


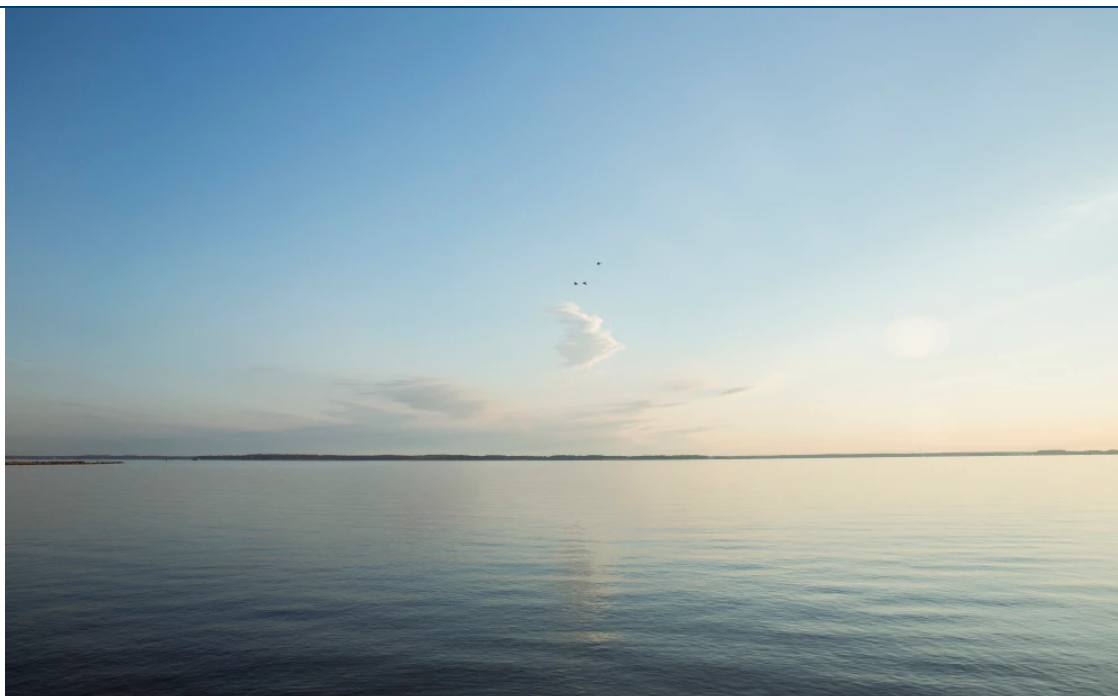
[Home](#)[Advertise](#)[Blog](#)[Subscribe Today](#)[All Posts](#)[FOOD AND DRINK](#)[HOMES AND PLACES](#)[PEOPLE](#)[More](#) ▾[Q](#)[Log in / Sign up](#)Story by Elise Seyfried // Photos by Caroline J.  Dec 30, 2019 4 min read

## MY BIPOLAR SUMMER, AND HOW THE SHORE HELPED ME HEAL



An old hymn resonates deeply with me. It begins “When peace, like a river, attendeth my way...” I do find peace by a river, or ocean or bay, and my favorite place is on Delmarva, in Lewes, Del. I walk along the shoreline, absentmindedly picking up bits of seashell, or sit and gaze at the sun-diamonds dancing on the surface of the water, and my racing thoughts are calmed.

By the sea, I am attended by the ghosts of my childhood self and my two sisters, happily scooping sand into buckets by the hour and chasing the screeching gulls. At water’s edge, I can see my own five children as they were years ago, jumping and splashing and swimming delightedly. More recently, my two little grandsons have discovered the joys of shore life and

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I don't like to remember what happened 13 years ago, but some memories are impossible to shake. It was the summer of 2006, and I had just been diagnosed with bipolar disorder. I was disordered indeed, with everything I understood to be true about myself completely upended. During the previous months in Philadelphia, before our annual return to the beach, I had battled terrifying daily mood swings. Depression like a thick gray blanket, muffled and distorted everything I looked at, everything I touched. Mania carried me to wild heights of euphoria, where my thoughts and words tumbled out at a frantic pace. The constant back-and-forth exhausted me to the point of complete despair, and my quicksilver temper and bursts of profanity were pushing away the people I loved the most.

I needed to get to the shore, the touchstone, the one place on earth where I could find serenity. I counted the days as I counted out my antipsychotic pills, each one bringing me a step closer to my beloved coastline. The day we arrived and unpacked, I headed down to the beach as soon as I could get away. At home, I had taken to wearing earbuds all day and much of the night, blasting constant music to distract me from the worries and fears that were threatening to engulf me. I was afraid to be without this crutch, so I shoved my iPod in my shorts pocket, just in case.

It was almost sunset, a glorious time to be on the seashore. The temperatures had dropped, and the sand was cool. I stood with my feet in the gently rippling water and waited for the click in my brain that would make everything all right again.

But there was no click, and the wild orange beauty of the evening sky, the whoosh of the surf and the twinkling lights from the boats out past the buoys, brought me no comfort. All was as flat and sad as it had been all year.

Finally, it was too dark to keep walking, and I left the beach, heartsick.



Throughout the summer, I kept returning to the water, even though I remained tormented there, as I was everywhere. At my worst moments, I fantasized about just walking into the sea, and disappearing forever. But as the weeks passed, those thoughts finally stopped forming in my head. In their place were bittersweet memories of happier times there, of a happier me there.

I walked at sunrise; I walked in the heat of noon. At first, I needed the escape of the rock music pounding in my ears, but there came a day I tried to make it through one hour without that noisy distraction and walked without earbuds. I was struck by the difference. It was like hearing waves approach and recede, and watching kayakers glide along for the very first time. It was wonderful. It was even peaceful. The next day, I lasted a little longer, then longer still. And so it was that, slowly, the shore began to heal me.

By the end of the summer, I had begun a new medication that seemed promising. I was no longer constantly frantic and irritable, and the mood swings had lessened in duration and intensity. It would be another six months before I really turned the corner, but those August days had given me hope that I could recover from this horrible disease.

Every summer since has been the greatest gift, as I have been well enough to enjoy my children, grandchildren and my life again, in the place we all love the most. My days are still very busy, and I am often over-extended at work. But I know what's waiting for me at the

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