

Episode_21_Blair.mp3

[00:00:01] 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.

[00:00:17] 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.

[00:00:33] There were there were times where through changing schools, I.

[00:00:44] Lost a social life. And that was, you know, like middle school.

[00:00:49] Went to a different middle school and made it very difficult to. The lack of the lack of friends and social support really put me kind of in a dark place now is probably one of the the low points. And but for me, it was always a. Depression has always been like a background noise, like like it's it's setting the theme, like the mood. The theming of your life. It's not always a good one, especially with the bipolar. It was difficult. And by that time, I was on medication, which which was definitely helping. But. The medication has its drawbacks and side effects.

[00:01:40] And specifically for me, like the mood stabilizers worked great.

[00:01:48] They would help me not have the mood swings, but it meant I was a level is Iraq.

[00:01:56] And that might be level at a medium low, maybe slightly high. But I would but it it it tones off the you know, it it tones down the the range of emotions that you feel sometimes for good.

[00:02:13] And so you don't get as low, but oftentimes you just don't enjoy the happy things either. It just it just kind of tuned everything out.

[00:02:21] There was a long emotional gray period in my life where.

[00:02:28] It was hard to be anything more than.

[00:02:35] My name is Blair and I was diagnosed with bipolar. Sadly, their sixth grade can't remember.

[00:02:43] Somewhere in there, you know, they're almost those diagnoses happened at the same time. In my experience, they've almost been two separate beasts to deal with where they can influence each other.

[00:02:58] But they they did not seem to be triggered or affect me in the same way. So we're just it was just like, oh, by the way, this is true, too. So it's.

[00:03:18] Yeah, I digested it to decide two distinct experiences. And I don't know how much it's. Related to depression. My depression, but there was a hard time in my life. When I found out that I was gonna be a dad, I've got a nine year old girl.

[00:03:40] She's a delightful and amazing. But she wasn't she wasn't a planned and I was in a very conservative community at that time. And in it that kind of disconnect for me caused me to like.

[00:03:58] Freak out, like, what am I gonna do? You know, I violate all these norms and taboos and end like that was ING's anxiety inducing depressing, like like just just had no idea what the what in the world was supposed to do or how to do with it.

[00:04:11] And I had to kind of reinvent my the way I did things to come up with it like.

[00:04:23] How to explain it?

[00:04:27] I realized that in that instance, I.

[00:04:37] Yeah.

[00:04:39] It just took me because I had broken those social taboos. It it took me a lot of questioning. What do I believe in? Why do I believe in those things? And as well as, you know, questioning relationships and stuff in my life as to what though what those mean to me and why do I hang out with those people in it? I had to rebuild all those things from scratch and that process was really dark. And that in that part of that is very much circumstantial related to what was going on. But depression definitely can feed into that. And so that was a that was at a time of trial that like I had to kind of. You know, it's a stress test time, you figure out what do you really believe and who are you really what do you. Who your friends are. Things like that. I was that was one of the rough times.

[00:05:43] My brothers and I had to move out of the house. Like my the family business was going under. And you like my brothers. I ended up having to move into an apartment by ourselves and just get go. Okay. You got to go get a job, get your own insurance. And we were live in on scraps.

[00:06:02] And at that point in my life, I couldn't afford health insurance. And so and I didn't. And I probably could have gotten on some programs, but I just didn't know how to and I didn't. So there came a point where I just stopped seeing the doctor because I couldn't afford it and I didn't. And nobody told me any of the better options. And so during that process, I actually ended up getting off of medication because I just didn't know what I had already. I had already recognized that that was an issue with the level MS. And it was kind of like.

[00:06:39] Like I said, just a.

[00:06:43] Had to it's just a difficult time, had to start from scratch, and I am not recommending that anybody do what I did and just stopped taking your meds and stopped seeing the doctor. All I can say is, in my experience, that forced me to.

[00:07:07] Develop some coping skills to deal with my own brain. And so by the time I did have a daughter. And that process came through. I was actually not on medication for that. And it was something where I would like it. Like I said, I had to deal with that and develop use the coping skills that I had developed to kind of handle that situation. And I mean, honestly, to this day, I haven't actually been on any medication for.

[00:07:40] Oh, gosh, I would have been. 2009 ish. Almost 10 years now.

[00:07:48] So I've I've just had I've learned, I guess the best thing I could say as is that I've learned to understand my brain's patterns and behaviors in a way that I can combat them so that I wasn't dealing with that because, yeah, that was a problem.

[00:08:07] But I I'm now that you mentioned and I'm wondering like that because I was very neutral during some very formative years of my life. You know, that middle school, high school time. And I never really got passionate about anything. Like I never really all the clubs and in the activities I did was because, oh, my you know, my brothers in theater and I can't get home because we're sharing the car. So I guess I'll hang out at the theater after school. That's how I got into activities. And it was a lot of fun.

[00:08:40] But I. I didn't really pursue things because I think it's part of that is because I lacked.

[00:08:49] Emotional range, you need you need things to feel good, to want to do them you need and you need. And even if that means, you know, having to deal with hard times and when when when things get bad, you recognizing those can be. Valuable, you know, it's OK to cry when it's OK, to feel terrible when shit hits the fan.

[00:09:14] The difference is.

[00:09:17] Understanding, you know, in my brain, figuring out when those times that.

[00:09:25] But when is my brain taking it too far?

[00:09:28] Like, when is a little thing spiraling down and escalating into my brain's making it a really big deal. The coping skill that's helped me the most, there was probably just.

[00:09:58] Being able to recognize the patterns was like the biggest thing for me, being able to say, having had enough experience to see.

[00:10:11] Oh, all this feeling like this didn't go right, so my brain's like, oh, that didn't go right because you're terrible and everybody hates you and everyone hates you because you're just, you know, a terrible person. It's just it's this back and forth downward spiral of negative thinking. And once I became aware that that was a process.

[00:10:35] That was my first step to climbing out of that hole, like you have to know you're in a hole. Years of therapy and working with a great psychiatrist who, you know, explained would help me understand neuro the neurochemistry of what's going on and what are these drugs doing and why are they helping?

[00:10:57] That was enough for me to.

[00:11:02] When I say when I started getting into the downward spiral, I can just step back and say, hey, you know, my brain's just not giving me enough of the proper, you know, dopamine or whatever, that my no receptors is off balance right now. And that's OK. And I've had enough experience to know that this is a temporary thing. And so we're just going to ride it out and it'll be fine. And it's amazing how just acknowledging that for me, being able to identify that and just accept that this is a temporary thing, it will pass instead of a instead of it being a conscious spiral, a spiral of conscious thoughts. It can be more of a spiral like it can be more of a well of a mood in the emotional state. And just being like,

why do I just kind of feel down and Nickey right now? Like, there's not really any reason. I mean, there are, you know, triggers like weather and stress and things that can contribute to that. But sometimes you're just like, you know, those for all that's gone. Going down, I'm feeling worse than I should right now. And I don't know why. And that.

[00:12:11] So it's it just a different kind of cycle that I've more recently become aware of and how to.

[00:12:18] Trying to figure out how to work around.

[00:12:34] In it's a gray area, because bipolar is not something you can do a blood test for.

[00:12:40] It's not something where you get a hard evidence.

[00:12:43] It's the diagnosis is.

[00:12:47] A.

[00:12:49] A loose thing, and I'm you know, I mean, I don't know if there's various spectrums and levels of of it, but this just this is my experience with it. I will say I was frustrated. There was a time where I was like like during that time or I was like I could, you know, maybe when I didn't have the health insurance stuff. One of the things I thought was, hey, you know what? People are always doing scientific studies, maybe to go volunteer at one of those and just try do some demo drugs. Even I get if I get a placebo, I know the placebo effect is real, that'll help out. So I found some studies that on depression, they're trying to do some drugs. And I go in there and it's like, sign me up.

[00:13:41] My brain takes a lot of shortcuts.

[00:13:46] And I think we're talking about earlier with the.

[00:13:51] You kind of dühring my formative years being on this mood stabilizer, let the lack of passion and interest in things. I don't know if that I don't know if that's just part. It would be pure correlation. I can't tie causation to it, but I can say that I've struggled with.

[00:14:09] Investing my full self into things even today, even that even up when I'm not on drugs, I saw I, I struggle diving into things and to be honest, a part of that's probably the ADHD cause I get bored and I move on to something else. But I'm just not as.

[00:14:28] Emotionally invested in hobbies and in things I want to be like.

[00:14:33] Like, just recently, I, I realized that like.

[00:14:39] I really like. I enjoy Mario Kart. That's the thing that I really love to play. And it's a great game. And when I'm by myself and I don't really have anything to do, I had to give myself permission recently to be like, you know what? This is something you love. If you want to sit down and spend three hours trying to get a record time trial lap and just improve your best, that's OK. And so it's like. So I even know I'm just trying to. I'm still hacking my brain and to try to figure out how to be more.

[00:15:11] Invest in those type of things. I have to remind myself that it is a.

[00:15:21] That it's OK to set up the mental barriers that block out those extra noise, and I can't tell you how I do it, but I've I've managed to. Kind of silence the other noises in my head when when I went to work on it. And it does it honestly, like I said, if I'm if I'm neglecting something or putting procrastinating on something, that that voice is strong. And it won't let me, too.

[00:15:56] But it's.

[00:16:01] Yeah, that's something I've been working on recently, is just just figuring out how to how to put that up. And and I don't know if part of that was.

[00:16:11] Like I said, those mental barriers that I eat. I don't know if I developed that from being like.

[00:16:19] With all the procrastinating and stuff in in school, like, I guess.

[00:16:33] I guess is there are times where you can take a thought and in hide it away and stuff it away, and that can be an unhealthy thing to do because you're not dealing with it.

[00:16:43] And I did that a lot. And sometimes it still happens where it's just like, you know, I'm just gonna let it slide. I mean, ignore it. I'm going to push it. It just pushed it back in my mind and let it go. It's like, I guess rebuilding my life in a in a healthier way has been a and that's been a big process, everything from my family life.

[00:17:02] So I mentioned before how my mom was very understanding, but my dad was not up until I was in college. And he.

[00:17:14] He had what essentially was a heart attack.

[00:17:18] They caught it early, but he had to go through surgery. And after that he had a large depressive episode. So he got to experience what that meant firsthand.

[00:17:28] And. And. That helped.

[00:17:38] With my dad, you know, who's a very important person to me. That really helps.

[00:17:45] Him to understand what I was going through, and that mattered a lot.

[00:17:50] Like being able to. And it's not that we not even that we talked about it a lot. But the fact that he could empathize, I guess, was helpful because then the world doesn't seem like this terrible, evil place in the world. Don't get me wrong, it can be you know, the world can be uncaring, chaotic and just, you know, terrible. But it's not malevolent. You know, people can be malevolent. But the world itself is is not. So I think that was, you know, probably another thing that helped me, you know, restructure just how I view the world, how I interact with world, how I interact with other people instead of. Because when you you know, in this in this church, it was very easy to. Look down on people that weren't part of that church because you felt like you were superior. Like this is the one true church and and that's not a healthy way to start relationships and view other people. So that's that's the thing for me that really. Just just a more positive outlook on life. And then the.

[00:19:11] So I now I can't say like I said, I can't say that having my daughter was like the turnaround point, but it was definitely an important point in my life that forced me to restructure, restructure my life, restructure my priorities, my friendships.

[00:19:28] And I've tried to do that in a way that is the best I can and to make healthy decisions.

[00:19:44] I figured chances are high this is something my daughter's going to have to deal with. I can't go back in time and tell myself, but I can talk to my daughter about this. And so throughout her life. Up, you know, whenever she was upset or sad or things weren't going her way or she's in time out and she was grumpy. After, you know, after time out was the time was up. I'd go over there and we'd sit down. OK. You won't talk about it. You know, what are we feeling right now? Just can we can you tell me how you're feeling? And just I've. With her, I've tried to establish.

[00:20:30] A healthy dialog about.

[00:20:33] Feelings and emotions that it's OK to talk about it and it's OK to feel things now. You know, and your actions, you know, the actions that you have from that that you take from those feelings, you know, those need to you know, you can you can't just do anything with those, but you can it is OK to feel angry. It's OK to feel sad. And so I've, you know, every time that, you know, she's. In a rough spox, I have seen with her that something consider off. She's just miserable and part of that's just, you know, how it is as a kid. Everything's much bigger, you know, and when when a friend says something mean, it hurts a lot more. And everything is just magnified when you're a kid. And so I've had to talk with her about that. But recently, now that she is getting close to the age where. You know, I suspect something may come up, I had to talk with her and just tell her about our family history and kind of what depression is and, you know, just saying this is a thing.

[00:21:43] This is part of her family. And. I just want you to be aware that it's OK to talk about it and because I like cause for me than the number one thing.

[00:21:58] I think that's helped is just being aware of what's going on. Being self-aware of my own brain and what it can do to me and how it can impact me. So I've tried to communicate with her.

[00:22:10] Just that it's OK to talk about it, it's OK to process this. It's OK to think about it, and just because things feel bad doesn't mean that they are bad. And and that's OK. It's hard to communicate.

[00:22:27] It's hard to understand. It's super hard to understand. What's he been there?

[00:22:33] And.

[00:22:37] Even for me, I have I have lots of friends that that have to deal with depression at a more and much more severe level than I do. And that it gets to a point where I can only understand so much because I haven't gotten that dark, that in and in the coping tools that I've built up. I mean, they work for me. I can't guarantee that it's going to work for you. So. I guess.

[00:23:10] I guess I could just ask for patience.

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