

Advance praise for *When Lightning Strikes Twice*

Melody Leclair and her family have created a very informative and beautifully written series of memoirs regarding their journey dealing with mental health issues. If you are a person struggling with a bipolar diagnosis, a family member or friend trying to support a loved one in need, or a professional who works with children and adolescents, read this book! The Leclairs' candid thoughts and personal experiences will help you learn more about bipolar disorders and how to get help. Thank you for writing this amazing book, Melody! Also, thank you, Josée and Luke, for teaching me what being bipolar is like from a first person perspective.

—Karen Kelly-Miller, Teacher

This is a beautiful book. It is an honest, raw, and brave telling of one family's experience with mental health challenges. The writing is accessible and natural. I think right now, more than ever, this is an important story. Reading about how this family and all who supported them came together to navigate the complex and unpredictable world of supporting children with mental health issues was eye-opening. As an educator, I have been part of this process quite a few times and the journey is not for the faint of heart. I am proud of the Leclair family for sharing their experience so openly. The book is informative, funny, captivating, and inspiring! Bravo!

—Heather Walker, Teacher

Melody's book is a prophetic sharing of sacred story that every one of us needs to read. Through exquisite vulnerability, Melody offers us an in-depth journey into the darkness and light of mental illness within a family. *When Lightning Strikes Twice* provides a powerful opportunity for each of us to grow in understanding and the experience of suffering, struggle, grace, compassion, healing, love, joy, and transformation. I am deeply grateful to Melody and all of the people who shared their experiences in the making of this book. We, the readers, are deeply blessed to receive the bountiful harvest from the challenging journey of Melody's family.

—April Snider, Spiritual Director

This book is a beautiful and holy gift for you to open and treasure. In its pages is the authentic story of a family that must change to deal with new realities. It is a story that can change the world. Their story can help to reduce the stigma around mental health. It is a raw story yet so filled with hope. As we follow this family through the tough issues that they face, we are drawn into a bigger human story of loss, of hope, and eventually of new life.

—Debra Nicholson-Elwell, Pastor

Melody's deep sense of love and her amazing strength have carried her and her children through the real world of the heart-breaking and heart-warming story she shares in this book. As a teacher closely associated with her children, I marvel at how she has supported and cared for each of them, and how she has shaped three wonderfully caring, genuine, and compassionate young people despite the struggles placed before all of them. This is a remarkable story.

—Joel Barr, Teacher

Melody knows whereof she speaks. The mother of two children who both had early onset of complicated mental illness, she tells the story of their family with humour and humility. Her vulnerability and authenticity reassure the reader who is struggling with similar issues, and promotes understanding and empathy in those who aren't walking that road themselves but may know someone who is. As a care provider herself, she has the knowledge base to provide accurate information but does so in a format and language that are easy to understand. Her words of guidance for those who are living a similar story are helpful without being prescriptive. I would highly recommend this for any person who has children with mental illness in their world, whether among family or friends, in the classroom or congregation.

—Jan Young Baker, M.D.

When Lightning Strikes Twice is a masterpiece in navigating the mental health maze of the unthinkable, unbelievable, and untouchable. Melody brilliantly and sensitively opens our eyes to the uniqueness of bipolar

disorder through each of her children's personal journey. She has us look at the effects on the family system—those you love, those you touch, and the community that surrounds you. The wisdom Melody shares will help you find the strength to believe that no matter what crosses your path in life, you are not alone—not even when lightning strikes twice.

—Catherine Cameron, Psychotherapist

WHEN
LIGHTNING
STRIKES
TWICE

One Family's Experience
when Siblings are Diagnosed
with Bipolar Disorder

MELODY LECLAIR

WHEN LIGHTNING STRIKES TWICE

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Disclaimer: This is the author's family's account of life with mental illness. It is their hope that their experiences, and the informational appendices that follow it, will encourage others to seek professional diagnosis and treatment. This book is not medical advice or a substitute for it. Everyone's experience with systems is different and wait times or level of service may vary.

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1. AND THEN IT HIT ME

Luke

I LIE RESTLESS WHILE MY THOUGHTS CARRY ME AWAY TO UNIMAGINABLE places. My mind races as though someone is channel surfing, only there's no remote control that can stop it.

I sit up, I get out of bed, I lie back down, and the cycle continues for hours. Ten o'clock passes, then midnight, 3:30 a.m.... time abounds.

Maybe if I just write things down, getting the thoughts out of my head will stop them. I start to write, theories of everything and why things are the way they are. Such clarity, such genius. If only everyone knew what I knew, the world's problems would be solved. Page after page, I write. Only the more I write, the faster my thoughts come, like a treadmill in high gear, a cruel joke, my thoughts, they haunt me.

I run upstairs to tell my mom I cannot sleep. In a dozy state, she tells me to try harder. I persist. She finally tells me to lie with her and that she has to get up for work in the morning. I lie down, roll over, sit up, and get up again.

I return to my frenzied writing state. My determination to outrace my thoughts persists. I will beat this! I will myself back to bed...

And then it hits me. First a flicker, then a bang. I bolt out of bed and let out a blood-curdling scream: "I have been struck by lightning!" My mom and sisters wake.

"Shut up," Karina yells. "We're trying to sleep."

When Lightning Strikes Twice

I frantically tell my mother, the only person who will listen, that I've been struck by lightning, explaining the surge of energy that's pulsating throughout my body, making my heart pound, causing sweat to come out of every pore. I am terrified. Electrified.

I proceed to become over-concerned for the safety of our neighbours, whose house I think was also struck. I drag my mother onto the front porch in her pyjamas and point out the broken hydro pole that has split into multiple pieces. I explain how part of the pole landed on the neighbours' roof, while another part hit and damaged our trailer before landing in the deep window well of the basement near my bedroom.

"I have post-traumatic stress disorder," I exclaim. "I need to be taken to the hospital right away."

The shock is setting in.

Upon arrival at Guelph General, the normally lengthy process of triage and evaluation by the ER medical team is expedited based on the seriousness of my situation. I repeat my situation over and over like a broken record.

I watch as my mother sits quietly in the waiting room for the next eight hours while I, along with nurses and doctors, fervently try to ease my pain of body and mind. I lie in bed, restless. I question every action and inaction. I call to my mother, wanting and rejecting any comfort she has to offer.

Moments of clarity, confusion, and pain continue for the next several hours. Blood work, medication, and observation ensue.

Alas, my father arrives. He's apprehensive; I can sense his fear and concern. He listens as I share my pain, and at points he laughs out loud with his well-known nervous laughter, trying to process all that has happened. That fuels my erratic state. My diagnosis is well suspected.

My parents sit and support one another while talking with various members of my medical team. I can read emotionless, stunned, reluctant relief on their faces. As they approach me, reality begins to break. The doctor validates my experience and proceeds to inform me that he'll be transferring me to a hospital for advanced treatment.

"For what?" I ask.

The doctor replies, "Bipolar disorder. You're in a manic state."

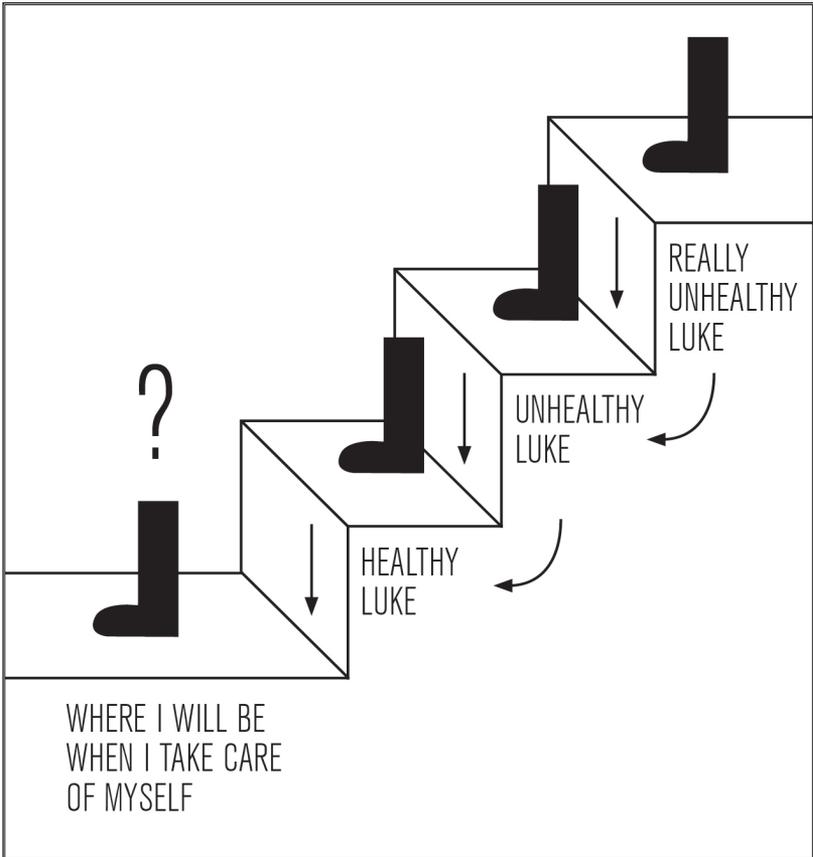
And Then it Hit Me

“Bipolar disorder. How can that be? My sister Josée has bipolar, not me.”

They don't know what they're talking about. I've been struck by lightning and am suffering from situational PTSD. The only thing we agree on is that I need help.

The next thing I recall, I'm being sedated before being transferred by ambulance to the Child and Adolescent Inpatient Program (CAIP) at Grand River General Hospital in Kitchener. My dad oversees the preparation as I'm strapped into the transfer bed and car.

My mother leaves, unable to bear the sight.



Examples of Luke's manic writings and drawings.

Make a Wish

Whether it is blowing out candles on a cake, wishing upon a star, picking a four-leaf clover, or blowing out a dandelion, all in the given hope of carrying out a wish to be further granted. The thought that there is something there looking out for us somehow relieves the pressure. If there is something out there that will determine our fate instead of us. They say create the kind of life you want for yourself, but maybe you are not supposed to. So, you hope in superficial things. What if it was so much bigger than giving yourself false hope? Find the real hope, it is out there.

—Josée Leclair