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Approx. word count of final manuscript: 50,000 to 60,000

# Between Two Poles

## *Living Authentically in a Bi-Polar Marriage*

by Ally Johnson

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**Working Title: *Between Two Poles***  
***Living Authentically in a Bi-Polar Marriage***

## Thesis

Approximately six million people suffer from bi-polar disorder in the United States today. My husband is one of them. The burdens of this mental illness on love and marriage rest heavily on the shoulders of many couples who don't seek proper treatment or acknowledge the havoc being wrought in their daily lives. Through our personal journey, we learned to understand and deal with the bi-polar disorder in the realm of our marriage to the ultimate success of our relationship as well as our individual lives.

## Summary

This story is about saving my husband's life, awakening to the bi-polar personality disorder, and navigating our tremendously difficult marriage relationship while unpacking the diagnosis. From an attempted suicide and complete relationship breakdown to a vision of hope for the future, this is the journey of us. This is the quest of two married people for love in spite of seemingly impossible odds, and these are our encounters with God's miraculous power of healing and restoration along the way.

## Benefits

This book is written for those dealing with the gut-wrenching dilemmas presented by any kind of depression or mental illness. The heartfelt sharing of our traumatic journey through both will encourage readers to move forward in their own lives, while recognizing they are not alone in their plight. Understanding the truth about love, marriage, and bi-polar disorder will beckon the reader into action, while encouraging them to get the support and help they would not have otherwise found.

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## Motivations

*Between Two Poles...* is written to highlight the trials, victories, and personal growth that a person can experience in mental illness, specifically bi-polar mood disorder and depression. *Between Two Poles...* is written from the perspective of survivor and marriage partner, while providing a depth of understanding not normally realized by those of a more clinical approach. A section at the end of each chapter will provide the reader space to journal or answer insightful questions regarding how God is moving or has moved in their lives. The book is written in an authentic, honest, and transparent style and will become a companion resource for the reader who seeks encouragement through the sharing of anecdotal stories and Biblical principles.

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## Chapter 1: Freefalling

*What I expect to be real isn't. I try to cling to the tattered edges of reality, desperately grasping for anything that might make things right again. I flail around clutching at the air, clawing for anything to help me. Some small branch, a twig, anything...I can't see but I know I'm freefalling into a dark black pit where the fire burns all around. The air is thick and hot, my chest is heavy, and I can't breathe. The flames lick my feet, teasing my clothes, caressing my body, mocking my predicament, laughing at me. I'm trapped, falling fast, surrounded by fire but I don't get burned.*

*"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." Psalm 23:4*

**[San Antonio, TX] August 16, 2005**

**6:25am CST**

"Good bye," Grant whispered into my ear as I struggled to wake myself from a sound sleep. He kissed me lightly on my lips as my eyes opened. I quickly wrapped my arms around his neck whispering, "I love you. Have a good trip." He nodded, and I watched as he quietly left our bedroom. He was heading for Dallas for the next twenty-four hours. I couldn't help but wonder if it wasn't a good thing. I flopped back down on the pillows for a moment, glancing at the clock, it was 6:25. I still had five minutes before the kids would be up for their second day of second grade. I tried to close my eyes and rest, but a

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familiar tide of melancholy washed over my heart as I began mulling over the previous night's argument.

I didn't understand what was happening to us; it seemed like all we did was fight lately. There was nothing I knew to say that made anything better; in fact, whatever I tried just made things worse. It was always the same old thing: I didn't appreciate him, he was just a meal ticket, and I was never going to understand how hard he worked to make me happy. I sighed, and rolled over...staring out the window for a moment before I decided to shake it off and hop out of bed.

We had always worked things out before; there was no reason for me to think we wouldn't work this one out now. I promised myself I would pray, seek God's guidance, and continue to ask Him to show me where I was wrong. I knew it was important to Grant to respect and honor him, and definitely I loved him. It just felt so hard. I wanted to show him how much I appreciated all he did, but I didn't know how. Last night's argument had been a bad one and I was scared.

As I wandered out to start the coffee in the kitchen I could hear Zach and Kayla moving about in their rooms. They were still excited about starting second grade. They were such great kids, and I knew they would be running down here any second, bursting with excitement to hurry up and get out the door. If I could stall them for a few minutes, I

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might be able to quickly check my email before we ate breakfast. I met both of them at the top of the stairs and instructed them to go make their beds and put their dirty clothes away. “Mommy is going to check her email. Why don’t you guys come to the game room when you’re finished, and then we’ll go downstairs together.” They groaned, but raced each other back to their rooms to see who could make their bed the fastest. I chuckled as I sat down at my computer; man, I didn’t want them to grow up.

### **6:43am CST**

I wiggled the mouse, and the screen saver popped up. As I rolled the cursor to my outlook express icon, I noticed several minimized icons at the bottom of the page. Huh, I wonder what happened here. Maybe one of the kids had been playing on the computer last night and I didn’t notice it. Oh well, that’s easy enough: I’ll just close these out before I open my email. I could hear the kids chattering to each other; it would only be a moment before they came racing in. I better hurry up.

With a click of my mouse the first icon expanded on my screen. I was expecting Dora the Explorer or Disney Channel, but I caught my breath in surprise and horror, my brain struggling to comprehend what I was looking at. The website was filled with tombstones and grave markers, and at the very front of the page was a gray, sculpted tombstone of beautifully hewn marble, inscribed, Grant Johnson, July 17, 1970- August 2005. My heart pounded in my ears, and my stomach began to churn.

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Numbly, now, I clicked the next icon. A coffin. A beautifully crafted oak-colored coffin with cream satin lining was featured on the page. *What kind of cruel joke is this?* I couldn't fathom what I was seeing; this couldn't be real. My hands were shaking as I expanded the final icon. Exploding onto my screen were the Air Force Academy guidelines to be buried on Academy grounds. Grant's name was filled in as the deceased.

I fought the urge to vomit as stomach bile filled the back of my throat. Blinded by tears, I choked back the sobs that were clutching at my throat. I could hear the voices of my children in their rooms down the hall, sunlight was drifting in through the window blinds, coffee was in my mug, and I was staring at a computer screen decorated with cryptic messages of my husband's death. None of it made sense to me, none of it at all. I quickly minimized the icons and tried to breathe again. Fire flickered around the edges of my vision, and my head was filled with the sounds of my own voice screaming, "Oh Dear God, Oh Dear God!"

Something switched inside of me as I jumped out of the chair: *I must get my kids to school. I cannot fall apart right now. I have to get through the next thirty minutes.* A saying from my Healing Hearts class drifted into my consciousness, "When you don't know what to do, do normal things." I said it again, and I kept repeating it to myself in my head while I made Zach and Kayla's breakfast. *Do normal things.*

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I spread peanut butter on bread, smeared jelly on the other, slapping them together to make a sandwich. *Normal things.* I fed the dog. I brushed Kayla's hair. I made myself another cup of coffee. *Normal things.* I helped them pack their backpacks, gave a quick instruction on shoelace tying for Zach, and tried to suppress the hysterical voice inside. "Finish your breakfast, Kayla. Brush your teeth, Zach," a forced smile on my face. Meanwhile, I made a quick call to my friend Martha, "Do you think you could stop by my house on your way to work, I've got something I need to show you?"

When I hung up, I continued with normal. It was automatic now. I smiled at my neighbors, made chitchat with one of the mothers at the school gate. *Just keep doing normal.* I even took Yukon for a walk, grabbed a shower, and decided that today was definitely a no-makeup kind of day. But despite my best attempts at normalcy, my entire body was quaking, my head pounding, and icy tentacles of fear were gripping my heart so tightly that I knew something was terribly, terribly wrong. I had little idea of what to do...and no idea what was coming next.

### **8:30am CST**

I ran to the front door, and as much as I wanted to throw myself into Martha's arms, I contained myself and invited her into the kitchen. I sat down politely, "Would you like a drink? Coffee? Tea? Water?" She shook her head no, inviting me to begin.

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“I can’t even begin to tell you how glad I am that you’re here,” I said across the table. “It has been a very difficult couple of days, and I have no idea what’s really going on.”

Martha’s face eased into a quiet smile and she said, “Allison, why don’t you tell me, and we will take it one step at a time.” I sat back in my chair, wondering if speaking these horrible things out loud would make them true. And then, the words found their way through the cracks in my façade and began to trickle out. Then they began to pour.

I told her about the awful fights, how Grant kept telling me how much he hates being married to me. How selfish I am and how unhappy he is. The words came rapidly now as I found courage in speaking the truth and threw down my makeshift walls of denial. I showed her the picture of the little blonde girl crying beside a tombstone for Santa Claus. And I described for her, in his words, how the little girl is me, and I am crying because my Santa Claus is gone.

I felt lost now, in a raging torrent determined to throw me outside the realm of my sanity. But there was more. I told her about the scripture verses he had written on our bathroom mirror and kitchen counter...about death, meaningless living and leeches that are never satisfied. I told her about the motorcycle he’d bought and his plan to go pick it up in Atlanta and how I will never understand him even though I’ve tried. I told her about the

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morbid photographs on my computer and how he's gone to Dallas for business and how I'm afraid he's not coming back.

### **9:15am CST**

My head hurt as I looked at Martha across the table, waiting for her to say something. *I am floating on the backs of the words I have spoken. They are real now, and I grip them tightly.* “Allison, I think we should go and look at the computer, and you can show me the pages you were talking about.” I nodded my head and we moved noiselessly upstairs to the computer.

“Martha, why don't you go ahead and open them, and I'll sit here.” She agreed and one by one she clicked each icon open, expanding the photos of coffins, tombstones, and burial instructions across the computer screen. *I wonder what she's thinking.*

She turned to me with sober eyes. And I know even before she says it. “Allison, I think we have a very serious problem.” I stared blankly at her for a moment before I replied, “Yeah, I thought so.”

*The screams are mine, but I don't recognize their sound. I'm plummeting, into darkness. The putrid scent of death wraps itself around me. My skin burns as the sulfuric claws of hell wrench my heart from my body, squeezing until I gasp for breath. My mind is calling,*

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*“Won’t someone help me! PLEASE!” But I can’t make the words; no one will hear me above the howling. I’m in hell, and my words are gone.*

### **9:20am CST**

“Allison, I’m going to make some calls. If you can, you need to print those pages from the computer.” Martha stared at the crumpled heap of my body as I lay on the game room floor. “Allison, I know this is hard. You’re going to get through this.” I nodded my head as she walked out of the room. *Get through this? How?* I pulled myself off the floor and dumbly activated the printer just as she asked.

Printed papers in hand, I wandered down the stairs and heard her on the phone. As I rounded the last few steps, she saw me and moved out the front door. I watched her close the door behind her and figured she was telling someone that I’d completely lost it and that my husband had too. In fact, it wouldn’t have surprised me at all if someone had shown up at my front door with a straitjacket and carted me off to the insane asylum. *That would have been far better than being in hell,* I thought grimly.

Standing in the sunlight by the front door, I watched Martha gesture wildly with her hands to someone on the phone. It was going to be a pretty day; I could feel the warmth of the sun on the front window. Waves of guilt mixed with fear washed over me now. I

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felt bad for involving Martha in this fiasco. I felt guilty for needing help. I felt weak for not knowing what to do. I hated what was happening, and I was terrified. Martha's words sifted through the door, "I don't know what to do. I wasn't trained for this. But she's holding up okay." *Hah, that's funny.*

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Grant's desk inviting me to keep it company for a while so I disappeared into his giant chair. I sank into the folds of leather willing myself to invisibility. With eyes closed, I imagined the four of us the way we were when we were happy. I thought of the way the kids climbed all over him, and he pretended to collapse under their weight, his laughter mixed in with theirs. His smile, and the way he said just the right thing and made me grin even when I didn't want to. I could feel the warmth of his big fingers, caressing mine the way they did when we sat together and just enjoyed being close. *Jesus, could you come back right now? Please could you rescue me from this?*

I ran my hands over the smooth lines of the wood desk. His office smelled like a mixture of printer ink, cherry hardwoods, and rich cigar tobacco. Papers were strewn across the top of his desk, and mountains of books were piled next to the bookshelf. In spite of myself, I almost laughed out loud. He definitely had his own way of organizing his stuff. I closed my eyes again and saw him sitting there on the phone handling an important call. I saw him doodling on his notepad or chewing on an unlit cigar while processing some

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important deal. I would stand in the doorway sometimes, just to hear the smooth inflection of his voice as he beckoned someone into a new way of thinking. He was good at that, changing people's minds.

Jolted out of my reverie my eyes flew open. There had to be something I was missing. Something, somewhere that I could grab hold of to make sense of this mess. I opened drawers, driven by an anxious hunger to immerse myself in his stuff. I was possessed by a new and strange curiosity to understand this man whom I had loved for 14 years. I was desperate to find something about him I might recognize. I dug through photos of Zach and Kayla, chocolate Reisen candy, pipe tobacco, pens, paper, and a list of goals with checkmarks next to the goals accomplished.

I thought if I could find clues that gave a direction to follow, perhaps that would call him home. I opened the last drawer and there sitting on the top of the stack was an envelope. My eyes burned with fire as I picked it up. With shaking hands I turned it over and then turned it over again. My name and address were on the front, it was stamped and the return address was Grant Johnson. What I hadn't counted on in my quest for clues was an answer, and I held it in my hand.

## **Previous Writings**

Author, Article, *Wow, I'm a Coach...Now What do I do?*  
*Journal of Christian Coaching, Magazine, Spring, 2008.*

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## The Author

Ally Johnson is an adoring lover of Jesus Christ. For eighteen years she has been chasing after the majesty of her Lord, seeking to answer the call He has placed upon her heart. She is filled with a profound desire to minister to the wounded hearts of women and passionately seeks to encourage them in their own relationships with Jesus.

Ally has served as small group facilitator in Bible studies for men and women at her church in San Antonio, Texas for the past five years. She is a graduate of the Wise Counsel Training Program, by John Drakeford and Claude King. Ally is also a certified Life Coach receiving her training from the Center for the Advancement of Christian Coaching. A former third grade teacher, Ally earned a Bachelor of Arts in Education from Central Washington University and is currently building a ministry for women called "Resurrected Girl."

San Antonio, Texas is where Ally makes her home, with her husband of fourteen years, Grant. Together they have been blessed with two children, Zachary and Kayla, and one great big yellow dog, Yukon.



## Current Endorsements

The following individuals have offered to endorse this project:

*"Between Two Poles" will rock your world! Told with insight and sensitivity, Ally's story alternately stuns and inspires. Ultimately, it will equip you to bridge the gap for others who are caught between two poles."*

**Jerome Daley, ACC, DPM**

Leadership Coach and Church Consultant, author of five published books

*"Ally's story of despair transformed into victory is at once captivating, gut-wrenching, and full of hope. From the first chapter, you are welcomed into a world that all too many people know, and too few are willing or able to share with others. But with Ally and Grant, the door is courageously flung open so that others who live in the same kind of world can find real hope for healing and restoration. Thanks Ally, for inviting us in!"*

**Roger Erdvig, M.Ed.**

President, Center for the Advancement of Christian Coaching

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"It has been a pleasure to watch God bring amazing healing to her life. I believe that Allison has something powerful to share with the body of Christ."

**Marguerite Hunter Hudson, MS**  
Pastoral Care Pastor  
Community Bible Church

"Ally Johnson has penned a graceful, gracious, gripping memoir of a marriage brought back from the brink. She offers much needed insight to the perplexing illness of bi-polar disorder; how to survive when a loved one is mentally ill; and how to preserve love, faith, and sanity when it seems your world is falling apart. Whether or not you have grappled with mental illness or marital strife, *Between Two Poles* will leave you breathless and restore your hope in the God for whom nothing is impossible."

**Sharon L. Fawcett**

Author of *HOPE FOR WHOLENESS: The Spiritual Path to Freedom from Depression*

"Allison Johnson has a God-given ability to speak His truths into the hearts of women and has been instrumental in encouraging women who are on the healing path. Her work will encourage other women to live a victorious life."

**Patti Cummins**

Director of Support and Recovery  
Community Bible Church

"*Between Two Poles* reads at times like a suspense novel...but this isn't fiction, it is a true story of turmoil, tragedy and the beauty of God's ultimate healing."

**Kathy Pride**

Author of *Winning the Drug War at Home*