

Episode_16_Anna.mp3

[00:00:02] Please be advised we will be discussing subjects that may not be suitable for all audiences and will include subjects that some will find challenging traumatic or triggering.

[00:00:16] Welcome to You Don't Fight Alone a podcast sharing the stories of those of us successfully living with mental illness and how we got here.

[00:00:35] So I would say my rock bottom was roughly from the age of 25 to 30. To give you some kind of reference my son was you know about 2 to 7 at the time. That was the start of it was really the time when it started becoming really apparent.

[00:00:57] To me and my then husband that we really weren't meant to be together forever. But we did have a kid. We kind of had to figure out what to do. I knew at the time that he already cheated on me in the past. But I also was finding out evidence that he was cheating at the time as well.

[00:01:15] And it was getting to the point it was really unhealthy. I was doing the completely wrong thing of going and checking his phone. He after seeing that recognized Hey you do have kind of a supernatural feeling about what I'm doing something wrong and you know when to check it. So I'm just going to stop blocking it check it. So he kind of stopped caring too. And you can tell that's not anyway for a relationship to be. So yeah that's. That ended pretty fast and. I mean I think I was just really lost during that time. I know now looking back that I was having a lot of mixed episodes which for people with bipolar is when you experience depressive and manic symptoms at the same time.

[00:02:00] And it's not necessarily the same time you can feel really depressed and then really manic next. They can be mixed in any kind of random combination it's really unpredictable. You have to keep in mind at the time I had no idea. I didn't know I had this diagnosis so it flung me back and forth. Here I am not able to work which I really put a lot of personal pride into. I really delayed getting my green card paperwork done and I think it was just the combination of depression anxiety.

[00:02:32] Fear of getting it all done and what's next.

[00:02:35] I would actually have to go and do stuff and get a job and be somebody professionally that I know or I knew at the time. Deep down inside I thought I could not be that person. So it was really a way to dissociate. I did start using substances again mainly alcohol some cannabis but it really was mainly always alcohol for me. And I also disassociated by playing lots of video games.

[00:02:59] I you know my World Of Warcraft Warlock was up there at max level you know.

[00:03:05] But at the same time you know was I taken good care of my kid. I was doing the best I could at the time and at least I can I guess proudly say there was never any kind of abuse or neglect. But was I given him the best kind of life. No I wasn't. You know in some cases you're totally times when instead of taking him go to a children's museum. I would just say Hey let's stay home and you watch Baby Einstein. Mom is going to play video games. It is not healthy and I really do have regrets about that time. I lied to my parents a lot during that time because they would call and ask because they did have to provide some support.

[00:03:42] My husband did work but you know like I said jobs weren't always easy to come by. I felt. See burning shame about my parents having to still support me in some way. And about lying to them about where I was in my immigration process. I mean I just I felt I could not tell them the truth at all. And every time I lied to them it just got heavier and heavier on me and you know I had to drink more or play more video games. It really became a vicious cycle. It definitely contributed to the failing of my marriage. I did get to a point. This is when my husband at the time and I decided that this really was not going to work but we weren't sure what the next steps are. I did get to a point I was really suicidal and I thought I had a plan to go through with it. I called a suicide hotline. And fortunately in my personal experience it was not helpful.

[00:04:38] But I have heard from many many people who had very positive experiences so I think I just got really unlucky that one time but it was not helpful to me. However after I hung up I did realize that I could never do that to make it ever. And that's what kept me there that day. My rock bottom lasted at least five years and it was yeah it was bad. It was definitely bad. So my name is on him and my diagnosis is bipolar disorder type 1 plus Generalized Anxiety Disorder plus ADHD which of course is attention and hyperactivity deficit disorder.

[00:05:25] So I was diagnosed initially with bipolar at the age of 34 and I'm now only 36. So it's only been two years ago. And then working with the same doctor you know as we kind of explore things. She also diagnosed me with the generalized anxiety disorder and then pretty recently only a few months ago with ADHD. So it was a pretty long road of I was misdiagnosed about seven years ago with major depressive disorder which is pretty a pretty common misdiagnosis for people with bipolar because the depressive episodes are really easy to notice. And then the if you have hypo or full blown mania it's very hard to notice. For some doctors and I myself don't even notice what I have though sometimes. So I was misdiagnosed with that and I was medicated for it it ended up setting off mania with antidepressants. Eventually I came to a point where you know thankfully my support network which is basically my husband said look I want you to be happy and you're not happy and we need to do something about that. I think you need therapy. And I said You're right. But first of all I need a psychiatrist because I think deep down I just knew something was really wrong other than what you know their previous doctor said. And I went and it was scary and I expected that they were going to Tom may have depression maybe anxiety and she just came out with bipolar disorder and later she did add the type one and explained the difference it was a big surprise. But that's how I arrived at that. And then I just stuck with the same doctor because we had a really good connection and came up with the other two. So that was a really really long journey and I am going to take you way back to kind of explain how everything came to be. So I actually grew up in Moscow Russia. So I stay there until I was 18 didn't come here until I was 18. You know English is my second language but I do speak it pretty well which a lot of people notice. They're like Oh I thought you were born here. No I wasn't. You know my parents were really focused on achievements and accomplishments. They themselves were very accomplished people educated smart and from the very early age I was expected to do really well and really wasn't given the many options for how you would do it it's like well this is how you do it you get your advanced degrees and you probably go into finance or economics or banking something like that. I mean why would you do anything else. And you know it started with that. It even probably started earlier my parents divorced when I was four. It was really traumatic. I'm sure you guys know in 91 Russia went through their putsch. So it was a coup which again was pretty traumatic because my brother was there on the front lines I helped build the barricades just a little bit. I was eight you know I carried some rocks pretty cool but I got to go home my brothers stay through the night. My mom was really worried I

remember being really scared that night. But we made it through and we lived in poverty and we made it through that. All of a sudden there was no no longer communist my dad started making really good money so it went from being you know standing in food lines for things basic necessities like sugar and flour and bread to all of a sudden he was giving me pocket money. And you know he would have money to send to be places to travel. And I had a tutor for my English language studies. It was just mindblowing and very confusing to a child and then at the age of 15 I was sent to boarding school again with the intention of you know Russia's not a great place especially for women go get an education really have a life. And on a paper my parents set me up to be the most successful person out there. You know they spent money on my education. They gave me enriching cultural experiences. They themselves were like I said smart and educated people. And at first when I went to college I did really well really excelled there because it's all structured. Got my job you know by the time I graduated secured my very prestigious hoity toity job with one of the big five accounts a public accounting firms. And then once I was kind of out of that environment where it's all structured I really did not thrive at all. I really there was definitely a failure to thrive. I went really kind of off the deep end right after graduation. I had manic episodes. I had mixed episodes during my manic episode. I met a man who I never would normally be attracted to were like but he seemed fun and dangerous at the time and you know. Pretty much within three months of meeting him there was a surprise pregnancy. So again I'm manic. This is cosmic sorry deputy at this point from my point of view. This is it. We get married or start a family. Come to find out once the mania wears off. I now have a baby and the husband. And at that point since I am a foreigner and I did have to apply for my work visa after one year which I didn't do because I was too busy being manic and thinking everything's fantastic and applying for immigration paperwork is boring. I no longer have authorization to work. So now you know I do have a baby I do have a husband who himself does not have good job prospects. We are going through the 2008 crisis as well. Jobs are hard to come by. I really that was the worst time and throughout that I knew something was really wrong because I just looked at everything I was given and I looked at where I was and I said What happened. I mean where did this go wrong. But it still took me several years before I actually went to professional because I kept blaming myself and thinking well you're just lazy I mean you just why aren't you getting up and doing things immediately that you know will further you in life. You know wearing shoes starting a third language why would she do an online course as all of those things. And I was so convinced that it was something that was wrong with my motivation or my personality not in terms of mental illness but in terms of you know being a good person. But that was that that was just my cosmic punishment and finally finally I kind of accepted that hey maybe there was a reason somewhere within my brain that isn't you know me just being lazy that I was responsible for that. And at first I really did just think I was kind of depressed and maybe needed a bit of a lift. I was in denial but once I went it really kind of opened the floodgates of like oh hey psychiatrist aren't scary they can be but once you're there they're pretty nice. Some of them suck like the first one who misdiagnosed me and then ended up losing his license and the state of Colorado by the way. But yeah that really kind of opened it up. So it was a really long road filled with lots of false starts and self blame until I finally realized I needed professional help. I it was not smooth sailing at all. I felt very lonely and scared during those times especially boarding school. Boarding school comes close to be in the rock bottom of my life but not quite. I would kind of say it was the Sunni army that sunk my ship so that eventually got to the rock bottom but it was definitely like a storm was brewing. I mean my dad who. Who knows maybe he was being manic too. I have no idea what my dad might or might not have in terms of mental illness. He kind of made that whole decision to send me there within months. And I remember filling out an application. And then you know maybe in the spring and then BAM in the fall I was there. I've never met the people I was with before.

I've never gone to an English speaking school. The first two months I was like What are they talking about. Because everything was in English biology you know. I mean everything. I had no idea what was going on for the first two months even though I had pretty decent English at the time boarding school was in Malta which is a island about 40 miles south of Sicily really tiny. And it's funny because at the time there are a lot of Russian kids there because that's when a lot of Russians started getting that income. I did so well in college. I mean I really had no clue how the after college experience would be different. I thought it would be the same. You know you just keep achieving and keep doing things but without having somebody say hey this is your deadline to register for classes and hey this is the syllabus. This is what we're going to do. These are the deadlines and these are the things we're gonna study need units. And if you want to you can go and google them and find out more about them. There was no professor with office hours that I could go talk to and kind of get you know an idea for what to do after college during college. You know that was always available. There were no resources that I knew hey this is the building you go to if you need help and you can talk to this one person and they will send you maybe you need resumé help or maybe in mental health but they can help you they can give you the right resources. I did not know that such a person could possibly exist outside of college I thought that was kind of on you. You just had to know everything. Not having that structure where you knew where everything was really written out for you and you did have a certain degree of freedom but that freedom was sort of like a almost not real because you weren't you know I did have a part time job but you weren't expected to you know at least I wasn't again I did have that privilege I wasn't expected to keep a roof over my head a hundred percent by myself you know I was expected to feed myself 100 percent. So I was like OK well I'm going to go and read more at the library I'm gonna go hang out with friends. It's not what adults do when they have free time necessarily because our free time is so limited. We're like OK we need to pay bills and do chores and get all of this done because I only have this many hours outside of work. Once I had to go to work and you know working at the Big Five was really I was a meat grinder. I mean they tell you going to work at minimum 55 hours a week in business season they don't tell you that if you go into the financial audit part business season can last up to six months a year and that it's you know 55 there's no suggestion it can be a lot more. And yeah they do pay for all of your meals and accommodations you know and you get to travel but it's really not for everyone. And it really wasn't for me that additional stress I think really got to me. And outside of work I barely did anything at that point. I did meet my first husband and you know we did get surprise pregnant and I think that was such a chance for me to go some kind of structure. Because hey pregnancy is about nine months then the baby comes out then it's baby we go to Leikam for into arms and you can take care of it and you put diapers on it. It seemed like such like a clear cut path that I honestly think I kind of took it as a salvation from my lack of structure that I felt I had because I somehow felt that that gave me a clearly defined path that I could not see for myself at the time professionally or personally.

[00:17:27] It really took me personally seen a different psychiatrist when they explained because they were really aware of what manic states are like.

[00:17:35] And once I started they asked me very pointed questions you know about the hyper sexuality about overspending on things like gambling which again doesn't have to be gambling it could be you know shopping or it could be something that gives you kind of similar things like those of in-game purchases and lewd boxes and video games. So whatever it is you know she started asking very pointed questions. And once I answered it and I kind of look back I was like Oh wow. Oh yeah. I mean oh that's what mania is I thought it meant like you think you can fly and you jump off buildings. I had a really really

wrong concept concept of what mania can be. And I myself went oh apps. Absolutely. Yes this is what I do. This fits me a hundred percent. And that's how it kind of came to that. Before that psychiatrist I didn't know was wrong. But what I did know is that the antidepressants that the first doctor put me on made me sleep maybe 2 3 hours a night. They made me move my body like almost uncontrollable ways I just couldn't sit still. I mean they gave me like these ridiculous thoughts and feelings that hey you know what if I just stop everything I'm doing right now in my career that has to do with mortgage and real estate and start this Shaved Ice cart and take it to Farmer's Market is gonna be so amazing and I am like gonna make a million dollars. I mean as a concrete we're doing this now we're it's a matter of fact already looked upward to buy a. And I'm on the way to get it. So can we put on credit that's kind of where I was after those antidepressants. Was I aware at the time that that was because the diagnosis was wrong. No I was not. Once somebody literally told me stop look back I went Oh my God this is so obvious. So it did take a professional kind of pointing me in the right direction at the time. I still thought that hey well I have depression. I'm just not depressed now. This is just the normal me. I'm just this you know politically chaotic person who does random things and that's just my beautiful personality. And it did take my new husband to kind of go you know I don't think it's normal to you know put that much on credit card. But then when I ask you what it went to you kind of say I have no idea. Don't ask me. I literally have no clue. Do I have something to show for that fifteen thousand dollars I put on credit.

[00:20:02] Oh I don't I don't have anything to show.

[00:20:06] I couldn't even tell you what I spend it on. It's insane insane. And it took somebody you had to kind of be like you know you say you have depression. And right now you're just being you. But when I married you just a year ago you weren't like this. And you're not depressed for sure.

[00:20:24] I think something's wrong. Yeah.

[00:20:39] So I think it's important to mention that I am the only one of my family who came here. So is still a Moscow Russia. I don't get to see them all the time obviously I get to see them Leikam once every few years and then I. Do or did have a sibling my brother. Unfortunately he tragically passed away last September. Brain aneurysm. He was 47. Really sudden. So my parents went through this really transformative experience of losing one of their children when they're in their 70s. That has absolutely changed our dynamic at least with my mother before that. I still have not told them any of you know anything about the past. I may have gently mentioned that hey pushing me towards finance and that world was not the right thing to do.

[00:21:32] And you know my brother's death did what was actually positive experience after all in that. I applied to grad school I got into grad school I'm going to change my career from this real estate commercial destroyed that distressed debt acquisition to social work and actually help people like myself.

[00:21:53] But you know and my parents were changed by that too. But before that all I could tell them is that hey with the direction you kind of pushed me into was not the right one. And I feel confident that it wasn't. That was as much as I felt I could reveal to them without you know kind of saying more than I at the time felt uncomfortable with right now I do have a much more open relationship with my mom. Guess again we're kind of grieved together and you know had to talk a lot through it. My dad definitely became kind of more affectionate because he was always always kind of did this need dad who you know

showed up with gifts said hey you really get an allowance here's extra money. So you like me because you're so awesome at him does it get you. Like I am awesome and I'm amazing and I deserve this.

[00:22:42] You're like where is this again.

[00:22:46] So with my dad it's still kind of complicated. We really are kind of missing that emotional connection despite being very kind of loving in our words and everything but the connection just isn't there with my mom and has improved. But to this day I and I think it's a lot of it is cultural because you know I mean they are Russian they grew up kind of with very stoic culture that didn't talk much about mental illness. He had mental illness. I mean you were in an asylum and that was that you were clearly mentally ill but functioned like highly functioning people with mental illness wasn't even a thing people didn't know. So I think especially now after my brother passed it is not something I would reveal to them.

[00:23:28] Maybe my mom if it kind of comes up in a way that I know will make us closer as opposed to Bush's apart. But I kind of feel like at this point the secret will stay with me you know. But it did improve over time and it honestly took some courage on my behalf to start some of those conversations. And some of them went into a complete dead end or kind of fiery crash. There was some you know angry hang on hang ups but it did kind of open that way and it did make our relationship better for me. Just opened up. You know they say like be the person you needed when you were a kid. It's kind of what I'm trying to do with changing my career and everything but I would I would tell her myself first of all. Believe that you're capable of change. Because I know that at the time with how confused scared lonely and depressed I was. I could not believe in myself. That was just an impossible task if somebody so just believe in yourself and be yourself happy.

[00:24:41] Well that's a totally a loser and a failure so I am being that high I believe that I will fail.

[00:24:48] That's essentially what I was telling myself at the time. Instead I would tell myself to believe that I am capable of change. That yeah you're right. The world's not going to change. You see it as this uncaring unjust place and you don't think it's capable of change and maybe that's through the world. Maybe your perception of it will change but the world itself will not. But you are capable of change and you may not see it for years to come. But you can change and it doesn't have to be this helpless hopeless darkness. It's just kind of stumble in. You can change if you kind of raise your awareness of what's wrong and then really work at it and ask for help. Another thing I would tell myself is I would kind of explain the seriousness and importance of trauma because as I am learning more about mental illness and especially bipolar disorder I'm finding that you know some research studies show that trauma during childhood can said bipolar often people who are already genetically predisposed to it. So you know if you're happy to have a really happy or if you're fortunate to have a really happy childhood. It may not set off whatever it is that's in your genes that might be bad if you do have some trauma growing up. Oh it will set it off and then some. So I would really explain to my young self that hate trauma mental and emotional trauma. Now they are finding that it can't structurally and chemically change your brain the same way that a physical traumatic brain injury can. So don't expect of yourself to you know be this super human being who achieves everything that her parents expect and more. You're actually damaged and not in a way like that bad negative way but something else came in and changed the way you think in a bad way. And that thing was not your fault. But now you do have a responsibility to learn how to cope with that thing that came into your life. So it's like yeah in a way some damage was done to you but you

can heal. You can change. And that was not your fault. But going forward you do have to be responsible for yourself. You kind of have to parent yourself a bit and you know talk to your inner child or those things that can help kind of heal from that trauma. And then I think the last thing I would tell my young self is. Don't be. I know it's really really scary. But don't be afraid to speak up for yourself and just because somebody especially that first time tells you to you know now that's ridiculous saddle and be quiet. Don't stop speaking up. Don't think that just because somebody says which you're saying is ridiculous it's actually ridiculous. You know people will invalidate you and gaslight you and try to tell you that the world is true from their perspective and not yours. And you do have to have that courage to you know even meekly say you know what I think I'm kind of right though here and I think I'm gonna keep this and I think I do need this thing that I'm saying I need and that will lead to you know creating healthy boundaries and all of that. But that very first step of actually believing your own experiences and standing up for yourself and saying just because this big scary adult that I know to be really smart and know to have better information than I do is telling me that I am wrong and that I should just be quiet and I don't know what I'm talking about doesn't mean that's the truth. You might actually have truth in you even though you're this you see you see yourself as a flawed person who doesn't know anything just speak up if something is really hurting you speak up and don't be afraid to do that. So for me I found that medication is huge and there are people that medication helps but the side effects are worse. So they go no this is not worth it. My life is better as you know random a chaotic as it is. Off medication as opposed to on it. For me personally especially the mood regulation part was such a huge help. I started feeling like myself which I kinda you know you forget who you are when you're really in the throes of mental illness that's completely unaddressed. And I kind of started to remember bits of me from when you know when I was a kid before I experienced the you know the whole plethora of traumatic events. So for me medication was crucial because it did stop me being suicidal for the most part the urges sometimes the thought not really the urges the thoughts are still there and you know that passive ideation or you know like the kind of wish I wasn't born but here I am.

[00:29:37] So I guess I'm going to slog through but I really would be nice.

[00:29:40] That still happens you know. But it is nowhere near at the level that it used to be before I was medicated. And then in terms of my anxiety it was pretty debilitating. Like I you know wouldn't leave the house sometimes I rarely went grocery shopping I kind of it. My husband thankfully and I was struggling to go to work on a lot of days. So again for me it was something that I really needed at the time that without it I couldn't function. I still haven't found the 100 percent right cocktail of meds. I don't think there are still side effects. I'm not happy with God discovered in the last two weeks I think I'm losing hair.

[00:30:23] I don't think I'm okay with that.

[00:30:26] So I am not like this a hundred percent right. Like I just medicate 100 percent of whatever the doctor tells you just stuff it down your gullet then you'll be happy.

[00:30:36] I do eventually want to explore if not completely going off of medication at least tuning it down because I feel that as I do develop coping skills that aren't medical I will need less medication but I also do trust the doctor I have now to make kind of the right decisions and to listen to me when I say hey I think that maybe I can go off of that one. Can we taper off. So again to reiterate for me it is a very very important crucial part. I would not be sitting here with you guys I would not have signed up for this podcast I wouldn't find you.

[00:31:17] I mean if I somehow made it here I'd probably be sobbing halfway through and throw the microphone at you and just say that I'm out of here.

[00:31:26] You are my shirt off and run away. I didn't do any of those things. So this one really well because of medication.

[00:31:34] Well like I said it's not I don't think it's a panacea for everybody. Therapy played a huge role in it too and I couldn't tell you what medication alone would be like because I also combine it with therapy. So I do I push therapy pretty hard on those friends of mine that ask for advice once they find out that I'm struggling with this. So.

[00:31:56] Yeah.

[00:32:08] So with bipolar because there are those you know two main states you can half plus the mixed episodes you can be depressed you can be manic but so clear that clear various right. If I am manic I wake up and I am just here ready to go by Wake up by I mean I get up or I get up I wake up at like three thirty or four after going to bed at midnight and it's fine. I am well rested and ready to go and I go to work. You know what works boring because who would want to do that. Who'd want to work and excel spreadsheets. No no. I'm going to go start another business. You know another one of those things would be to start a blog whatever if I'm depressed.

[00:32:45] Get me out of bed is incredibly hard. I am laying there with tears kind of streaming down my face for no reason thinking of excuses that I can call in and not go to work. So that's kind of like bipolar straight up the first thing in the day that's how it affects me. Anxiety same thing wake up. Right. If I you know before I take my medicine I feel this overwhelming dread about what I could not tell you. Just anything and everything there is no specific thing is this dread that washes over my body feels almost paralyzing. So if I am depressed and I have that anxiety I'm not going to work that day. I'm I'm not. I've taken plenty of medical leaves already. It's just not happening. Then once I do kind of get started on my day and you actually need to you know plan it out and decide what you need to do. That's where the ADHD really comes in. But bipolar also makes it really hard for me to. Use that executive function of the brain which is you know organizing planning break in big goals into manageable little tasks and keeping yourself on track and time management saying hey you you need to switch this if you want to get it done by your deadline. That person is like oh my god that part's a mess. I really and that's where the whole structured environment came in. I really struggle without somebody else setting that for me my executive function is really like in a big disarray and ADHD comes in. I mean even if I do manage to come up with a plan. I don't want to start anything and if I do started I don't want to keep working on it.

[00:34:27] I want to keep going over there and over here and over here.

[00:34:31] So again this is all like I'm kind of giving you a picture of what it was like unmedicated with medication it is much easier. I still feel those things but I know that once I take my medication it does get better. The executive function still suffering and I still struggle with a lot of motivation at work but I kind of I think it has a lot to do with not being in the right and the right profession for me. Even through being born in communist Russia my parents were educated and they were just they tried. They may not have been there emotionally for me the right way but they try to set me up in the best way they knew how. A lot of people don't have that. A lot of immigrants who come here do not have that you

know. Yeah I may have been the first and the only one to come here but I had all of the support a lot of people come here with no support whatsoever in their family relies on them to support them instead. And it's like there one hope of making it out of poverty and horrible horrible situations. So if you are an immigrant that lives here that has those high expectations whether to provide for their family or like me to fulfill some kind of family legacy that they hung on you like this is what you gotta do. You feel so much pressure and culturally it may be completely unacceptable for you to say you're struggling. It's I know that on my own personal experience like I said I can talk to my parents about it and there is a huge stigma more so than if you are just raised here and you do see all of these you know mental health awareness month you come here and you go no admitting something's wrong with me internally that's weakness and I cannot show weakness. Neither you know in my culture or here as this immigrant I mean I achieved something I came here. I am doing a good job and I can not admit that something is wrong because then things might fall apart. In my experience things fell apart more the more I try to push it down and say No I'm okay. I really am okay.

[00:36:38] And kind of use what my culture taught me to use those coping mechanisms which is basically rape repression and self shaming. So again you know if you are here it is so so hard you don't know what services are available. I didn't know who to go for I didn't know there were social workers I didn't even know there was a thing that there was a person you could go to and they'd be like Oh yeah. There's a resources for you you know even if they themselves are doing anything for you personally as you know in terms of therapy there's resources.

[00:37:09] Things in America are you know they may not be perfect but they're a whole lot better than in Russia. And there are resources there are people who would listen to you. There are people who are compassionate with a lot of empathy. And there really really is no shame in seeking help because long term if you keep it down and if you just keep kind of need to go any to go any to achieve any to achieve. I believe just like in my case it may well break you and it's better even if you do it in secret from your family which is what I kind of had to do right. I'm not telling them the truth. I am so much happier after I admitted that hey there was something wrong and there was no shame in seeking help for it.

[00:37:56] For more information and to donate please visit youdontfightalone.org.

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