



Library podcast

Ellen Forney Discusses 'Rock Steady: Brilliant Advice From My Bipolar Life'

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[00:00:42] I'm the literature and humanities program manager here at the Seattle Public Library and I'd like to start this evening by acknowledging that we are on Indigenous land. Welcome to this evening's event with Ellen Forney and David Schmader presented in partnership with Fantagraphics Books. Thank you to our authors series sponsor Gary Kunis and to the Seattle Times for generous promotional support for library programs. Finally we are grateful to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Private gifts to the foundation from thousands of donors helped the library provide free programs and services that touched the lives of everyone in our community. So the library foundation donors here with us tonight we say thank you very much for your support. So now without further ado I'd love to introduce our speakers cartoonist Ellen Forney is the author of a best selling graphic memoir Marbles Mania Depression Michelangelo and Me. She collaborated on the National Book Award winning novel The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian and was awarded residency fellowships from the MacDowell Colony and Siva tella Rainey Ranieri. She was also the 2012 recipient of The Stranger Genius Award for Literature and the winner of the National Association for the Advancement of psychoanalysis 2013. Diva award. We also had the pleasure of working together when I was at town hall she was my inaugural artist in residence there so I've known Ellen for a few years now and she also curated the graphic medicine. Ill conceived and well drawn which was a traveling exhibition about comics and health for the National Library of Medicine. And I do I have a note here to ask about the upcoming exhibit and perhaps she'll tell us more about that. Ellen is that true.

[00:02:26] No it's a mystery. Apparently yes. I stuck my foot in it apparently. OK.

[00:02:34] So I'm sure a lot of you have seen her huge beautiful murals at the Capitol Hill light rail station as well. She's here tonight. I know right. So she's here tonight to talk about her new book from Fantagraphics Rocksteady brilliant advice from my bipolar life and after her presentation Ellen is going to talk with David Schmader. David is a writer and performer. He is the author of The Soul of play a straight letter to Aksel and a short term solution to a long term problem and more recently he has become a spokes model for marijuana writing the book. Writing the book Weed the user's guide. So they'll be chatting in a little bit. But first please help me welcome Ellen Forney.

[00:03:29] So I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder in 1998 shortly before my 30th birthday. I was in a very manic swing at the time and then fell into a deep depression and then spent the next four years struggling to get stable my clicker is somewhere and go through this Marble's Mania Depression Michelangelo and Me. My graphic memoir about that time. So it's mostly my personal story and I also included coping tools and therapies that I had found along the way. Since it came out in 2012 I've heard from so many people who thanked me for the company and the information. The number of them told me that they used it like a manual and so I figured you know there was a lot of information that I didn't get into Marble's. There's a lot of stuff that I have figured out and learned since then and all sorts of things that I would love to research. So I should do a manual. And is

[00:04:50] Not just about getting stable but maintaining stability over the long term which is just as challenging frustrating and essential.

[00:05:02] So when I was when I was planning Rocksteady I figured that I would be kind of imparting my wisdom from my 14 years of stability. But whatever wisdom I have gleaned that comes with knowing that the only constant is change and stability is never a done deal with me. Is this really actually for you.

[00:05:29] Can we do something that makes this less like I'm in some weird echo chamber. And so. You

[00:05:40] Do a little job going for and you just keep talking. So so I you know Marble's was such a big deal for me. Maybe I'll just keep going on the role anyway.

[00:05:52] So so I figured like Who what's what's what's going to go on here. All right.

[00:05:58] So here I am thinking that I'm just going to share my wisdom. So after I had finished the proposal a few months after that when I started getting into into writing Rocksteady

[00:06:15] I saw my psychiatrist and she had some bad news for me I called your labs your calcium level has been inching up.

[00:06:26] Let him can affect a gland in your throat called the parathyroid which regulates calcium. One of the effects of high calcium is depression.

[00:06:40] And hyper calcium can also cause other things too like osteoporosis. Well so what are we going to do. Well you have to come off off the lithium that I hear. So Lithium has been one of my two main mood stabilizers for all this time that I've been able. The other one Lamictal motor Jiand. Hadn't been enough on its own so her news threw me into a tailspin.

[00:07:19] She and I talked about it on the phone and in person I did a ton of research on the internet about hyperscale Samiya about the thyroid about different kinds of treatments.

[00:07:32] I wrote and drew in my journal I turned to my support system my mom my partner my friends the next med that we were going to try was called oxcart Baza. I resented oxcart Bagdikian drew a stupid ox. Stupid car

[00:07:58] I wanted to get and this is this is the move right out of my journal. I wanted to get extra organized and really deliberate about taking care of myself. I wanted stability maintenance guide. And

[00:08:14] Here I was already writing one. So the timing was just uncanny. So I gave it a personal test run. And I learned a whole lot of new coping tools. That I was myself and. And so it worked out great. Five stars from me. And I have to say it has an index

[00:08:41] Yes it has an index. Thank you Fantagraphics. Thank you Kristie. Andy OK.

[00:08:50] So the big picture is that maintaining stability takes a whole lot of different kinds of coping tools and information. There is stuff to take care of for everyday life. There are things for particular situations and in crises. So.

[00:09:14] So I have isolated nine elements that I think are the most are the most important. So that I found myself and in my research so sleep sleep affects pretty much everything that you can think of for your mind and your body. And then some that you can't even think of any more than. If you take meds take your meds Fremont's. Eat eat good food food that nourishes you.

[00:09:57] I get to say one more thing about those that I would point out. We've heard a lot of these things right. Yeah I know eat well. But but one of the things that I that I wanted to point out is that what you eat affects your mood. And so to remember remember that like you think about you know like eating caffeine or alcohol or psych meds for that matter it affects your mood.

[00:10:19] So it's the same it's the same with everything pretty much that you put in your body. The key point. See your doctor regularly or else stick with the therapy that's working for you.

[00:10:33] Dr. meditation and mindfulness I know I know we're all the same.

[00:10:40] But but it's actually a really great practice to be able to calm yourself which I think is a particular issue for many people and it helps with your sleep and it helps when your thoughts are going to us really. And then it winds up really feeling very pleasant.

[00:11:03] Exercise exercise.

[00:11:04] Kind of like this like oh yeah you know heard it a million times but it really it really is what it stimulates the antianxiety neuro transmitters and exercise also helps regulate your eating and your sleep.

[00:11:22] So it's good. It's another one also that feels good. About routine.

[00:11:30] You know I used to really get this directive.

[00:11:34] You know don't fence me in man. But but having a routine helps you a couple of different things. It helps you remember things like if you do something all the time like like if you wake up every morning and then you feed your dog and take him for a walk then you're probably not going to forget to feed your dog and take a walk.

[00:11:54] And so it's the same thing with all the other things that we need to fold into our lives.

[00:12:01] And then also just in a more general way so far as what that might mean like not really in a poetic way but if you think of if you think of kind of like a good solid rhythm section in a band that they really kind of brings everything else together and everybody else can improvise along as long as you have something really solid and grounded looping tools.

[00:12:28] Got a whole book of.

[00:12:32] So this is probably too much it all kind of go through although I have to say this one was really fun for me to draw and I looked up Batman's utility belt. So there's some stuff up in here.

[00:12:44] I was like grappling hook grappling and and then James Bond gadgetry. So inspirations there and a solid support system.

[00:12:59] It's just too much for us to do.

[00:13:02] Byars so with a lot of things so like how how to bring them all together.

[00:13:11] The the different the different therapies and strategies that I was reading about it seemed like they all had like acronyms and and like fun mnemonics to remember them.

[00:13:22] And so I figured I was going to have one. So. So the Rocksteady strategy is Edwards. With my doctor mindfulness exercise routines support system

[00:13:42] Loves this Medard.

[00:13:43] Okay so so there are a few things that I thought I really wanted to make clear in in Rocksteady and there are reasons that that this book is from is from a really personal angle. I wanted to make it clear that that taking care of yourself is hard even when you know all of the things that you that you should do that it is hard it takes a lot of effort. There are times that you're going to have to weigh your priorities. There are times that you're going to mess up and for the most part that's OK. You know folded apart part of the part of the whole thing.

[00:14:26] Often it will be OK and other times horribly fixable. So I wanted to make sure that I wanted to make sure that it was clear that different strategies are

[00:14:44] For different people at different times that you're going to have to be kind of like wait where it is that you're at and what's going what's going to work for you that sometimes isn't going to be the same for different times and and then the the other thing I was going to say I wanted to make clear that oh right that's I'm here already my talk that coping tools are you know the the things that are in monomer it's it's it's recognizing your red flags it's your breathing exercises.

[00:15:32] But there's also a lot of other important stuff that needs to be part of health care like ways to respect and be kind to yourself and also especially ways to know that you're not alone. So I have a whole chapter called you have company and and of the many things that are in it.

[00:15:54] One is that well that's where you'll find the mood disorder Hall of Fame and 1 one page on that. So this is one floor of the musicians that have mood disorders. And if you if you heard the play last that was that was going on when you were coming in that was all these musicians and and here's a tool for those of you who have Spotify or perhaps would get it.

[00:16:21] I put this as a playlist on Spotify so listen to it you have company. So another part of that chapter is about coming out and I'm going to share some of my favorite

[00:16:39] Parts of that. Now let me ask a bipolar Ms Manners cured bipolar Ms Manners. What is the etiquette for telling someone you're dating that you have a mood disorder. Sincerely. Totally love crazy.

[00:16:57] Tlc I discuss this very question with sex advice expert Dan Savage on his savage love cast. There are striking similarities with telling a new love interest about your kinks.

[00:17:11] Having something private and important to someone that you really like that doesn't come up naturally in conversation.

[00:17:19] So the following is my Mrs. bipolar bipolar Ms Manners version of his advice to be calm and sober and ideally stable. Give your disclosure the time space and care it deserves. 3 It's fine to wait and get to know each other first. If you don't click it's a moot point that. For. It's also okay to disclose right away if you want to vet them but only if you're confident you'd be okay with it. Oh let's say two to five days. Do disclose before making any major commitments and last a caution if you're feeling super high energy sexual maybe ask yourself if you might be manic because the cars entangle you while manic can lead to frayed so many puns so many puns.

[00:18:32] Best wishes for getting the love you deserve in solidarity.

[00:18:36] The bipolar OK so so I didn't say that there may be times that you know all of the things that you should do and all of that goes out the window. Not that that's ever happened to me. Oh wait yes it has.

[00:18:54] So so I wasn't really quite so cautious when I met this one particular so.

[00:19:06] So I met Jake in Portland in 2008 and 9 and I pursued him tirelessly for three days. Three days three days. Yeah. And he finally gave in.

[00:19:26] Finally three days. And I totally fell for it. So soon. Thank you for. Staying

[00:19:38] Late at night in my hotel room. He was in the shower and it was time for me to take my meds.

[00:19:46] So I had a decision to make. Do I Do I take them now fast so he doesn't see I don't have to deal with that just yet. Or do I wait. Because. Like I know why

[00:19:57] Whatever and he'll come out and I'll act like it's no big deal. Well I didn't decide fast enough and thus succeeded at neither I'm bipolar

[00:20:16] If he's going to force us to do it now. So here he'll remain warm and understanding

[00:20:34] And we survived that and we've been together for nine years.

[00:20:47] And so sometimes messing up actually you know works out fine. So I have to say this is our origin story then part of our origin story and Jake has the last admit it made me nervous

[00:21:03] Not the bipolar part.

[00:21:11] Stability is an action to to rock is to get off balance. Steady is to regain your balance.

[00:21:25] It is really difficult to maintain your stability. It's a matter of learning how to gauge the situation and figure out if something if something is feeling off or off track and compensate for it somehow. So if something is really upsetting and getting overwhelming maybe ask friends for a little extra support.

[00:21:49] If things are getting really overwhelming and exciting and like it's spring. It's getting really light out and you're on a book tour and it's all getting really exciting maybe really make doubly sure to make sure that you're getting enough so mind your Smed Mertz

[00:22:10] And do your thing and be well and be brave and Rock Steady. And now I would like to bring out my dear friend for so long and sometime collaborator David Schmader

[00:22:44] First I was very glad that this I think turned into a real clap but it was about a response to your hands in the light rail station which makes me a little over Klemet every time I go by. It's such a glorious addition to the city. Yeah. I mean I've known you long enough. Like I have some I still have Queer Pride feelings about things like that. Like we were here growing up on Capitol Hill when it was there was like the Oasis lesbian bookstore and there was one which was Bailey Khoi where we met I think and just that. Now that's that's the culture of the city. So it's just a lovely thing it makes me feel old in a good way.

[00:23:26] All right. So Ellen Forney Rocksteady brilliant advice My Bipolar Life. I do not have a bipolar diagnosis but the night is young. Did you not have a bipolar diagnosis.

[00:23:40] But I've found a lot to relate to in this book. It is primarily a book about self care as you pointed out and maybe you're driven to this self care by a mood disorder or maybe you're driven by a desire for like better more harmonious days. But it has something to offer. And did you have a sense of that kind of wider appeal when you're writing it or is that a happy benefit of you honing in precisely on what you thought would be read mostly by people who share your diagnosis. Well

[00:24:09] I guess I guess I I was really I was really focusing on mood disorders. But I mean it's immediately apparent that the kinds of issues that those of us with disorders have or like issues like for the for the like so many of them be kind to yourself. Insomnia there's a chapter on this and I like how many people have a hard time sleeping and those kinds of rules are the same. I don't know why this is are are really the same for for everyone but a lot of the calming and then different ways that you calm. I think it actually might be useful in a way for people who don't have mood disorders that don't get directed to those kinds of resources. Because I think that those of us who are in therapy or read books about how to take care of ourselves like OK you know like if I if I draw Mondelez or if I do they serve a certain breathing exercise. I don't think that that's the kind of information or the training I guess that most most people get.

[00:25:23] There is something where you do it it helps to get bullied into it by a diagnosis because it can feel like a luxury if you're scraping by with your anxiety and everything you're like I'm doing it and then you realize life could be very different my minutes can be very different if I took care of myself.

[00:25:40] And there is something about why did I have to get a good diagnosis to do these basic things all the time. And so something else that struck me and there is like there is there's no one and the cure for this. You are the cure. Your habits are the cure in your self care consistent self care is a cure. And humans are good at consistent anything like what I feel like it touches a little bit what it what's your secret. How do you hack this thing of like. Humans don't like this and think it's fun to break the rules. You do. Right. Right. Explain your superhero ism.

[00:26:17] Well you know it's it's there's figuring out figuring out how to how to why would that be like how way different things you know like like like if you're if you're figuring out when it is that you have to kind of buckle down with these things to like like. Like for me like kind of what I was saying if it wasn't like incredibly clear that I'm talking about like the things that I have to be careful about right

now with like I'm having trouble sleeping. So I'm brainstorming with my doctor I'm going to start taking a new med because the Canepa is making you groggy during the day and I'm doing the sleep meditation that I started using. So so I'm so I'm focusing a lot of attention on onse on sleep and you know like so other things don't get I mean not that I'm not doing them but they're not. So they're not quite as deliberate and so so I I think it's kind of it's a bit like a balancing act but you know like whatever like the jello in the baggy that you kind of squish around. Does that make sense. Do you know what I mean. You have any idea what I just meant by that. You know I like you like you have to just kind of figure out which things to focus on at which time and when you talk about prioritizing during moments of like oh I'm not to them be my ideal.

[00:27:37] And that just requires a presence like the kind of sense I got from this was like you've just got to really be present and on your own side. Most of the time that your conscience. Well you know one thing that was really important that

[00:27:51] That came off. I don't know if doctor was here but there there was a psychiatrist that I that I had as a consultant.

[00:28:05] And so I would we would like send these long e-mails I would send her my questions and she would she would always apologize for like how long she would go on and I said No no no it's really great. And she was really really super awesome. And one of the things that she and she's a clinical psychiatrist too. So it was both her point of view and then also what she knew from her bipolar patients were her patients with bipolar.

[00:28:30] And one of the things that she pointed out is that she really liked that I thought I said do your thing do your thing. Because that's that's really kind of the key is to figure out how to how to how to be yourself.

[00:28:45] I mean like we don't we don't have to think of it as as tying ourselves up with all of these different things that we have to do. I know I listed off a whole lot of different things to keep in mind but we don't have to be squashed by it. So. So that's I mean that's kind of where that comes from. Figure out how how how to be you and how to take care of yourself as you which requires all this listening to your heart and paying attention to your gut which is so painful.

[00:29:15] And I can only imagine mood disorders are a particular challenge for artists.

[00:29:20] I mean there are points where I'm writing where you get lit up and it definitely feels like something to encourage and chase and sustain and is. Is it typical to have that kind of laid up feeling. Land is a red flag.

[00:29:36] Yes sure.

[00:29:38] But then when I like answer my own question like this is where routine comes in. Take care of yourself doesn't mean never experiencing a little part excitement. Just means do your yoga in the morning and hit your bedtime and have whatever feelings you want in between.

[00:29:48] Well that's kind of you know like the sort of like checking out your priorities and how to compensate for different things you know like go to Burning Man you know but sleep you know and maybe don't take all of the quite all of the recreational drugs that your friends are taking you know because you can't because that's that's you know because.

[00:30:08] Because because it is different in that it might set off an episode. I want to go there. So it doesn't mean that we can't do anything and it doesn't mean that we can't like chase the. The news is somewhere but ok if you wind up like for me if I wind up staying up late like let's say I stay up until I don't know midnight or 1 then I'm pretty exhausted because I go to bed pretty much Ivan. But you know like whatever happened and I'm up until 3:00 I'm pretty. The next day and I have to be really sure to get back on schedule to make sure that the rest of my routine is in place as much as possible so if something is really going to go out of whack then I really have to make sure that everything else is taken care of. You know you don't have to be so vigilant when things are when things are things are sort of like cooking. OK. It's just like figuring out like oh something's going on I just kind of need to keep track. Well that's another thing that I'm doing.

[00:31:08] Having having some trouble sleeping that I finally yeah OK I have to do a sleep chart and you know one of the things about one of the thing about having done this book tour is that I really have to hold myself to it. Like. Now I have to do. It. Yeah. No I recommend I recommend writing a manual so that you can hold yourself

[00:31:32] On a lesser extent.

[00:31:33] I wrote a book about how important it is to clean your bong and I have to have the cleanest bong in Seattle or I look like such a jerk.

[00:31:41] Exactly. Let's should we do the health care reenactment.

[00:31:47] Yeah. All right. So one of the first things I think it might have been did we eat because we were doing.

[00:31:55] We were reading for things that I think that was it was part of that but I knew like I knew Reesa and I just feel like you were part of the toys and Beyblade haven't though anyway so remember that. Yes oh did we meet because of 70 75.

[00:32:09] I think we did well.

[00:32:11] One of the so one of my one of my earlier was a comic that I did called I was 75 and there was there was a there was an episode one of the storylines was about to deploy and reading reading forever and so we read forever a couple of times.

[00:32:34] Yeah for like a radio show or something like that. So I don't know.

[00:32:38] It was the with the Ralph scene and Minnie bread forever.

[00:32:44] Yeah this was key cut people. Yeah this was Judy Blume is or Austintown book. It had a Peanuts character in it. Yeah.

[00:32:53] Anyway the point is just that it's just pretty exciting to be doing this.

[00:33:01] Yeah I hope we end up doing a production of love letters in an old folks home someday.

[00:33:06] All right. Awesome. Oh and laughs and jokes.

[00:33:11] Okay so so be kind to yourself.

[00:33:15] I mentioned that is an important part of coping tools. And so this is in Chapter 3 coping tools.

[00:33:25] Be kind to yourself.

[00:33:28] Is your inner voice is getting really harsh can such an idiot.

[00:33:34] Think of it as a furious adult berating an inconsolable child. Ugh.

[00:33:42] You're such an idiot.

[00:33:48] Neither has reason to calm down. Both feel worse and worse.

[00:33:51] It's a miserable place to get stuck. So take a step back breathe.

[00:33:59] This is not easy. Many tools for calming yourself are in this and following chapters. Can I just have a note here. So this looks like what I was talking about about the like you know what. This is hard. Like.

[00:34:11] Like this step here. That scene is just like all took a step back and calm down. Just take a step back and get some perspective. You know and so do this. There's a whole brings up. Exactly right.

[00:34:23] I feel like we get a lot of a lot of advice like you know just step outside of your anger. Yeah OK. OK. So take us back grieve

[00:34:41] And think of someone you truly intuitively care about.

[00:34:45] Ok I love this stuff because it doesn't count on self-love that only you know it counts and just being someone who loves someone else.

[00:34:51] And that's a great thing to exploit. How you might treat them in this situation especially how you might treat them if they're breeding the rating themselves.

[00:35:06] Sorry I'm such an idiot. Oh well that sucks. It's OK. Both parts.

[00:35:12] Yeah you didn't. No no that's good. Now you should do that. OK. OK. So now mentally replace you.

[00:35:20] What are you doing here. Oh no. I broke it I'm sorry SOB. Oh no.

[00:35:26] Well that sucks but it's ok. I'm really depressed. I know it's hard.

[00:35:31] It's ok so treat yourself like that.

[00:35:37] This Trick Could sometimes help me recognize the futility of that stuck. The rating place and get beyond oh no this sucks.

[00:35:47] It's OK. I'm really depressed it's hard. I know it's OK.

[00:35:54] Wrote.

[00:36:00] Really. It really helps.

[00:36:03] I don't know if I picked that up from somewhere so far as I know it came out of my own like maybe. But it really it really helped me when I just like you said like when I could when I could not sympathize with myself I could not be kind to myself. I could kind of do the fake it till you make it think like OK I'll just sort of feel that way and then just kind of like some of that

[00:36:27] Anyway loved it which is why I said let's do that part right. OK I want to talk more about the craft of this.

[00:36:33] As a writer something we all value is concision and getting the most info into a small space with elegance and I've got a crash course in concision. Working with Ellen on this five part series for the stranger is called What the drug has taught me it was my story and with her drawings and it's collected in Ellens book I love Led Zeppelin. And it was really instructive to me of realizing Oh you

don't have to say that you will draw this thing that will save me from this entire paragraph. And now this is this is your artistic arena now and these info heavy graphic works and you are on the scope where you're adding more info.

[00:37:11] So I just want to hear about your process of how you attack this. Do you know what you're going to draw. Do you urge or do you seek out what needs to be depicted visually first and then fell into place with text. What is your what is a rough draft of an info graphic look like.

[00:37:27] Well let's see.

[00:37:29] So so Conex the language of comics is a combination of words and pictures and some and some some stories sort of lend themselves more to pictures let's say if it's something really about feelings like abstract kind of things is about information like fairly specific. Like think of it like a recipe or or things like of like some very specific coping tools. And here we're like the kind of descriptions that I that I was reading.

[00:38:03] There are some things that really need more explicit explicit treatment like it like in words. So and so like figuring out where where to land. There are times that having a having a comic that's an and panels and in pieces. It's just cumbersome to try to make your point when you can just put a couple of sentences and sometimes words are just too much and it's better to have an one in one drawing and you can. One of the things I was thinking about with combining words and pictures is that so I've gotten really attached to the Smed Mertz character

[00:38:46] And so now I mean we have stickers if you buy a book you'll get a Smed Murt sticker. And so so so now like if you have the Smed Murt sticker it means oh this whole therapeutic strategy to you in that one image.

[00:39:02] So that's one of the things that this combination of words and pictures can can can do you like and unpack it in different ways.

[00:39:11] And it's in that case it's making many ideas a character which is even when you're just doing storytelling with only words or just want to make an idea and a character. That's the way to get your readers because those characters can fight or something and there's a whole adventure even though it's about ideas and you're super good at it and it's not what you do all the time.

[00:39:33] Tell me a little about the National Library of Medicine graphic medicine ill conceived and well drawn show that you curated. How did this come about. So the director of the traveling exhibitions at the National Library of Medicine Sámi

[00:39:49] Gave a keynote at the comics medicine conference at Johns Hopkins in 2004 and she asked me if I were a guest curator and exhibit which is basically the traveling part of the exhibit. It's. 7 6 7. Big banners are like 7 feet tall with information on them about graphic medicine is basically

comics about health and health issues. A lot of them are memoirs marbles marbles is like right in like the mix of graphic medicine. But then there's also there's also other kinds of comics involved in that.

[00:40:31] So. So that after 2014. So it finally was launched this past January and it was immediately upon it being offered to libraries and universities across the country and within depending on who you talk to within a couple of days or within a couple of weeks it was booked out for four years so. So there was a demand for it. I think that comics are really getting recognized as an important way to get information. And I think in particular

[00:41:05] Health information has I mean I think it I think it's become clear that that comics are getting more and more respect as a literary medium. They're making its way into academia.

[00:41:21] There's you know like there are a lot of graphic graphic novel reading classes and they're incorporated into other kinds of things. But to have to have comics being recognized as a way to communicate science. Science and Health like as a clinical tool that's still coming along. So so graphic medicine I think is is really really exciting. And so I like that's one of the things I'm really curious about how Rocksteady is going to.

[00:41:52] There's a there's a lot there's a lot of I mean there's a lot of information in there and there's pages of citations. I did a ton of research and. And we'll see.

[00:42:04] I mean I think it takes this this this that kind of rigor to to get to the places that I think a lot of us in the comics in medicine I guess are driving toward and hoping for.

[00:42:22] I wanted to talk about stigma and any mental illness comes some stigma. Bipolar disorder is no exception. And but the idea of what a bipolar diagnosis is at least getting more complicated by more people telling their stories and by people I mean celebrities the best kind of people.

[00:42:43] Kerry recently addressed what's what's been the most surprising part of making your mood disorder part of your public autobiography. Well

[00:42:56] I guess I would say I would say that the two the two most surprising one would be well when I did Marble's I wasn't out about my disorder particularly my friends knew my close friends anyway. My family. Of my family. But so putting marbles out there was this enormous enormous coming out. That was it was it was terrifying very exciting.

[00:43:24] I mean it wasn't like it was a surprise. I'm working on this book for a really long time.

[00:43:29] But I had no idea how it how it was going to go over and and so going it was like it was like going over a threshold because this whole idea of you have company and really trying to make it make it clear for everyone else. Oh my god it became so clear to me people just how many people were not just understanding like they didn't think that I was like going to go you know like you know like they had some sort of understanding but they themselves had grappled with something or

somebody close to them had. And so that sort of sense of being like. Opening up strength and opening up to vulnerability is is really I felt like I like I really kind of liked to turn that one and then the other thing the other thing that really came of it was that I wasn't really expecting this to become such such a focus of my professional work and my work and my being really. I'm. I'm. I'm a mental health activist because I'm out for one because it interests me because it's been something that has felt so worthwhile to pursue. And because I think it's fascinating.

[00:44:52] I mean it's actually really funny I'm looping back to when I graduated from university in university with major in psychology.

[00:45:07] But I just you know kind of like like left left behind thought that I left it behind. And so like I've come come come back like full circle I guess.

[00:45:17] I don't know does it feel a full circle like I never really left. Left it apparently you know it just took a while for it to come come back together.

[00:45:27] Well let's I want to open this up to the world and see how this works. It works best.

[00:45:32] I've been told it officially works best if you just yell your questions and then LMB repeat them.

[00:45:43] That is actually an excellent excellent question. What advice do I have for teenage bipolar.

[00:45:49] So I will say this.

[00:45:53] Let's see Marble's wound up being kind of too adult for like say schools. I know a lot of teens read it but there is like sex. Sex and drugs in it. So I really when I started out when I set out to do Rocksteady I really wanted it to be something that was available to teens and appropriate for teens. And I spent hours on the phone with a psychologist a counselor at a high school and wound up realizing that there were enough differences and in what I was able to. Do was able to give in Rocksteady like teenagers. Aren't doing a lot of the decision making about health insurance and not have very different

[00:46:54] Very different issues around substances. Because I mean there's all sorts of stuff that's available in high schools and it's really different from the kind of drug and alcohol. Issues for adults.

[00:47:10] I mean maybe that kind of goes on and on and also I have to say that I have really I wound up in particular after talking with this counselor really mixed feelings about all of the medications that teenagers. I don't think that it's for anyone and I mean I feel that way about about. I think I think that there's a lot of overmedicate and there aren't a lot of long term studies. And

[00:47:40] And it's it's really it's our brains it's our brains and they're complicated and we don't know how they work. And a lot of. So you know one of the reasons when when I had meds it wasn't just take your meds.

[00:47:55] It was. If you take meds take your.

[00:47:59] I don't know that meds are they are the answer for everyone or for everyone all the time or for everyone indefinitely.

[00:48:10] I think that there are all sorts of it's really important. I mean I take that as an essential. I believe they are an essential part of

[00:48:17] Treatment.

[00:48:18] So that's kind of a preamble to you too. What would my advice be for teens is that I think it's really tricky. I'm not really I guess I guess the main the main thing is life for everyone else is that you're not alone. For one you're not alone.

[00:48:37] And reach out for help. Because it's just too it's too much for one person to take. And I think especially as a teenager.

[00:48:52] Thank you. I'm going to introduce a step before the Yoe which is raise your hand then but that was a great question I'm so glad you're here.

[00:49:01] Really great question and I.

[00:49:05] I wish I had a better answer. Actually I think that all of a sudden it's so individual. Anyway here I've continued on OK but thanks for that question.

[00:49:17] The important one you're calling on.

[00:49:20] Oh Jeffery I. Thank

[00:49:28] You. You mean like like from what I was talking about with what I when I started. So what wound up happening is that

[00:49:48] So I went down on the lithium and then I was just having other other things going on lady parts things like. Do you have breast cancer. Let's do this test. Do you have cervical cancer. Let's do this thing. So my body was just being really challenged and I don't and I didn't. But now I have to. And it was just exhausting. And so my psychiatrist said you know what let's not introduce something to your body right now.

[00:50:18] So you need to be. You need to be off the lithium or it needs to be low enough that we will do your labs and make sure that your calcium is going.

[00:50:30] There were some some other things involved in parathyroid and my calcium went down and so and so here you go.

[00:50:38] I mean it's just like the I mean I guess I'll try to keep it short but basically the oxcart Basil pain is on the backburner now.

[00:50:48] I've been stable on what would be considered a subtherapeutic dose of lithium. We have different theories about why it might be working. Maybe it's just me.

[00:50:59] And it's you know I'm just taking it like I could take him. You know I don't I.

[00:51:05] But I mean it could be because my brain has patterned itself after all this time of stability that that's the path that it is accustomed to being as well as my whole Smed Mertz thing to kind of like he died in place. But but that's so the motor day and I'm still on that and then I'm on a really dose low dose of lithium. Oh and I'll just add one other thing to that is that lithium really isn't study it's nobody makes any money on lithium. It's a generic it's a salt.

[00:51:37] And so there's there's all of this 0 problems with big pharma anyway but so I don't know.

[00:51:47] You know like. Like. So that's that's the that's the answer to that question. So. To. Are

[00:52:17] Here that we repeat it brings.

[00:52:22] So good advice for artists advice for artists with bipolar on how how to how to have bipolar disorder and be creative well one of the things that I was talking about next a do your thing and prioritize your thing and know that like being being stable but being fuzzy or not having ideas is not helping you.

[00:52:54] So I know that for me and from a lot of others that I've heard from other artists that that being stable means being able to focus better and means being able to kind of like be able to work work better.

[00:53:11] So it's it's really a matter of finding out what your what your I'm going to keep saying Smed Mertz when you're Smed branding commitments. So like how to take care of yourself and what that would be.

[00:53:25] So it feels like you. And so it feels like you can you can do your work and do your creative work. And if it means that you need to change something something else. And a lot of times that ends up being. You know then it is correlated anyway with disorders and creativity.

[00:53:45] And so it's there's for sure and like like a you're not alone. There's two more like your high toned Tenzing.

[00:54:00] One of my students a Cornish.

[00:54:09] How do you prioritize your time when you're working on a big like personal creative project as well as like the things that you have to do to pay rent and food and.

[00:54:22] Well and I mean always really actually a concern of I love I love teaching and I love really being being really like having a relationship with the students that that is that is a really dynamic one and it's definitely when I was working on Marble's and when I was working on Rocksteady it was it was really it was a really big consideration for me that I'd be present for my students. And I really think that I was very fortunate. The class that the class that you were in in particular where I there was a lot of studio time that I was doing doing studio work too that I would bring it in and that I could show you to like what that process was but it's always it's always really really hard I think for for any for any artist to figure out how to juggle to juggle all of those things. Even just as a freelancer. I get along like yeah prioritizing prioritizing all of those different. So it's hard. But one thing that I have definitely definitely learned is to just to get enough sleep. It's one of the things that I don't like it. It's really difficult for me. Most of the students still get enough sleep and pulling all nighters and stuff is really normal. And especially for my students who have any sort of anxiety or mood you know there's only so much that I can do as a teacher of an elective elective but. But that's definitely I mean that would be definitely something like a matter how much stuff is going on like don't pull all nighters and don't overextend because it's really only it's only going to come come back at you like maybe that'll be two days of feeling like you're productive and then and then long time of not being able to do. To do. To keep going that. Probably from. For

[00:56:32] Me Thank you so much.

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