

# crazy love

HER FATHER'S MENTAL ILLNESS HELPED THIS TV JUDGE LEARN TO LOVE HIM EVEN MORE, BY JUDGE LYNN TOLER

When I was little I had no idea what was wrong with Daddy. Often intoxicated, occasionally unhinged, Daddy was an ongoing event. Once, he tore out all the light sockets in the kitchen because we forgot to turn one off. Mommy mispronounced a word and he chased her down the street. Daddy broke out a window once when Mom said something about Russian oil production he didn't believe. Burned biscuits got the kitchen table smashed, along with the back door.

Though my mother always made a point of telling us it wasn't his fault, as a little kid this was hard for me to accept. What kind of love sends your family running out into the night and hiding in the bushes? I spent my early years wondering if all of life was really this chaotic, and if not, why was it this chaotic for me?

Then Daddy died.

Charged with giving his eulogy, I started going through his papers. And there it was, the big ugly word no one had ever used, but the one that explained everything.

"Psychosis", that is what his army discharge papers said. "Manic-depressive-manic type". These days they call it bipolar: different name, same behavior.

At first, the word set me on my heels. Conjuring up images of serial killers and women who drown their kids in the tub, "psychotic" is not the way one typically wants to describe one's dad. But after the initial shock subsided, seeing that word did a number of wonderful things for me.

First, and foremost, "psychosis" told me he didn't mean it. Better yet, it made those things Dad didn't do that much more significant. He never went after my sister or me, no matter how muddled up he was. What strength of character he must have needed in order to harness his illness that way.

Second, seeing that word taught me to define things for myself. It showed me that you can't just slap a name on something and let it go.



The dictionary definition of psychosis does not usually include the words loyal, brilliant, principled, and loving, even though my father was all of those things. I now purposely look beyond labels with everyone I meet.

Lastly, but certainly by no means least, having the word written down as a diagnosis helped me separate the illness from the man - which, in turn, allowed me greater comfort with some of the more random aspects of life. Daddy did not ask God to make him crazy so he could torment his wife and kids, just as other folks don't request cancer so they can die slowly in front of the people they love.

Once I saw that word written down in black and white, I stopped wondering. Never again would I ask, "Why me?" This applies only with regard to the way I lived, but with respect to misfortune generally. Life happens. You either ride the rollercoaster well or get caught under its wheels. Living with Daddy taught me to go with the flow. Life, though turbulent at times, seems much less random.

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