



PHOTO COURTESY OF ZACK McDERMOTT

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— ZACK McDERMOTT

"GORILLA AND THE BIRD" AUTHOR, PICTURED HERE WITH HIS MOTHER, CINDY CISNEROS-MCGILVREY, A.K.A. THE BIRD.



There's no way you go through that and not care about other people who have been going through it.

M.W.: *I was troubled by the scene in the book that described an interaction that you had with a good friend some weeks after he'd taken you to hospital. As you put it, "I'd never been read 'Terms and Conditions' by a friend before." What would be your advice to friends of people with bipolar disorder, in terms of how they should relate?*

Z.D.: Let me give you 'The Bird's' advice: "When people are at their worst, when your instinct is to be repelled by them, what you need to do is go toward them." Visit your friend in the psych ward. When your friend comes out, accept him as still being the person you liked, for all the reasons you liked him. Whether he inconvenienced you, scared you or jammed you up, think about how inconvenient, scary or jammed your friend or family member was. And "Jonas" – not his real name – if he could run that back now, he would probably do it differently.

Not all friends love you unconditionally. That's kind of OK. The more we know about mental illness and bipolar disorder, the less it'll happen that sufferers have friends that cut them off or step away. But you're allowed to decide when someone's too intense for you.

M.W.: *Tell me about the Bird, in terms of the way she's supported you and her work as a teacher.*

Z.D.: She has just always been so there and so unconditionally loving, not only to me but to literally hundreds of people. She told me today, "I feel like I'm getting pulled by four different horses off every limb and maybe a fifth one on my head."

I'm like, "Well, you're only helping 250 people or so, including my grandma, me, my brother, my sister, their children, her grandchildren and every single person in the Wichita Public School District who has dropped out of school and wants to go back, and not only get a GED, but their diploma." She's made a difference in countless people's lives.

She had to protect the three of us, my brother and sister, from the time she was 20 onwards. She was the buffer between us and the world, and me specifically. She was a helicopter mom in terms of, "Oh, you just got suspended again? Well, to hell with

them!" Some parents would say that's too lenient, but I can tell you it wouldn't have worked any other way. She couldn't have grounded me: I just would have left.

She's been totally unflappable in the face of my condition: that's false. She hasn't been unflappable; she's been crushed by it, but she's appeared to be unflappable, for me. She can't have as big a heart as she does, as big an empathy zone as she does, and not feel people's pain acutely. I can't tell you how she does what she does. That's a lottery she won.

Courtesy of Street Roots' sister paper, Real Change, INSP.ngo

up, I want to be freebasing cocaine." People who are freebasing cocaine have so much pain in their lives before they start freebasing cocaine.

We have to ask, "Is this effective?" Anyone with one eye open will tell you "absolutely not." What should be done after someone's violated the law is just the wrong question to ask. The question that needs to be asked is what we should do to prevent them breaking the law in the first place.

Very few people are born bad. Just look at Chicago. Why is the murder rate there whatever it is? It's not like people want to kill each other. It's because there's no jobs, no money. You have to let people have enough money to survive. People have to have basic human rights. That includes good health care, affordable housing and employment opportunities – and don't give me that "anyone can work at McDonald's" bullshit.

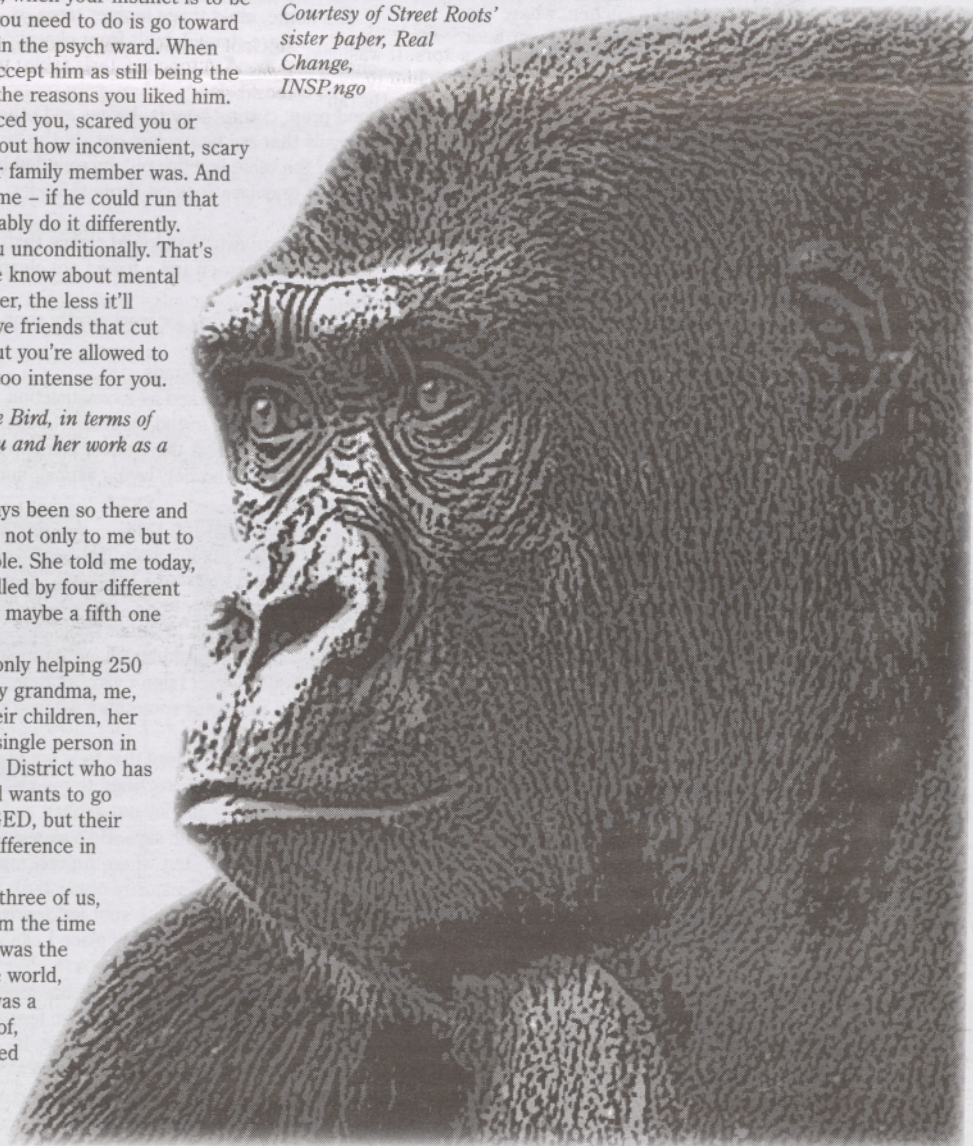
Tell me, Harvard Law grad, what your career would look like if you were born in the Marcy projects instead of Fairfax, northern Virginia. That's one thing that disgusts me about law school. Alumni, recruiters and staff want to tell you how special you are with your LSAT score and GPA. No, you're not. You had parents supportive enough to put a book in your hand. Or, in the very few occasions where you didn't have that, you won a different lottery, which meant you were just bright enough to get there on your own.

I have a close friend who grew up with very little money and had a very unstable mother and no father and she made it to law school, but she started reading books when she was 3 or 4. She won the IQ lottery and she won the I Love to Read lottery.

M.W.: *What effect do you see your memoir having on people with this disorder?*

Z.D.: I've had a lot of people email me saying "I'm a gorilla," and a lot of people calling me and emailing saying, "I'm a bird that has a gorilla." These are people who are just coming to terms with their own bipolar disorder, often after self-diagnosis. It didn't occur to me until I wrote the book that I could provide others with useful information. It's so costly financially and emotionally for us not to know that, and it's such an easy thing to know.

What's cool is that it's a binary thing. A lot of times, the gorillas of the world will have an instinct to be a bird after they get themselves sorted.



STREET ROOTS ILLUSTRATION/PUBLIC DOMAIN IMAGES



...the most common reason for the lack of advancement for Black women is the lack of mentorship and sponsorship. Many Black women do not have a mentor or sponsor who can help them navigate the workplace and provide them with the resources and support they need to advance their careers.

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