorder; Journals 1997–2011, by Katherine L. Fogg, gives an inside view of a life of instability and anxiety. Naturally, as a journal, the book displays a full range of emotions, especially the extremes, but Fogg's urgency ties them all together—urgency to find her identity and feel whole and accepted.

Fogg's journal begins when she's a teen—full of typical teen enthusiasm and angst. But even from the start, Fogg demonstrates a mature self-awareness and world-weary regret that shows her story is not simply typical: "I have never been good at keeping journals, or relationships of any kind. Sometimes I wish I hadn't destroyed all my other journals. It would be interesting to read them now." By the time she's diagnosed as having bipolar disorder, anxiety, and social phobia at age thirty, her story has traversed an array of places and emotions, including the pain and delusion of substance abuse.

The most compelling elements of the book are Fogg's generous self-disclosure and highly relatable themes—even those not affected by bipolar disorder can empathize with isolation and the desire to make sense of the self. The entries vary in length, and some of the most powerful are the short, pithy statements where Fogg is able to succinctly boil down what's happening without deliberation or dissection: for example, "My head feels full of clouds ... thunderous clouds." She also gives voice to the mixed nature of life—bad times can feel good and good times can be difficult; this is particularly evident as she explores the hope and exhaustion of recovery: "Life is beginning to feel more real. I'm not sure I enjoy the sensation." While the writing does the bulk of the disclosure, the snapshots in the center of the book give a surprising, visceral sense of how Fogg has seen herself (and sought to present that identity) over the years.

As a journal, the pace of the book varies considerably. Events like the death of a friend yield seasons of more writing, and other years pass by rather quickly. In the book, as is often true in life, the downward spiral can feel like it's dragging but positive change happens seemingly quickly—though, of course, looking back, it's a long time in the making. The tone of the entries is directly tied to the author's mood and thoughts at a given time, and the diction and syntax are easy to read but casual. While all of this is expected and acceptable in a journal, it does make the reading experience a bit more laborious.

The book speaks to others in similar situations, urging them to find help and know they're not alone. It is also a needed voice for those whose loved ones are struggling with mental illness. While it may be painful for these loved ones to read, Fogg's story helps them understand what daily life is like for those living with bipolar disorder.

When Silence Screams is a raw, real look at life with bipolar disorder.

MELISSA WUSKE (October 1, 2015)

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