

Michael Schratter biography

Michael Schratter is a Vancouver fifth grade teacher at David Oppenheimer Elementary School and a social columnist for the 24 Hours newspaper. On August 1, 2010, he embarked on his "Ride Don't Hide" 40,000 km journey around the world, across six continents and 33 countries on his bicycle. Along the way, he is raising awareness about mental illness by sharing his own struggles with bipolar disorder, encouraging others to share their stories surrounding mental illness, and by publishing a bi-weekly Vancouver newspaper column on mental health issues. The 42-year-old was diagnosed with hypomania in 1990, a mild form of bipolar disorder, and was then diagnosed with ADHD a few years later.

The mental health crusader is hoping to shatter the stigma around mental illness and raise funds for the Canadian Mental Health Association BC Division's child and youth mental health initiatives.

Growing up in Vernon, he knew he was different. He had difficulties in social situations, was hyper and was not able to focus in school. He was placed in gifted classes but underperformed. His curiosity led him to research into what was going on. At 10 years of age, he read Encyclopedia Britannica every night and learned about mental illness.

Throughout high school, Michael had problems with his self-esteem and depression. His parents didn't understand him and figured it was due to teenage hormones. He ended up living with his friend's parents in his senior year, moved to Vancouver after graduation and worked as a bartender. Later, he moved back with his parents at his father's encouragement, but his depression only worsened. He tried taking his own life but realized that it would only hurt his family. The traumatic event led him to getting the help he needed.

His love of cycling came from travelling with his family in the Okanagan and Europe, and his desire to gain confidence as a traveler, led him to bike across Canada in 1994. He biked 8,500 km in less than four months. Throughout the journey, he was asked what motivated him to take on this adventure. He realized then that he wanted to ride around the world to raise awareness for mental illness.

On August 17, 2011, Michael embarked on the Canadian leg of his worldwide journey starting in Halifax. He will trek across the Canadian terrain to raise awareness and funds for children and youth suffering from mental illness. He has been speaking to youth of all ages in schools, and adults in the workplace, educating them about mental health and his journey both internationally and nationally. He concludes his ride on November 12, 2011 in Vancouver. Join him on his expedition by riding along with him, sharing your story, making a promise to end mental illness stigma, or donating to the cause. Visit www.rideonthide.com for more information.