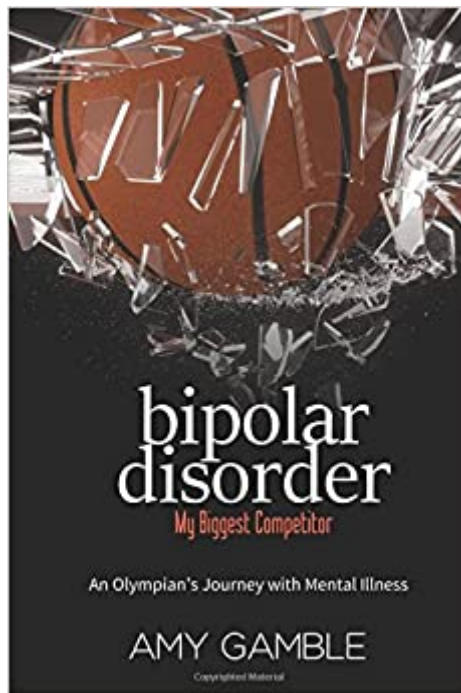




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Bipolar Disorder, My Biggest Competitor: An Olympian's Journey With Mental Illness



Synopsis

A small-town childhood, a close-knit family, a successful career, and an Olympic athlete--this was Amy's life...until it wasn't. That's the thing about mental illness, it doesn't care where you grew up, how smart you are, how many awards you've won, or how much money you make. It's an equal opportunity destroyer. From the earliest signs, to the denial, the manic highs, and despondent lows, bipolar disorder has the power to affect every aspect of a person's life. It derailed Amy's athletic and corporate careers, ruined relationships, and caused a whirlwind of chaos within her family. But now she's ready to tell her story. Ready to share the darkest parts of her life in hope of showing those diagnosed with mental illness that there is a way to overcome this world of uncertainty--a way to live and thrive in the midst of this life-altering disease. This is Amy's story... "Bipolar Disorder, My Biggest Competitor is the heart-wrenching story of an Olympian's struggle with and eventual triumph over the terrifying highs and lows of the bipolar disorder. Through scenes of astonishing visceral and emotional power, Amy takes us from the successful team handball Olympian to the darker side of bipolar disorder. With remarkable honesty and humor, Amy shows the effects of this illness on the mind, body and soul of those who suffer with it. However, despite the struggles, this is not a book that brings the reader down, rather a road map for wellness and a vastly informative yet entertaining guided tour of bipolar disorder for those who don't understand it. This memoir is an excellent guide to a painful and difficult yet treatable illness. Amy's courage in sharing her experience is impressive and commendable. It will help others struggling with this illness feel less isolated and more hopeful."

~Maura Andronic, MD Psychiatrist

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Customer Reviews

"Amy Gamble is a champion for mental health, advocating for awareness, improved care and the removal of stigma. In her book, she painstakingly describes the details of her own battle with bipolar disorder that led her from the U.S. Olympic team to a prosperous career for a top Fortune 500 company to a small jail cell in Montana and eventually to recovery. Amy's firsthand experiences with the obstacles of our own health care and justice systems are chilling. And just when you think her nightmare has to be over, it starts all over again. You come to understand that mental illness truly levels the field: No amount of money, prestige or physical strength can protect you from it. But her survival instinct, her faith in God, and the work ethic she developed growing up on a West Virginia farm and honed as an Olympic athlete kept her trudging onward through her darkest days. The book is in part a cautionary tale and a "what not to do" for the health care industry, as well as for families of those who are mentally ill and sick individuals themselves. Above all, it is a story of Amy's redemption, a reclaiming of the life she thought she lost and the emerging of a true champion who dares to dream again. Mental illness won far too many battles in Amy's life, but through her own education, proper care and sheer determination, she won the war. By sharing her story, she has ensured that her struggles were not in vain and many people will benefit from her victory." Betsy Bethel, Life Editor, The Intelligencer and Wheeling News-Register

Amy Gamble is a small town girl who has always had big time dreams. She followed those dreams all the way to the Olympic Games. Facing competitors on a world stage, she learned how determination could overcome all the odds against her. Amy needed that strength and those lessons when she faced the biggest challenge in her life-bipolar disorder. Amy is now the Executive Director of NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) of Greater Wheeling. She is a Certified Mental Health First Aid instructor and a mental health speaker. Amy has over 18 years experience working for Fortune 500 companies in sales, marketing and leadership. Amy has a M.A. in Organizational Management and a B.A. in Communication. Her mission in life is to help those who live with mental illness and their family members find help and hope. She strives to eliminate stigma by sharing openly her struggles and triumphs of living with bipolar disorder and educating audiences of all ages.

I thought the book was in enlightening I couldn't put it down once I started reading it I would recommend this book to anyone who has a mental illness not just bipolar

This memoir is not only captivating to me because it sheds so much light on mental illness especially on bipolar disorder; but it is equally captivating because of the author's life and journey itself. With this said, I confess that once I started reading this soulful and resourceful memoir, I didn't put it down until I finished. It took me 8 hours to read, I was on the go and actually grateful for the traffic. This is a memoir which shares the author's resilience as she in her own words "refuse to relinquish the title of my life to mental illness". A game of basketball or team handball or raquetball is easy to play because there are clear rules of the game. No matter how fierce the competition in these games, you know after the game life goes on and you can compete in other encounters and lose with dignity or win why not. No, not with mental illness. First of all it is no game although it plays you around like on a chess board. Secondly, if to be compared to any game, it is in my opinion best like boxing. Amy herself tells how in the ring with bipolar disorder, "my face was bloody, my eyes blackened, my nose broken, and my pride destroyed". The bravado here is that: "Each time I got knocked down, I got back up again". Amy Gamble is an Olympian and so staying on top of her game, being in good spirits and shape were very important to her. Indeed, when the signs and symptoms started setting in, so too did denial big time. Who Me? No way was her fierce reasoning. Yes mental illness could run in her family even if never talked about you know, yes she could burst with such unquenchable energy to literally move mountains and other times sink into such debilitating depression, but no she couldn't come to terms with the words bipolar disorder. The erratic life and actions on the spur in several instances, the wanderings and all which caused her two painful run ins with the law and a sting in jail not to talk of the massive financial and emotional devastation still didn't sink in well with her. She near gave up especially after losing so many close people like her dad and co, her loyal dogs and even some invaluable relationships. At the 8th or 9th round, the bloodied athlete in her through a series of divine interventions and other circumstances, started to recover. She looked her opponent in the eye, felt the bruises through her body, spirit and soul, grieved for what was and what should have been, and then gave her opponent the final blow. I say final blow because even though bipolar disorder is still out there and can rear up its dragon self anytime, Amy is fully prepared for any further competitions. The light Amy Gamble sheds on mental illness not only lightens our paths but hers above all.

I give this book 5 stars because if you have not dealt with mental illness yet, you will at some point

in your life. It may not be yourself, but a relative or friend or co-worker. A Must read. I liked that everything was right out there. Honesty. I felt the writer put her life out there so we could all benefit from her life's tragedies. And by writing this book she is STILL recovering and taking it one day at a time. Amy, Thank you for writing your life story. I know it will help many. It sure gave me better understanding about mental health. Best of luck to you. Diane

Amy Gamble wowed her fans on the court as a basketball player with Pat Summit and as a Lady Vols handball player, worked tirelessly as a team handball player and became an Olympian, all the while living with a serious mental illness. Amy's book, "Bipolar Disorder: My Biggest Competitor," takes her readers on a fantastical journey from world-class athlete to being restrained in a mental hospital. The wonder of her journey is always in her tenacity to be the best Amy Gamble possible. Her humility in relaying the story of her athletic prowess, descent to psychosis, and her will to survive and thrive is remarkable. As a fellow traveler, I appreciate Amy's willingness to share this often painful story in a way that leaves the reader with hopefulness in regard to recovery from mental illness. Amy has now dedicated her life to raising awareness and reducing the stigma of mental illness. This book is a beautifully and carefully rendered autobiography of her journey and describes her psychotic episodes in an understandable manner for those of us who have not experienced them. The openness of her story helps stamp out the stigma of mental illness and reassures her fellow travelers that wellness is an achievable goal.

Thank you Amy Gamble for bravely sharing your story. I read this straight through, smiling and laughing with you during your good times and triumphs, and choking back tears as you honestly describe your struggles. Your story is a great inspiration to those living with a mental illness and the people who love them. Thank you for so bravely opening up, and making yourself vulnerable, so that others may benefit.

Amy Gamble's account of her challenges with bipolar disorder is real, compelling, and moving. Just as the illness itself is characterized by the extreme euphoria of mania and the severe depths of depression, her narrative depicts her personal highs and lows as she struggles to understand and learn to manage this life-altering condition. From her competitive days as a collegiate and Olympic athlete, to her hospitalizations and even incarceration while in the throes of her illness, the reader gets a true sense of the battle she has fought and the slow process of ultimately reclaiming her life.

As a clinical psychologist who has worked extensively with many people with serious mental illness, I was particularly impressed by her focus not only on her challenges, but also her description of her journey of recovery and the strategies that have helped her regain stability and a new-found purpose as a mental health advocate. Amy makes a powerful statement when she says "Lives can be saved with a simple message that says help is available and treatment works, and there is no shame in having a mental illness." I would highly recommend this book to anyone who is personally affected by mental illness and for those who wish to gain a greater understanding of the effects of mental illness and the process of recovery.

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