

# MOODS

Serving People with Unipolar and Bipolar Illness, Their Families and Friends, since 1981

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## The Long Road to Creativity: Fifty-Nine Minutes at a Time

By Suzanne Gannon

*Using social media as a conduit for her creativity, actor and playwright Adina Taubman is shining a light on mood disorders through a series of broadcasts on her Instagram Live channel, @the\_road\_back\_at. The founder and artistic director of the Chrysalis Theater Company, Adina hopes she's helping dismantle the stigma associated with mental illness through conversation. Adina is a board member and long-time volunteer at MDSG.*

### **How do you define creativity?**

Creativity is a mindset. At its most basic level, it's channeling my need to express something, to make something out of nothing, which is very exciting. I began acting at 12, and though I didn't know it at the time, it was a form of therapy. I was escaping reality into this fun place where I could explore and live outside of any limitations.

### **Has your perception of creativity changed throughout your life? If so, how?**

First it was a way to pretend. Then it became something to learn at school. And then it morphed into something external, a way in which I was going to make my mark. And then it became something spiritual for myself. It's what Julia Cameron writes about in *The Artist's Way*—it's organic and constant.

**How does your work on this Instagram Live series fit into the context of your work in general?** When I write my own shows, they tend to be about social change; they spotlight an issue. I did this with my solo docudrama, *A Line in the Sand*, which was based on a series of interviews with survivors of the Columbine massacre. In that work, I looked at the students as a compass that could guide the rest of us in processing that event and healing. In *The Road Back*, both in the play and on Instagram, I'm doing the same thing. I tell my own story of a crippling episode of depression—a breakdown from which I slowly began to recover only after my husband nearly pulled me out of our apartment and over to an MDSG meeting on the Upper West Side one night 11 years ago. In telling the story of my recovery in a solo show, I'm hoping not only to help those with mental illness feel less isolated but also to help others who don't suffer from it to understand it better. I'm trying to build community by sparking a conversation with those beyond the MDSG community.

### **How does creativity intersect with your mood disorder?**

Creativity for me is an essential part of my mental health, not only for where it takes me but also in the moment of engagement in the work. If I'm not involved in something creative for a week, I get really irritable. It's part of my self-care, to allow the bubbling of energy.

### **What is your process?**

There's a popular misconception—it's very popular—that one has to be manic to create. No! I have to

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sleep, exercise, eat well, and meditate. In that space I'm able to produce better work, although occasionally, when on deadline, sugar and coffee can help! When I'm depressed, I don't create. I follow the adage that I must put my butt in a chair and write. What I create is not always great at first, but I'm at least getting it out onto the page.

## What impact do you think you've made thus far with the Instagram broadcast?

Well, the interviews always start off with me improvising some chit-chat as my guests learn the intricacies of getting a live interview up and running—log on on your phone, not your computer (!), secure a consistent WiFi connection, prop your phone up so that we can see your face. A bloopers reel would be very funny. We've accrued more than 300 followers with almost 100 posts. We've spoken with many thoughtful and talented members and board members of MDSG (as well as individuals outside MDSG) who suffer from depression, bipolar disorder, and anxiety. We've gathered information on the signs and symptoms of various conditions and discussed strategies for recovery. We've posted inspirational thoughts, spotlighted relevant events in the news, and spoken to psychiatrists, authors, and artists, among others. We've hosted a mini-monologue festival, and offered a forum for top-

ics like race and mental health, faith, and suicide prevention. We do all of this in just under an hour. Our audience is very active with comments and reactions during transmissions, which is affirming.

## How have you fared during the Covid lockdown?

Like so many New Yorkers, I grew claustrophobic in my two-bedroom apartment with two kids and a husband. But I was blessed to be able to walk along the Hudson in Riverside Park a block away, to speak to my psychiatrist, and keep my meds straight. This combination kept me afloat. And MDSG's 'Heal the Healers' meeting on Tuesday nights—a small meeting for MDSG facilitators—was a huge help. It showed that if I had my support system in place, I could find ways to be creative. I don't know that I would have started @the\_road\_back\_at if we had not been locked down and if my *The Road Back* had still been on stage.

## After a year and a half, what's your takeaway from the experience?

Doing anything of service, anything that's purposeful, always lifts my mood. This is true for anyone. The fact that I have had the opportunity to use my creativity in this outlet, well beyond acting, is a really good thing.

*Suzanne Gannon is a MDSG board member as is Adina Taubman, the interviewee.*

## Items of Interest

Sedas, Michelle. "How to Handle Depression When World Events Overwhelm You" HealthyPlace. <https://www.healthyplace.com/blogs/copingwithdepression/2017/11/depression-when-world-events-overwhelm-you>

Tracy, Natasha "I'm a Professional Patient—My Health Is My Life" [Bipolar] Healthy Place. <https://www.healthyplace.com/blogs/breakingbipolar/2021/10/im-a-professional-patient-my-health-is-my-life>

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