

## **Pregnancy and Persecution: Laura's story**

In May 2004, I got pregnant. Like some bipolar women, when I became pregnant, my mind found stability. Perfect stability. I became 100% asymptomatic. I saw my psychiatrist every month and he was flabbergasted. I selected a midwife who had experience working with mentally ill women. She worked hand in hand with my psychiatrist my entire pregnancy because my medications are not safe to take during pregnancy. They monitored everything, but the reality is that during my pregnancy was the first (and only) time I have been completely stable without medication. It was a godsend.

On January 22nd, 2005, I went into labor with my first and only child. I knew the time had come and was unafraid; I'd had 9 months to prepare for this day and I knew that come-what-may, in a day or two, I would no longer be pregnant. On January 23rd, I went to the hospital and in January 24th, my daughter was born. The labor was long and slow and ended in a C-section, but in the end, I was no longer pregnant.

During the portion of labor where I was in the hospital, there was one nurse who could not comprehend the words "don't touch me." I told her multiple times not to touch me, as she insisted on touching me while I was having contractions. During contractions, women need to focus. It is a very, very internal process. During a particularly rough contraction, the nurse decided that exact moment was the time to try to wrap a heart rate monitor around my abdomen. I told her to back up; my partner told her to back up; she wrapped her arms around me to try to fasten on the monitor and I pushed her away. My partner informed the nursing staff that the nurse was not to come back into the room (and she didn't).

What she did do, however, was file a report stating I was violent and would pose a threat to my child. In my file existed the words "unmedicated bipolar." It didn't matter that I was perfectly stable. It didn't matter that there were pages of notes from two different Doctors noting that I was stable and showing no symptoms of bipolar. What mattered is that the nurse said I "assaulted" her.

My daughter was born via C-section, which took place without complication. She was put in NICU for unrelated health issues. I was relieved not to be pregnant. I was relieved my daughter's prognosis was good. I was also in a massive amount of pain because the surgeon neglected to add in a few notes for my post-op. Like painkillers. I was given 200mg of OTC Ibuprofen to recover from a C-section. It was insufficient for pain management, but because I was mentally ill and unmedicated, it was determined I was trying to get drugs from the hospital, not trying to manage post-op pain.

I couldn't get out of bed because of the pain, so I was declared "unwilling to follow post-op care instructions." It was noted that I had not visited my daughter (who was in an oxygen bubble in NICU, where I couldn't get to because of the pain). A psychiatrist (not mine) was called.

The psychiatrist, believing me to be a violent, uncooperative, unmedicated psychopath prescribed me 300mg of Seroquel 3 times a day. For those of you who have taken Seroquel, let that sink in. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner, I was to take 300mg of Seroquel. No ramping up period, I was to start immediately on 900mg a day. Let's ignore the fact that if I'd taken 300mg at breakfast I would have slept through both lunch and dinner. I declined the medication.

Because I declined to take an obscene amount of a medication that at the time was not approved for breastfeeding women, I was declared a danger to my child. The next day, two police officers and child protective services showed up to the hospital, where my 5 day old daughter was in NICU, to "remove me" because I was a danger to my child. I was still asymptomatic. Not a single sign of bipolar had reared its head in 9 months, and I was to have my child taken away from me.

Cooler heads prevailed when the nurse who reported me as "assaulting" her clarified that what she actually meant was "pushed away after multiple warnings not to touch." The psychiatrist, wisely, never came back. The police and CPS left and after 7 days in NICU, my daughter came home with me and my partner. When she was cleared to leave, we practically ran from the hospital.

I have been asked many times if I have ever been discriminated against because I am bipolar. The answer is an unequivocal yes. This instance was by far the worst I've experienced, but there have been other times and other ways, by other people.

The stigma associated with mental illness puts already broken people at a keen disadvantage. Who would seek help if by seeking help they may encounter this type of persecution?

**As a society, we cannot treat mentally ill people the way I was treated and then expect mentally ill people to be forthright about their need for help.**

To read more of Laura's blogs visit: <http://brokenmindblog.wordpress.com>