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Insights into personality disorders from a girl who's had one
by Stacy Pershall

Parents of Sasha Menu Courey Talk About BPD

When their daughter died by suicide, Mike Menu and Lynn Courey became activists.
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On June 17, 2011, 20-year-old Ontarian Sasha Menu Courey, no longer able to fight the daily torment of borderline personality disorder, ended her life. She was a student at the University of Missouri, competing on the swim team, until an injury and interpersonal conflict plunged her into a severe depression. Sasha's parents, Mike Menu and Lynn Courey, sent Sasha to the inpatient dialectical behavior therapy program at McLean Hospital in Belmont, Massachusetts, where she improved with treatment. However, when it came time to transition from inpatient treatment at McLean to outpatient treatment in Ontario, Sasha's mood plummeted, and she tragically completed suicide.

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Stacy Pershall is the author of *Loud in the House of Myself: Memoir of a Strange Girl* (2011; Norton), chosen for the Barnes and Noble spring 2011 Discover Great New Writers program.
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Determined to raise awareness about BPD and the dearth of available treatment, her parents started [sashbear.org](#), a memorial website stating their mission to "make waves on BPD." They started the [Sasha Menu Courey fund](#) at Mount Sinai Hospital Foundation, with the money dedicated to expanding DBT services in Toronto.

I asked Mike Menu and Lynn Courey if I could interview them about Sasha's life and treatment, and they graciously obliged. Here are their answers.

1. First and foremost, what would you like for my readers to know about Sasha?

Sasha was vibrant, smart and talented. She was the life of the party in social settings whether with family and/or friends – her presence could not be ignored and will be forever missed. In one on one situations, she was always there to give advice. We were overwhelmed by how many of her friends had, at one time or another, received help from Sasha to get them through a rough time. In the end, it is bittersweet and poetic that only her heart survived, after all that was the essence of her being and it is therefore fitting that it lives on the body of another who is so grateful for the gift of life he received.

2. What can you tell us about the difference between BPD treatment in the US and Canada? How do you think Canada's single-payer health care system affects mental health care?

From what we have seen, availability and accessibility to affordable effective BPD treatment is an issue everywhere. In Canada, free state-run intensive BDP treatment programs exist in some locations (e.g. greater Toronto area), but they are still mostly inaccessible, plagued by long waiting lists. Access to private treatment is also available in Canada in some locations but the biggest issue remains the availability of qualified resources and their willingness to help those living with BPD.

3. What advice do you have for parents whose children are newly diagnosed with BPD?

Don't give up. Learn as much about the disorder as you possibly can. There are good resources out there but start with a reputable 'anchor' site and go from there. For example, [borderlinepersonalitydisorder.com](#) has a resource centre that can be your starting point. Families can make a difference so consider yourself part of the team that can make a difference for your child. Even when times are tough always consider that you are in for the long haul and that the relationship between you and your child matters. Learn DBT and especially validation, get into programs like [NEABPD's Family Connections](#) where you can learn these valuable skills, they will help you

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4. How do you talk about Sasha's suicide with people? What have you learned about how to discuss suicide and BPD so that others can understand?

We don't hold back. We believe we are not doing enough as a society to prevent suicides and that many are affected. We have been overwhelmed by how many people, after hearing our story, have come to us with stories of their own about a friend or a loved who also struggled with suicidal thoughts and/or died by suicide. At first we were hesitant to go into high schools and talk about Sasha's sad story but we found that this story was powerful and got students (and staff) paying close attention to the rest of the presentation which is a message of hope about how BPD is more prevalent than most people think and how effective treatment DOES exist and how lessons learned from DBT can help everyone! What drives us is that we have seen how evidence-based treatments such as Dialectical Behavioral Therapy can truly make a difference, Sasha wrote in her journal while getting treatment at McLean Hospital that DBT was for her like 'air to breathe'. We truly believe that teaching DBT-like skills in schools can help fill the coping-skills gap and save lives. This is why we are compelled to discuss suicide, so that others may not suffer through this tragic loss.

5. I've found that when people think of suicide, they tend to think of depression – usually long-term, unremitting depression. However, the suicide attempt that almost took my life in 2001 was very much due to anger and impulsivity. How do you think these factors contributed to Sasha's suicide?

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