

## Dancing on The Table

In the 60's we didn't have medications for as many of the psychological disorders as we do now. Bipolar disorder, often called manic depression, is one of the most treatable conditions today, but was not so, then.

I've worked with many patients who've had bipolar disorder, but one experience during my student days stands out most vividly. Upon entering the women's locked unit for my daily shift, I was greeted with enthusiastic singing from the day room. There was Mary, one of our more animated patients, rather thinly clad, dancing on one of the tables. She was having the time of her life, and it was evident she wasn't about to stop anytime soon.

It was dangerous for her to be cavorting about on the top of a table. The other patients were cheering her on as she swung her hips back and forth. It's not uncommon for a person in a manic state to be sexually preoccupied.

The student nurses gathered around her trying to formulate a plan for getting her off the table and back to *terra firma*. It took all our creativity to successfully cajole her down from the table and slow her dancing.

Several days later when I returned to the unit she was in her bed and a student nurse was sitting by her side saying, "Come on Mary, you have to eat something." With a shake of her head Mary turned her face to the wall and refused to talk or eat. She remained mute for several days after that.

Bipolar disorder is generally very cyclic and often after a few days or weeks of manic activity the person crashes into depression. They can stay severely depressed for days or weeks. They may also refuse to get out of bed. It's not uncommon for a person to go through several of these cycles in a year. Everyone acts differently, but it's important that the person, and his or her family, discover the duration and frequency of their cycles. Many times, today, if a patient stays on their medications, they can break the cycles or make them more manageable. They may even be able to hold down a job and have a relatively normal life.

*(The names in this story are fictional)*