

## Scott, 45

### Father, self-employed handyman & former SES volunteer who struggled with undiagnosed bipolar disorder for many years, *ADELAIDE*

Father of one, self-employed handyman and former State Emergency Service (SES) volunteer, Scott, 45, Adelaide was diagnosed with bipolar disorder seven years ago.

After attending a motor vehicle fatality as an SES volunteer, Scott completed a mandatory psychological debrief, and was then referred for further psychiatric examination. He was subsequently diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

Having experienced extreme highs and lows for years, Scott sought treatment for clinical depression. He would go from “being the life of the party, to not being able to get out of bed for days.” Scott says that although treatment for depression helped him “to some degree”, his extreme moods persisted, unabated.

Prior to his bipolar disorder diagnosis, and commencing treatment, both Scott’s personal and work life were being harmed by his illness. Since commencing treatment however, he has managed to turn his entire life around.

Scott is participating in the *Australian Genetics of Bipolar Disorder Study* to help raise public awareness of, and assist researchers to identify the genes responsible for bipolar disorder to ultimately improve treatment for the illness.

**This is Scott’s story.**

Scott’s energy levels, creativity and euphoria echoed the rapid, cyclic nature of the bipolar disorder he experienced both pre-diagnosis and pre-treatment.

“My highs were very exciting, fun and creative. I would often do my best work when experiencing a high. Sometimes though, I would have no recollection of what I had done during an up-time.

“On the flip side, during a low phase, I would stay in bed for days, avoid my friends, and work really hard to hide my massive mood swings,” said Scott.

“The low phases would affect my ability to work. Although I was able to navigate my way through these phases because I owned my own business, they nonetheless affected my ability to earn a steady income, which placed me in debt a lot of the time.

“In hindsight, there were definitely some obvious catalysts for my mood swings, including frustration with work and relationship challenges,” Scott said.

“Even simple things, such as the TV not working or the internet going down, could trigger a downward cycle.”



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For Scott, medication has been the only solution to managing his bipolar disorder symptoms to date.

“Medication is the only thing that has worked for me, and it’s had an extremely positive effect on my life.

“Before I started taking medication, and when I was dealing with the reality of my diagnosis, I attempted suicide,” said Scott.

“This [suicide attempt] took a huge toll on my second marriage. Things just became too hard in the end. Upon reflection though, I think I’ve always had these symptoms, they just weren’t picked up.

“Aside from being medicated, I don’t think I could have pulled my life back in order without support from my friends,” Scott said.

Scott is encouraging Australian adults who have been treated for bipolar disorder to volunteer for the *Australian Genetics of Bipolar Disorder Study* – a ground-breaking international collaboration exploring the genetic risk factors associated with the illness, and how genes influence one’s response to treatment. QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute is leading the research and Scott genuinely hopes his contribution will allow experts to unravel some important answers to help combat bipolar disorder.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if genes play a large role in bipolar disorder. When I think back to my childhood, my parents had very similar traits to me.

“I often worry about my daughter and whether my bipolar genes could affect her. If her mood fluctuates, I find myself analysing her behaviour and wondering whether she is showing similar traits to myself, or whether it’s simply a normal part of childhood,” said Scott

“I do find solace in the fact that if she has bipolar, depression, or some variation of that, I’m more likely to identify it early, and hopefully treat the illness before it has the opportunity to compromise her life,” said Scott.

“I wouldn’t want her to learn the hard way like I did. I will try to be vigilant without jumping to conclusions with my daughter,” Scott said.

“I think the *Australian Genetics of Bipolar Disorder Study* will be very worthwhile. When I was in my twenties, if you had bipolar disorder or depression, you wouldn’t get the same recognition or support as you do nowadays, and you wouldn’t be able to talk about it as freely. So, it’s important to continue to raise awareness of the disorder,” Scott said.

By sharing his story, Scott hopes to empower others battling symptoms of bipolar disorder, to seek the professional help they may require, and to urge those who have been treated for the illness, to volunteer for the *Australian Genetics of Bipolar Disorder Study*.

“I encourage others living with bipolar disorder symptoms to seek professional help – to talk to people about their illness, and to learn how to best manage their symptoms.

“In general, I’ve found people to be much more helpful and supportive when they know what’s going on,” said Scott.

*Should you or a loved one be grappling with a mental health issue, and require support, contact the organisations below without delay.*

*Lifeline – 131 114*

*Beyondblue – 1300 224 636*

*MensLine – 1300 789 978*

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**To coordinate an interview with Scott, please contact Kirsten Bruce or Holly Hamilton from VIVA! Communications on 02 9968 3741 / 0401 717 566 or 0434 799 839.**