



Invisible part of me Old man and the sea

Personal piece by Amy

I have a life threatening illness, only it is invisible. I am bipolar. Unlike Santiago's problem which is man vs. nature, I have a problem that is man vs. himself. Many things come with this illness: seeing and hearing things that aren't there, rapid changes of mood just like the ocean, suicide attempts. I look at being bipolar as a boat in the middle of an ocean being pushed around. I am torn between doing what is good for me and listening to the tricks that my brain throws at me. I could have died or I could have been hospitalized for life a very long time ago. The question is, "What kept me going? What kept me alive?"

It was pure determination, the determination to live and the even larger determination to not be different. Just like Santiago, I am struggling to live. Just like Santiago's struggle with the sea, I survived my struggle with being bipolar. Just like Santiago, I am being pulled by both directions to go back home and be safe or to move into the deep, deep sea and be gone inside myself covered by depression. The only thing is no one sees that side of me unless I decide to let it go. I never let it go anywhere public for one reason alone, I don't want to be different. I am determined not to be different. If I feel different in anyway, even if it is the smallest bit, I makes me terribly frustrated. Sometimes I have to face that I am different and that is one of the hardest parts. Santiago is different by being older than the other fishermen.

Not all of it is bad though. I have learned lessons some adults haven't even learned yet like where to break down, how to handle money, how to control my moods, how to handle adversity, and many other things. The list goes on and on. It is what I have to do to be healthy. I embrace those challenges. I believe my disorder has helped me become a better person. Now don't start thinking I have done this all on my own. My parents helped my so much that I don't know where to start. They have been there 100% of the way. My illness is a big part of my life whether I want it or not. I can relate to Santiago so much through his life threatening experiences, his courage, and his determination to keep on going, to stay alive.

When I was first diagnosed, I was in a bad place, constantly sad and depressed, seeing things that weren't there. I can still feel like I am on a log flume. I get excited and then hyper and then I have a long drop into depression and if I go too far, I become psychotic. As a consequence, I have to stop myself before I get too hyper. The reason why is it's a long way down but it is an even longer way up to get out of the depression. When I am riding the log flume it is doing all the work, but on the way back up I have to walk. I got better though and now I am better than many people could have imagined.

Santiago had to fight with that fish to keep himself alive. I see the fish as my illness. If you think about it, Santiago and I both would have had the same results if we gave up and never tried again - death. I still remember the time I ran away from home. My mom came looking for me as I hid under some trees after I almost flung myself at a car passing by. My mom called my name and I finally came out and I was safe again. I cried and cried and then it was time to go to the hospital. I hated it there. It was awful because the bed was hard and it was filled with kids who were in bad shape just like me. I made it out of there in weeks instead of some kids who had been there months, but the worst part was all the fighting and the kid who had to be taken down by the security. I know I will never forget that experience. It was one of the most frightening experiences of my life and I promised myself I would never repeat it. It was like Santiago's frightening experience isolated on the boat struggling with the fish. I have to thank my mom and my dad for everything they have done for me and I just hope I can stay healthy and reach shore each time I go out into the ocean just like Santiago was able to get home. I am happy I have my parents just like Santiago had the young boy.