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Our Story

Mother and Daughter
Collaborate on a Book
about Depression and
Bipolar Disorder



This Is Why We Are Telling

Our Story

Cinda Johnson, Special Education Program Director, and Linea Johnson, Seattle University student



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Photos by Steffanie Chritz

Mom and Dad,
if you ever read this then it is because I survived and published this sad attempt at a biography of depression. Please forgive any of the discoveries you make while reading. I love you.
(Linea's Journal)

Cinda: I accepted a faculty position at Seattle University in 2004. The mission of the university resonated with my own long-held beliefs, but I did not know how strongly I would live this commitment to a just and humane world. I teach graduate students about educating children and youth with disabilities including issues of depression, suicide and other mental illnesses. Little did I know that I would experience this far beyond my professional life.

I moved to Seattle University as an “empty-nester.” My husband and I have two kind and talented daughters. Our older daughter had finished her BFA and was working as an artist. Our younger daughter had left home to attend college on a music scholarship. And then... this daughter spiraled into a suicidal depression and finally a diagnosis of bipolar disorder.

Linea: From my earliest years I wanted a life defined by music. My goals were “opera star” and “world-renowned

pianist”. After receiving the chance to obtain my goals I quickly realized that these were driven by other pressures as well: the mastery of my emotions and the drive to be the best. It was in the pursuit of achieving these goals that I tried to shut out both the world and my interaction with it in order to concentrate on my music. It was in the pursuit of achieving these goals that my life shattered.

At the height of my academic and musical training I was sent plummeting to an incomprehensible place of depression. This depression was paralyzing and terrifying and landed me in the arms of my parents and eventually the grasp of the psychiatric unit at Harborview.

Cinda: The journey yanked Linea from her life as a student in Chicago to a locked-down psychiatric unit in a tier-three trauma hospital in Seattle, mere jogging distance from my office at Seattle University.

Linea: It was here that my life changed. After struggling so hard to focus on my own goals, my hidden side of compassion was forcing its way out. I was struck with the realization of my years of blindness and suddenly was in a position in which I had no choice but to focus on the world. During the worst of my suicidal manifestations I could not help but focus on the pain of my fellow patients. At a time when I was having shock therapy I could not help but cry over the injustice of the stigmas that affect mental health patients every day.



Cinda Johnson with daughter Linea Johnson

Cinda: After more hospitalizations, manic episodes, self-harm, depressions, at least 20 different prescriptions and hours of therapy and counseling, Linea is once again back in college, this time at Seattle University and in charge of her life.

We have written a book together, chronicling this frightening time in our lives. She shares her journals and her thoughts written in the midst of this incredible and painful journey. I share my thoughts and anguish of our family caught in this vortex. Working on this project together has been terrifying and yet healing. We both share our deepest and most painful thoughts. We made it through this test with faith, love and the support of family, friends and the people that I work with everyday. We held on to her and to each other and believed that somehow, somewhere it would be okay.

Linea: When I decided to write a book with my mother about my experience with depression and bipolar disorder I was swept into a path driven toward hope and acceptance. I have been forced to acknowledge my clumsy terror and graceful strength as I attempted to move through the transformations of my life. Today, after my depression, suicidal lust, self-mutilation and self-hatred I am ready. Years after my manias, self-induced vomiting, drug abuse and overdose, I am prepared. I am ready and prepared for a path of service.

In the past my goals of justice and community change were overwhelming to me and self-defeating, managing

to crush my ability to act. Today, I have discovered ways to focus my energies towards a place where I can make a difference. In writing this book and sharing my story I hope to touch those struggling with the same demons. I hope to touch those who do not understand. I hope to give strength to those who do not know how to help their loved ones. I am ready to be a voice to those who are either unable, or too afraid to share their wants, needs, and hopes.

Cinda: This is the inside story of mental illness far beyond what my students are assigned to read in their textbooks.

Linea: I am proud to be working with my mom on this project and to be in the life I am now living. Today I am attending Seattle University, a school that encompasses my values of justice and compassion. It is my hope that through writing this book I can provide hope to those struggling with mental illness and support for their acceptance, care and love.

Cinda and Linea: Through our writing we hope to give voice to all the patients in the psychiatric unit that we came to know; those that we turn away from on the streets, those without family or insurance or kind care. We are embracing Seattle University's mission for a just and humane world for those in the darkness of mental illness from a very personal perspective. This is why we are telling our story.