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# THE DARK SIDE OF INNOCENCE

## GROWING UP BIPOLAR

A Memoir By

**Terri Cheney**

Author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Manic*

Advance Praise for *The Dark Side of Innocence*:

"This will be big." --*Library Journal*

"A compelling coming-of-age follow-up to *Manic*."

--*Kirkus Reviews*

"The Dark Side of Innocence is a magnificent depiction of the ravages of bipolar illness in childhood.

Cheney's intensely personal account provides much-needed hope and understanding about a highly stigmatized illness. A real tour de force."

-- Elyn Saks, author of *The Center Cannot Hold*, and recipient of the 2009 MacArthur Award

Praise for *Manic*:

"Cheney's chilling account of her struggle with bipolar disorder brilliantly evokes the brutal nature of her disease...Edgy, dark and often cynical, *Manic* is not an easy book to read, but it has heart and soul to spare."

— *People Magazine*

Terri Cheney's 2008 debut *Manic: A Memoir*, about her life as a bipolar entertainment attorney, reached number ten on the *New York Times* bestseller list, stayed on the list for four weeks and is in its tenth printing. She returns with *THE DARK SIDE OF INNOCENCE: Growing Up Bipolar* (Atria Books, March 1, 2011, \$25.00), a memoir that reveals what *Manic* did not: the tempestuous reality of her bipolar childhood.

With the success of *Manic*, Terri received countless emails from parents, asking for her help in making sense of the disorder that was devastating their children. According to recent estimates, nearly one million children have bipolar disorder, and there has been a staggering four thousand percent increase in the diagnosis since the mid-90s. One question Terri was asked again and again was, *How old were you when you knew something was seriously wrong with you?* Since her condition was not diagnosed until she was an adult, the answer is not a simple one. And yet from the opening pages of *THE DARK SIDE OF INNOCENCE*, when Terri first attempts to commit suicide at age seven, it's clear that hers was no ordinary childhood.

(OVER)

From the outside, Terri Cheney lived a charmed life. She was raised in a tranquil, middle-class suburb of Los Angeles, where she and her older brother attended a strict Catholic school. She excelled academically from the very start – by the age of ten, she was attending classes at nearby Pomona College, during the height of the free love/flower child movement. But despite appearances, she knew that something was very, very wrong with her.

While most children have a secret friend, Terri was tormented by what she referred to as the Black Beast: “. . . the monster that ruled over me and manipulated my moods. The Black Beast didn’t live under my bed or in the closet, like a proper childhood monster should. He lived inside my heart and head, leaving little room for hope or joy or any emotion lighter than sorrow.” Yet the very next second, the Black Beast would do a complete about-face, whirling Terri up into giddiness and euphoria. He was wildly unpredictable, and Terri never knew from one day to the next who she would wake up to be: the exuberant, energetic, charismatic sprite, who could ace all her exams in a flash? Or the somber, sullen, dour child who spent most of her time in bed, unable to move or even muster a smile?

Terrified and ashamed of her rollercoaster inner life, Terri did her best to hide it behind stellar grades and extracurricular achievement. Her teachers and friends – even her parents – were fooled by the façade. She told no one about the Black Beast, not even her beloved father, who always seemed to be on the verge of leaving. To keep her father at home, Terri vowed to be his perfect little girl: all A’s and no visible flaws. It was an impossible undertaking, but she was so determined she might have succeeded had it not been for the fact that the Black Beast was constantly lurking beneath the surface, pushing and prodding her beyond any normal response to life.

The slightest thing could send her over the edge into extremity. A botched homework assignment at age seven was the impetus for her secretly swallowing a bottle of her mother’s pills. A tiff with her brother at the dinner table erupted into sudden violence as Terri stabbed him with a fork. At ten, sexual experimentation with a neighborhood boy intensified into hypersexuality, an obsessive preoccupation with sex which often afflicts bipolar children. A rare defeat in a school election a few years later prompted her discovery of alcohol, which quickly became necessary to her existence. At sixteen, a fight with her mother re-ignited her thirst for suicide, and she embarked on a riotous, drunken, speed-soaked drive through the desert, crashing her precious ’65 Corvette out in the middle of nowhere. To her regret, the car was totaled but she survived.

As Terri grew older, her moods became increasingly uncontrollable. The Black Beast’s hold grew stronger over her, and she had to work harder and harder to keep his existence a secret. Her popularity and success at school should have provided some respite: she was voted varsity cheerleader, “Most Likely to Succeed,” and class valedictorian. But it was all just more fuel for the façade. In fact, she felt completely alone, acutely aware that “. . . in their entire lives, most people never felt as intensely as I did on an ordinary Tuesday afternoon.” She watched her friends closely so she could mimic what seemed like normal reactions to events. But her inner tension ran so high, her only release was to cut private parts of her body with her father’s razor.

While her mother sensed that something with Terri was not quite right, in her father’s eyes, she could do no wrong. Terri would do anything to uphold his belief in her. She felt frantically competitive for his attention and affection, a dynamic that finally led to her being openly at war with her mother. But by the time Terri’s mother decided Terri should maybe see a doctor, it was too late: acceptance letters poured in from colleges, and Terri eagerly planned her escape, certain that whatever was wrong with her could be fixed by a change in geography.

In the end, it was easier for her parents to bask in her success than to try to confront the problem. While she deeply regrets the loss of her childhood, Terri doesn't assign any blame: "It was a different time, a different world, when I was growing up. Commercials about bipolar disorder and depression didn't run nonstop on mainstream TV; there were no full-page ads in popular magazines; no best-selling memoirs. There was only shame – and silence."

With *THE DARK SIDE OF INNOCENCE*, Terri Cheney finally shatters that silence. Her visceral, beautifully crafted writing pulls back the curtain on the truth, bringing hope and clarity to the complex phenomenon of childhood bipolar disorder. The unspeakable secret that she carried alone for so many years now not only has a name, it has a story.

#### About the Author

Terri Cheney, once a successful entertainment attorney representing the likes of Michael Jackson and Quincy Jones, now devotes her advocacy skills to the cause of mental illness. On the boards of directors of several mental health organizations, she also facilitates a weekly community support group at UCLA's Neuropsychiatric Institute. Her writings about bipolar disorder have been featured in the *New York Times*, the *Huffington Post*, and countless articles and blogs. She currently resides in Los Angeles.

#### **THE DARK SIDE OF INNOCENCE: GROWING UP BIPOLAR**

**By Terri Cheney**

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