

BtR 395 Transcript

00:00:00 - Jerry Dugan

Are you looking to create a life worth living in your faith, family, and career? Then you're in the right place. Welcome to beyond the Rut, the podcast that shares encouraging stories and practical advice to help pull you out of your rut into that life worth living. I'm your host, Jerry Dugan. And in this episode, we're going to be joined by retired General Gregg Martin. Now, you may know this, you may not, but I served an Iraqi freedom, and one of the things I did to help kick off that war was drive through a landmine field through these lanes that were already there. General Martin and his team at that time, he was Gregg Martin. They were the guys who paved the way for us to go through that minefield. Now, unfortunately for General Martin, that kicked off full onset of bipolar disorder. In fact, we're going to talk about his newest book, Bipolar General. And we're going to talk about the importance of taking care of our mental health, getting the help we need, and surrounding ourselves, people who will support us and help us heal and grow. So sit back, relax, grab a notebook and a pen, because here we go. All right. Hey, Greg, thanks for joining me on this day. How are you? It's.

00:01:10 - Gregg Martin, U.S. Army, Maj. Gen. (Ret.)

I'm doing great. And thank you so much for having me on. I really appreciate it.

00:01:14 - Jerry Dugan

Oh, this is my pleasure. We met through a really cool friend of mine out of interview Valet, the Schwabs. Tom and Karen Schwab reached out to me, and they said, hey, do you want a general on your show? I'm like, yeah, why not? And then she started telling me about you and then gave me your one sheet. I'm like, this guy was where I was at the same time. And she was like, yeah, he was the guy in charge of making sure the engineers plowed these lanes through the minefields. And she's like, do you know anything about that? I was like, Karen, I got to drive through that in the middle of the night in night vision goggles. Actually, I was right in the back. I was the backup driver, in case. But they had me in the back of this Humvee with a map and night vision goggles, and they said, hey, just make sure we stay on track. I'm like, doesn't the briefing say stay behind the vehicle in front of you? And this was how morbid we were. They were like, and if the vehicle in front of you blows up, stop following it. That guy obviously veered off out of the lane. I'm like, wait, what? They said, no, just stay in the middle. You'll know if you're getting out of the lane. They made these big berms on the side, and we're like, okay, cool. So I was like, I know those lanes firsthand, so I got to talk to this guy. So thank you for making them wide. That's my first thing I wanted to say.

00:02:31 - Gregg Martin, U.S. Army, Maj. Gen. (Ret.)

Well, you're very welcome. Third Infantry Division, Rock of the Marn has my utmost respect because you guys were the main effort on the attack to Baghdad as part of Fifth Corps. So all effort was support third ID above all else and help them keep moving forward.

00:02:53 - Jerry Dugan

Yes. And it mean. And I was even thinking about it as we were going through there. I'm like,

okay. We didn't do our part until it was dark and these lanes were already here, which tells me they got out here before we were even out here and plowed these things with guards watching them on the other side. That is gutsy as heck. I'm like, that is engineering for you right there with that. You've had this long career in the US army that goes back to the 70s by decades. I mean, you were in some of the same areas. I was in Germany. I've been reading through your book. So I wasn't in Darmstadt, but pretty darn close. Lanzrule and a few other places.

00:03:35 - Gregg Martin, U.S. Army, Maj. Gen. (Ret.)

I know these.

00:03:36 - Jerry Dugan

And last night, I was even talking to my wife, like, Liv, I'm reading this guy's book, and I'm getting all nostalgic. And she's like, you thinking about Germany again? Yes, I'm thinking about Germany again. And she's like, are you thinking about Broachen and Bratvurst? I'm like, yes. I'm so hungry right now. She's like, it's 11:00 go to bed. I'm like, okay. Oh, man. But again, thank you for coming on here. And you bravely have come out with a book called Bipolar General where you share about this struggle that you faced. And you didn't discover it until later on in your career either, that something had to give. You were going down a path that was really causing a lot of trouble with folks. It wasn't your best foot forward, in a sense. And you had a trusted friend and leader share with you. You had a trusted friend and leader share with you. Hey, it's time to step down, get some help and all that. And then that's when you started to discover, oh, I've got what? And then you found out you've got bipolar disorder, and you've had it forever, but it just kind of masked itself what was that like when you had that discovery? It was, like, around 2014, I believe.

00:04:48 - Gregg Martin, U.S. Army, Maj. Gen. (Ret.)

So you hit it. Well, I was basically on the bipolar spectrum, a rising slope of bipolar disorder for my whole life. And for decades, it helped me enormously, because this condition, called hyperthymia, is a continuous level of low level mania, which gave me extra energy, drive, enthusiasm, problem solving skills, creativity. So I was like the Model army officer. All those traits I had, and then they were enhanced and boosted by the hyperthymia or the pre bipolar disorder, and that continued for decades. And I was incredibly successful in every way. Leader, athlete, scholar, army officer, until 2003, when we were together on the attack into Iraq. That the thrill, the ecstasy, the euphoria, the stress of leading about 10,000 troops in combat, that triggered my genetic predisposition for bipolar disorder. So it was triggered when we attacked into Iraq. And I felt like Superman. My energy level shot up. My mind focused like a laser beam, didn't need sleep. And so that continued for about a year, until we went back to home station in Germany, and then I plummeted into depression. And that was my first full up, down cycle of bipolar disorder. But I had no idea I had bipolar. Nobody did. All they saw was a very successful senior officer. Nothing wrong with this guy. Model army officer. And so these ups and downs continued from 2003 to 2014. Higher highs, lower lows, undetected, undiagnosed, until finally, 2014, I went into full blown mania, and it became so disruptive, over the top, out of control. I literally went into a state of madness, insanity. My behavior was bizarre. And I can describe in detail some of that. But finally, then people realized there's something wrong with this guy. And basically people, the students, the administration and the faculty, started writing anonymous

letters to my boss, who was the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They wrote letters to him saying, hey, General Martin has lost his mind. This guy is crazy. Here are the things he's doing. So General Dempsey, the chairman, did an assessment and then decided to call me in and talk to me. So it was a Friday afternoon in July 2014, and I get a call report to the chairman in the Pentagon on Monday morning at ten. So I go in and report to him, and he comes across the room and he gives me a big hug. And I knew him well. We had served together many times. And he said, greg, I love you like a brother. You've done an unbelievable job. Nobody could have done what you did in two years in transforming this organization. I give you a grade of a plus, but you have until 05:00 p.m. Today to resign, or I will fire you. And I'm also giving you an order to get a psychiatric evaluation this week at Walter Reed. And so you would think maybe I'd be disappointed. I wasn't. I said, thank you, sir. This is great news, because God put me here to do big things, and now he's putting me somewhere else to do even bigger things.

00:08:25 - Jerry Dugan

Oh, wow.

00:08:26 - Gregg Martin, U.S. Army, Maj. Gen. (Ret.)

Now, ironically, nine years later, bipolar mental health advocacy that I'm doing is the biggest thing I've ever done in my life. So I resigned. I did three mental health exams that week. All three gave me a clean bill of health. Said, you're fit for duty. There's nothing wrong with you. But the doctors were wrong. They didn't get the information they should have gotten. They didn't have a complete picture of my condition, so they misdiagnosed me. Over the next few months, I went from the height of mania, remember? Because bipolar, what goes up must come down. I went equally low, deep into depression. So I had crippling, hopeless depression. Lost interest in everything. Just want to be alone. Wanted to die. It was horrible. And then I got really bad psychosis, which are hallucinations and delusions. So I had delusions that people were following me, spying on me, wanted to get me arrested, put in jail, murdered. Of course, it wasn't true, but that's what my sick brain was telling me. And then finally, after about November of 2014, I knew I was sick. I knew there was something wrong when I had this depression. So I went in on emergency sick call to Walter Reed, told them what was going on, and I said, what's wrong with me? And they re-diagnosed me and said, you have bipolar disorder. And they were right this time, and I was grateful that they got the diagnosis. But from there, I went from bad to worse and went into two years of a death spiral in bipolar hell. And I'm really lucky to be alive today.

00:10:06 - Jerry Dugan

Yeah. And great courage on your part to go back, because I know my time in the army, you were never sick. You couldn't be sick. You couldn't need help, especially if it was mental health. You couldn't be that guy. And to go back and say, hey, something's wrong. I don't know what it is, but something's wrong. That is huge, for one. And I was just thinking, how did they miss that? I know you mentioned that a few times in the book, that you're like, how did they miss this? And I'm grateful that they caught on. Well, you went back and told them, hey, something's off. And then they're like, okay, now, based on what we know, boom.

00:10:44 - Gregg Martin, U.S. Army, Maj. Gen. (Ret.)

But the big reasons they missed it were, number one, when they looked at me, they saw a senior officer, hugely successful, wearing stars in his fifty s. All they saw was success. They couldn't see beyond the mask of success. That was one big thing. The second big thing is they didn't want to hurt me. They didn't want to injure my career or delay my retirement Date or something like that. The third thing was, if they had gone to the chairman's office and gotten the information that got me fired, it would have told them a much more complete picture. So they didn't really do the right things in terms of diagnosing me.

00:11:38 - Jerry Dugan

Yeah. And I could see where systemically, that would be an issue, too. Just huge work that you're doing, though, to raise that awareness. And this is a thing, this is needed. And you add that to all the work that's being done to help soldiers get the help they need after they've done tours in combat and the stress of fighting a global war on terror, and it's just so much need for it. Sadly enough, it's powerful there. And you've mentioned a few times from your early life going up to 2003, a lot of what was already there was masked, too, by something called hyperthymia. Thymia. Thymia, not hyperthermia, that's totally different condition. That's the temperature being too high in your body. But hyperthymia was there masking everything. Tell us about in what ways was having bipolar disorder, like having a superpower and gave you an advantage.

00:12:41 - Gregg Martin, U.S. Army, Maj. Gen. (Ret.)

So right off the bat, starting probably in junior high school. Again, I had no idea I had this condition, but I was like the superstar kid in junior high, high school, West Point, in terms of really successful student athlete, leader, all those kind of things. And I did have natural ability and talent, but all of it was boosted and enhanced and supercharged by this hypothymic condition whereby the brain produced and distributed excessive amounts of these powerful chemicals in the brain, like dopamine, like endorphins. And they get into the brain wiring and into the cells of the brain, and they essentially elevate you. They make you happier. You can work harder, run faster, think smarter. And I had that my entire. So, you know, when I went to, you know, very incredibly successful Army Ranger school, super successful, off as a lieutenant and a captain in the army in Germany, incredible success. And then, like, in my spare time, I did things like I would party all night, and then go run marathons. And I ran seven marathons under 3 hours.

00:14:00 - Jerry Dugan

Oh, man.

00:14:01 - Gregg Martin, U.S. Army, Maj. Gen. (Ret.)

Including a 236. And we would do things like with my lieutenant buddies Friday night after a hard week of work, we'd jump in a car, drive to Austria, party all night, ski the entire weekend like Mad Men, drive back up into Germany, show up to work just before PT, and work another week. And we did that week after week. And it know, you could say, well, that's just know you were young and that's how you were. But the hyperthymia had a lot to do with it. And I'll give you another example. After I was a company commander, the army said, hey, we want to send you to graduate school at MIT, and your mission is to get one master's degree in engineering.

Well, what did I do? I got two master's degrees, a PhD, and I finished the army command and Staff college by correspondence during that time. Now, that is not normal. That is evidence of a bipolar brain where I'm boosted by these chemicals. And that continued to rise until, as I talked about earlier, 2003, the incredible stress, trauma, thrill, euphoria of Iraq, where I was really happy. I felt like I was on cloud nine. I felt bulletproof all over the battlefield, in and around Third Infantry Division, 101st Airborne. And that's where my real, no kidding, bipolar journey began. And then it lasted till 2014. And then finally, in 2016, I got the right medication and began my journey of recovery.

00:15:44 - Jerry Dugan

Yeah, and you've shared with us that dichotomy of when you were full blown mania and just that height of just excitement, and then that bipolar hell where you're, like, seeing things, and you didn't go through that journey alone. You had General Dempsey say, hey, you're going to get evaluated, and I got to fire you, but you're going to resign, basically. But besides the help from General Dempsey, you didn't have to fight this battle alone, did you?

00:16:10 - Gregg Martin, U.S. Army, Maj. Gen. (Ret.)

No. First, a word about General Dempsey. I mean, an old friend, mentor. He was my commander four different times, and very caring, compassionate leader. And he did the right thing. He got me out of a pressure cooker situation. He probably saved my life and prevented me from having a stroke or a heart attack, or even worse, mania. And when you're in a state of mania, you can do all kinds of crazy things, like attack people, kill people, get in terrible car, know, I thought I could know. I maybe would know. Jumped off the top of a building thinking I could actually flap my wings and fly. So Dempsey really saved me, and he saved my marriage as he was, he did absolutely the right thing. In addition to him, I had a wonderful wife and family who continued to support me through the trauma and the chaos and the insanity of being in acute bipolar disorder, both the manic side and the depressive side and the psychosis. So my wife and family really played a huge role in supporting me and helping me. And then I had one army battle buddy in particular who kept a hold of me and I stopped answering texts, emails, phone calls. I just was withdrawn from the world. And he persisted in getting a hold of me through my wife and he helped me get into a really good VA hospital that really probably saved me. And then I had other army friends that were very good, consistent, loyal friends who didn't judge me for being mentally ill. They didn't blame me or say, hey, it's because you're a weakling and you have no character, just try harder. They didn't do any of that stuff. They just were there. They supported, they listened. And so I had a team of people, in addition to the medical professionals at the VA in White River Junction, Vermont, who were absolutely outstanding. And these people were fantastic at what they did and they really helped me get better, even though it took months to get better. It was like kind of a steady progress with them until they got the right medication. So I was fortunate to have a good team and then also give glory to God because it was his will that I came through this out the other side and can talk about it and share my lessons learned. So I have no doubt God really did save me much of it through these wonderful people that were helping me.

00:18:50 - Jerry Dugan

Yeah. And was it easy to accept that kind of help right away, or did you find yourself struggling with that, too, like when people were coming forward to offer their help and support?

00:19:00 - Gregg Martin, U.S. Army, Maj. Gen. (Ret.)

I was so depressed that I didn't want to be around people. I was in such bad shape. I lost all interest in everything. I had no energy at all. All I could think about was death and dying and envisioning my own brutal death, multiple ideations where I was murdered or killed. I was withdrawn, I was confused, I was indecisive, I was all these really bad things. So I really didn't want to have anything to do with people. And so, yeah, I guess it was a little difficult to accept their help. And the one army battle buddy that helped me, he said, my son has bipolar disorder. And you may think you're never going to get better, but you will. You're going to get better. You're going to get medical help. You're going to get better. It's going to be okay. And I didn't believe him, but he was right. That was really important. The one time during this stretch of bipolar hell where I really did get happy around people was when I went to the inpatient facility at the VA Hospital in Vermont. And I loved the professional medical know, the doctors, psychiatrists, nurses, therapists, chaplain, all these people who were focused on helping me get better. They were so professional, compassionate, caring, knew what they were doing. They were patient, and I loved being around them. And so those people made me happy, and I embraced any help they could give me. So I guess it was kind of tough to accept, but at the VA, it wasn't.

00:20:47 - Jerry Dugan

Wow. I'm also just thinking about a moment ago, you gave glory to God in your recovery and getting the help you needed. And just moments later, you tell me how your battle buddy from the army, and for those who have no idea what we're talking about, when we say battle Buddy in the army, they teach you early on, wherever you go, you take a buddy with you, and that's your battle buddy. And from there, you develop over time. You're like, ride or die. This is the person I will go into any situation, anytime, anywhere, because we'll have each other's back, whether or not you're assigned to the same unit. And so Greg is talking about, he has such a friend who he referred to as his battle buddy through his army career. And what blew my mind is not just that he was there for you, but he was there for you because he also has a son who had to fight bipolar disorder. And it's like, what are the freaking chances? That's the thing that blew my mind right there. I was just like, oh, man. Yeah, it just gives me goosebumps thinking about that and some of the other things I've experienced in my army life, but in my life after the army, and it's just like, man, what are the chances of. That is just so huge. We talked a little bit about wanting to overcome the stigma of mental health needs, and I think we said at the very beginning, as well in this conversation that it's so important to be able to get past these stigmas, whether it's depression, suicide, PTSD, bipolar disorder. What words would you want to share with folks listening in if they're struggling with any of these things to get past whatever's holding them back for you? When you had depression, you didn't want to deal with anybody. You didn't want to be around anyone. And at some point, you were able to get past that, to get the help that was being offered to you. What would you say to folks that are going through that kind of valley or that hell?

00:22:51 - Gregg Martin, U.S. Army, Maj. Gen. (Ret.)

Well, stigma is the biggest barrier to people seeking help for a mental health condition, a mental illness or what have you. It's the biggest barrier, because what stigma does is it makes the person who's afflicted with the illness or the condition, it makes them feel embarrassed, ashamed. They feel like it's their fault for being sick, that they're the one to blame, that it's because of their lack of character or lack of willpower or something bad about them. And we know scientifically that that's completely untrue, that mental health conditions, mental illness, brain illness, brain conditions, they are physical or biological in nature. So it's just as biological or physical to have bipolar disorder or any other mental illness as it is to have diabetes or heart disease or cancer. So nobody stigmatizes a person who has cancer or heart disease or diabetes because they say, oh, that's a physical thing. But when you have a mental illness, it's physical, too. It's just that it's inside the cells and the wiring of the brain. And the brain is a physical organ. It's not like just ether. It's real physical stuff made out of cells and blood and all kinds of material. And so what has to happen to get rid of the stigma is, number one, we need to get rid of it because it's killing people. Because people who have a mental illness who do not get help, the typical path for them is their marriage and family get destroyed, their career goes down the drain, they lose their finances, they get addicted to drugs, they're homeless, they get arrested, and they're in jail, and they're either killed or they die by suicide. So that's a common thing. The stigma actually makes that happen. And the stigma is our fault, because we have the wrong views of these conditions. We blame the person, the afflicted. So people, we need to get rid of the stigma, encourage, persuade, help people to go get medical help, because if you get medical help for any of these conditions, like I've done for bipolar disorder and psychosis, if you get help, the chances are very high, over 90% success, that you'll be able to live a happy, healthy, successful life.

00:25:28 - Jerry Dugan

Yeah. And I just know through my own journey, I avoided getting any kind of evaluation for anything after I served in the Army. And my wife had always said, jerry, you probably need some help around PTSD. Your rage quit video games when there's no reason to. And I'm like, but you really can't. 360, no scope in real life. That's just not a thing. It's just like playing video games with my son, and he just didn't like it. And one day, I remember I was on a camping trip with some guys. If you call it a camping trip, the tent had four walls and a roof. So to me, it's not camping. But anyway, one of the guys there, he was talking about his VA appointment, and it's too bad he didn't get the disability rating to get the free access to the state parks here in Texas. And I was like, wait, that's a thing? And he said, yeah, if you get this percentage, the state of Texas will get you a state park pass to get into state parks for free. And I'm like, I love backpacking. I love free. And that was my motivation, to actually go get help and get screened. And I was like, I'll just go and answer some questions and so on. And when they gave me my rating for PTSD, I was blown away. I was surprised, but my wife wasn't. She goes, yeah, I've told you for years you probably needed help. And I'm like, now what do I do? She goes, you probably need to go get help. And I still haven't gone to get help. I just like, I'm fine, but in talking with you, I'm like, I probably still need to go get help. What's holding me back? It's just me saying, oh, there's something wrong with me when the reality is now there's help out there and need to go get it. I'm okay, but I could probably be doing a way better than if I go get somebody

to chat with. So that got dark. Greg, you just came out of the book. Bipolar general, my forever War with mental illness. It's really good read, guys. You got to get it. It's on Amazon. And then you've got your own website. General Gregg Martin. There's the book right there, guys, for those who are seeing the video and go check out his website, generalgregmartin.com. That's Greg with two G's at the end. And if folks want you to come out and speak to their organization, run workshops, whatever it is, well, mainly speak. How do they get a hold of you? What's the best way for them to get a hold of you?

00:27:59 - Gregg Martin, U.S. Army, Maj. Gen. (Ret.)

Okay, first off, thanks for mentioning the book. That's this story in great detail, in depth, and everybody who's read it has had nothing but great things to say about it. The way to get a hold of me is to go to my website, and I've actually got two ways on. The one that you'll be able to remember the most is WW dot bipolargeneral.com takes you to the same place, and basically on there there's a link that you can email me directly and then just email me, tell me who you are, what your organization is, what you want to do, how you think I can help you, and we'll figure it out and make it happen. I've given probably close to 100 talks in the last couple of years. Between talks, podcasts, interviews, it's probably at least 100. Many of them are on the website. I published about 25 articles. Most of them are on the website. I just published the book. So the website has a ton of information and then you can assess and see if I'm the guy you really want to do your program, and I'd be happy and honored to do it. I love sharing my story because my life mission is sharing my bipolar story to help stop the stigma, promote recovery, and save lives. And that's what I do by speaking, writing, and conferring.

00:29:24 - Jerry Dugan

Oh, man. Greg, it was awesome to have you on here. Karen, if you're listening to this episode, thank you for making this introduction again. Thank you.

00:29:34 - Gregg Martin, U.S. Army, Maj. Gen. (Ret.)

You're most welcome. It's really been an honor and a privilege. Thank you. And I'm so grateful and proud of your service with the mighty Rock of the Marn Third Infantry Division.

00:29:46 - Jerry Dugan

Wow. I hope you got a lot out of that conversation like I did and took copious notes, and you're thinking about how could you either a take care of yourself on a mental level, even better, or reach out to somebody who could use some advice, resources, support, and so on. Now you can learn more about Bipolar General Gregg Martin's platform. Reach out to him for speaking engagements, all those good things, by going to the show. Notes@beyondtherut.com Three nine five. There you'll find links to all those resources, plus links to other episodes I've done where I've interviewed veterans, talked about PTSD, the importance of taking care of our mental health. Now, I'm glad you joined me for this episode, and I look forward to joining you again on the next one. But until then, go live life beyond the rut. Take care.