

Foreword

Dear reader,

When I did research for my theatrical performance '13866' I ended up in the psychiatric museum 'Het Dolhuys' in Haarlem, the Netherlands. I passed different displays of psychiatric patients, among them, the display of Pieter Overduin. A man who has been suffering from bipolar disorder so the attendant told me. The bipolar disorder, in popular speech also called the manic-depressive disorder.

Pieter was no stranger. He has been participating in leading Dutch talk shows (Paul de Leeuw and Jack Spijkerman) to talk about his... erm; I don't want to call it disease..., to talk about his disorder.

He wrote books about it. I read these books and gained a totally different insight about bipolarity. Later I met Pieter Overduin. He came to me and talked about his disorder and what has happened to him. I was impressed.

Especially because I saw that Pieter, with the proper medication, can function just normally. Although you're inclined to say, well you know, once a fool always a fool. Put a mark on him and don't let him come near to you!

Pieter is the living proof to me that with the right medication, will power, understanding and love of your family a bipolar human can function in this society.

Both books: 'I love myself... and the feeling is mutual' and 'God is confused, He thinks He's Pieter', tell a touching, comical story of what happens in the life of somebody who is suffering from bipolar disorder.

The fact that Pieter involved his family in the writing of 'God is confused, He thinks He's Pieter' is worth mentioning. His father, his mother, sisters and brother

who all tell about their experiences with Pieter during his mania or depression.

I highly recommend this book. I hope that you will have a lot of reading pleasure and that you will gain an insight in what bipolarity means and what people (and their family) go thru who suffer from it.

Jörgen Raymann,
Dutch comedian and TV personality.

Introduction

My name is Johannes Pieter Overduin. I was born in Rotterdam on 4th September 1969. When I am still very young my parents and I move to Dordrecht. This is the place where I grew up. I have an elder brother and three younger sisters. My father is a counsellor for elderly people who are mentally disabled. My mother is a housewife. After completing secondary school in 1987, depression knocks on my door. I break off my training at the College of Social Studies. The following year – I'm now doing a primary school teacher training course – I feel the depression coming again. After that I try to complete my teacher training course for the second time. I become manic. By now I can justly say that I have my 'own' psychiatrist. His diagnosis is that I am manic-depressive. My late grandfather also suffered from manic depression, as does my uncle. There appears to be a hereditary factor involved. In 1992 I start an occupational therapy training course. It is during my work as an occupational therapist, in 1995, depression hits me again. In 1996, things go well. In 1997 depression hits me once more. During the years that follow I have my ups and downs, supported by family, friends and medication. Mood swings, frequent job changes. But I am constantly trying to find balance.

The motto of this book is: 'Vulnerability is fine as long as it is self-chosen'. Manic episodes and depression expose your weaknesses. Your fragilities are plainly visible. If there is anything left resembling mental soundness, it makes you feel embarrassed at insecure moments; because they often make you remember the things you said or did during manic episodes or depression.

Manic episodes turn you into a caricature of yourself. You outcry your vulnerable self and the vicarious shame felt by the people around you increases. During a depression you talk about feelings that are not always really understood by others. In many ways, you are isolated. Having to constantly start over again, having to pick up the pieces of life over and over again, is a continuing cycle but seldom becomes a routine. Very often, your vulnerable position is not self-chosen.

Thursday, 15 June

With great pride I've passed my final exams at secondary school. Lying in my bed in a dream-like state, I figure that the world is my oyster. I have a hard time making choices about my further education. I'm not entirely sure what I want to be. My mother always says, 'If people ask you what you want to be, just say, "I already *am* somebody, Pieter is my name."

Like many of my fellow adolescents, I'm plagued by a good share of insecurity and time pressure. I need to make a decision concerning my future before the start of the upcoming school year. If I can't come up with anything, there's always military service. After all, that's never done anybody any harm.

After a lot of worrying about what I should do I decide to try my luck at a College of Social Studies. Admittedly, my arguments for choosing this course are fairly weak (you get to do folk dancing, and my cousin's going there as well), but the College of Social Studies needs students too.

Monday, 4 September

On the first day at the College I find out that there's an indistinct quality to a lot of the subjects that are taught there, such as philosophy, sociology and ethics. These subjects got me thinking. And once I get my train of thought going, I'm in for a ride and there is no stopping it. Add to that my 'adolescent insecurity' and you get a *pas de deux* of philosophy and double-dyed doubt. Pro-abortion or against it. Fighting for peace or the exact opposite. Euthanasia is no problem. We all have received our share of money under the counter. I get completely stressed out by all these dilemmas. This first day has filled my head with problems and the experience of meeting new people. A good social worker has to be able to put things into perspective. I realize that I'm in for a very interesting future.

Tuesday, 5 September

After five children and twenty years of marriage, my parents conceived the idea of divorce. There's one striking detail: my mother's new lover is a friend of the family. We've known him for ages. I totally lose it. I realize I have no-one but myself to fall back on. My father is a complete wreck and is staying at one of his friend's. My mother and the family friend have annexed the house. And slowly, while my mother is enjoying 'the birds and the bees, the flowers and the trees', I'm starting to lose touch with myself.

I reconsider my view on relationships. Getting married and having children by no means guarantees a healthy relationship. I've been too naive about this.

A relationship is something you have to work on. You have to go for each other every single day. And falling in love with somebody else is something that life springs on you. It's beyond your control. Very often this also goes for the way you deal with these feelings. I try not to pass judgement on the situation my parents are in. After all, I have got enough on my own plate.