

Excerpt from 'LAID'  
Victoria Maxwell

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When I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and anxiety and...uh, psychosis – it's not like I suddenly stopped being interested in dating. In fact even in the hospital...well that's a whole other issue.

What I mean, is there are a lot of things to consider. Really, how do you even go about starting to date again? It's not like there's an outpatient program for us: "dating after diagnosis" or "intimacy after insanity".

One time, when I got out of the hospital, about year or so after – I kept running into this guy I liked. I don't think he knew I was alive. I think I must've been invisible. Ewww...don't tell that to your shrink: *invisible*. Red flag phrase for doctors.

I just mean Sam – that was his name, cute, red hair, bulging biceps. Skinny too, lanky. I just mean this guy, probably had a girlfriend or something and didn't even notice me.

My confidence wasn't exactly at its' peak so it wasn't like I was out there shaking hands and introducing myself as 'available'. I mean you have to be crazy to do that! Anyway...

And then once you start dating, how do you know when it's the right time to tell someone you've got a mental illness? Or...three? God. I wanted to be sexually abused, alcoholic, bulimic! Something traditionally dysfunctional. Something with some *sex* appeal! Not Jack Nicholson's: Redrum! Redrum! And Tony Hopkins' *Silence of the Lambs* Fava Beans: Ffffff...Fffff!

This has gotta all be strategically timed, right? Do you wait 'til the fourth date –you know to test the waters out? Or just blurt it out during the first – you know to put all your cards on the table, right up front? And then there are the specifics: after appetizers – but before dessert? Certainly waayyy before you announce the engagement and meet the parents, right?

Maybe it's sort of a "one-disorder-per-dinner-date" kinda thing. You've got to consider the overwhelm factor.

Really, I think it's quite like an art form...telling people, especially when dating...it's like pairing wine with food. You know... you should only disclose bipolar disorder when eating something mild and stabilizing, yet still richly complex...like a classic Fettuccine Alfredo.

Nothing too wild or crazy (poor choice of words). But you know - never with something like ...Wasabi tuna steaks over udon noodles.

And when I let the cat out of the bag about anxiety – make sure it's not with anything too complicated or overpowering - don't wanna add *unnecessary* pressure.

Nothing too finicky...like a soufflé...or that requires extra cutlery skills – like fondue spears or chopsticks. Something simple, like a hearty hamburger – something that adds strength.

And psychosis...well, just stay away from all flambé dishes.

Really though, how do you break it to someone? Maybe just a casual approach, a haphazard manner to mirror my history:

‘Oh, hi. No, I don’t eat meat, or smoke, but I do occasionally take Prozac and Lithium.’