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My Invincible Summer

I've suffered from clinical depression since I was 9. I'm 21 now, and my parents have been practicing Buddhism since before I was born, so I've grown up in this practice.

Three years ago, I started going to a community college and living in a dorm. I was being treated for depression, and everything was going great — for the first two weeks. Soon, I found I no longer needed sleep or food. I discovered I was smarter than even my professors. I talked incessantly and spent \$3,000 in five weeks. I raced cars on the freeway, barefoot.

My parents say I disappeared, but I always knew exactly where I was. They eventually found me and dragged me home.

After 12 weeks, I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, more commonly known as manic depression, which is a chemical imbalance in the brain. Manic depressives experience dramatic mood swings, from suicidal depression to euphoria, which can escalate into manic psychosis. Without treatment, 25 percent of manic depressives commit suicide. Fortunately, my dad chanted and found a doctor, a psycho-pharmacologist, who prescribed the combination of medications that helped stabilize my moods.

With medication, I began to think rationally again, and the diagnosis sank in for the first time. It felt like a death sentence. My old life was over; I was no longer the person I had been. There were chunks of my life I could no longer remember.

So I began swinging rapidly into depression. I chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo for the most basic things: to remember on which side of the street to catch the bus, where my classes were, how to hold a pencil.

I didn't realize it at the time, but my chanting was pulling together the most amazing group of Buddhist deities, the universal forces of protection: my doctor; my English professor; friends I met just when I needed them most; and my parents and brother, who never let me give up on myself.

But as I started to get better, I became enraged at the whole idea of Buddhism. My illness could not all be the result of previous causes. I could not have been bad enough to deserve all this. And so I quit practicing.

It made me furious that my parents and other Buddhists were chanting for me. It was all a bunch of crap, I thought. Through religion and philosophy classes, I started learning about other religions. I attended a lot of different services. It made me angry to admit it, but Buddhism was the only one that made sense to me. I was a Buddhist, damn it!

My English professor kept encouraging me to apply to Austin College, and it turned out that the school offered scholarships. A scholarship would be necessary for me, but to apply for one, I'd have to write an essay about a life-changing event. I was hesitant to write about my illness — some people freak out when I tell them about it — but I chose to be brutally honest. I was granted \$13,000 a year in scholarships.

Soon I was back in a dorm for the first time since I went nuts. It was a struggle, but I remained stable — such a simple, boring word. But as someone who has lived through hell, I can't imagine a word more beautiful.

Through Austin College, I was offered a chance to live and study abroad — in France, where I used to dream of living. I've been attending classes at the Universite Lumiere in Lyon, France, and joyfully participating in SGI activities here, where I have found true friends, kindred spirits.

Three years ago everything looked so dark, so hopeless. As Albert Camus said, "In the

depth of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer.” And as Nichiren Daishonin wrote: “Those who believe in the Lotus Sutra are as if in winter, which never fails to turn into spring. Never have I seen or heard of winter turning into autumn” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 150).

In the darkness of winter, hope is difficult to find. Yet spring always comes. Chant for courage. Chant for confidence.

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