



## Ida's Diary Discussion Guide

Director: August B. Hanssen

Year: 2015

Time: 63 min

**You might know this director from:**

Pushwagner (2011)

### FILM SUMMARY

“Most important is that you are who you are.” The opening words from IDA’S DIARY protagonist Ida Storm, who offers us a raw, intimate seat on the roller-coaster ride of her life, told over the course of a bumpy, bruised, tension-packed 63 minutes.

In 2006, at the age of 19, Ida began compiling a video diary, perhaps as a way to order her thoughts, to substantiate her existence, something she otherwise felt she had such little control over. Diagnosed with borderline personality disorder and subject to a visibly intense tendency to self-harm, Ida struggles to make it through the events of an ordinary day. For Ida, there is no ordinary or predictable level ground on which to stand and face her life. The camera seems to offer her a constant amidst the turbulence of her personal storm.

Having received a package from Ida in the mail in 2010 containing a memory stick of video footage and a letter stating Ida’s wish to have her story told, Norwegian documentary filmmaking organization Indie Film did just that. Rather than interviewing people in Ida’s life, collecting an orderly, pragmatic view of her circumstances, Director August B. Hanssen allowed Ida to tell her story through the footage she provided, as chaotic, rough, and painful as it is. Weaving in the occasional atmospheric imagery makes for a touching and emotional means of storytelling, pulling the viewer into the vortex of Ida’s topsy-turvy existence.

IDA’S DIARY is not packed with facts and figures, and little of Ida’s upbringing is revealed. The bold magnitude of this film pulsates through the first person, the chance to view the world through the eyes and heart of a young woman navigating the turbulent waters of mental illness. By opening the door on her innermost world, Ida shines a light into the dark corridors of mental health, offering hope and possibility to the many others in her position.

## FILM THEMES

Ida Storm empowers the mental health community and the world at large by bravely exposing her inner workings and struggles.

### A LIFE LIVED WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

"I want to be happy. I want to be like everyone else," states Ida in a standard downswing of emotional torrent - normal to Ida is hell for anyone free from mental illness. Between the mood swings, delusions, suicidal thoughts, feelings of hopelessness, and unpredictable state of play inside her brain, making it from one day to the next is a monumental challenge. Within this whirlwind of emotional and mental instability, the small feats and passing moments are magnified. Buying potatoes for the first time sends elation through her body, while being called "sweetie pie" by a stranger sends her into a downward cycle of damage and destruction. For Ida, living with mental illness means experiencing a constant and unpredictable struggle with anything that crosses her path.

### TABOO, TABOO

When someone has cancer, is diabetic, or requires an inhaler to cope with asthma, society understands. We see the difficulty in healing from a physical illness, in battling the medically-affirmed conditions the body presents. Mental disorders are real illnesses affecting millions of people, and yet there remains a heavy layer of taboo and stigma attached to conditions of the mind and emotions. Why is it more shameful to admit to working through depression than to expressing one's difficulty at enduring chemotherapy? "Get a grip." Common talk for Ida and others deeply suffering, never receiving the medical and psychological attention they require, leading to isolation and a cycle of unhealing.

### NATURE VS. NURTURE

The exact roots of mental illness are still in dispute. IDA'S DIARY briefly touches upon the notion of genetics vs. upbringing in the quest to understand why mental disorders afflict some and not others. Ida recalls her childhood as a time of deep depression, a period when her parents exchanged aggression over love, and a time when she was abandoned by her father, left behind to emotionally fend for herself. The jury, however, is still out on just what is the role of family in mental illness and how much we are born with. The confusing and commonly insufficient treatment available for many people is directly connected to this debate. Without understanding the source, how can we begin to heal?

### LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

By simply telling her tale in the first person, by providing an unobstructed view into her journey, Ida offers hope. She reminds others suffering from mental illness that there is a wider community out there, a supportive net waiting to catch the hard fall. She educates the wider community on the struggles, the pitfalls, the realities of trying to make sense of life when "normal" isn't how you feel. Ida does not sit still and seep in her sadness. Embracing life head on, aching to find the good, the possibility, the hope, the way out of her pain and suffering, she initiates a much-needed open dialogue on the state of mental health in the modern world.

**"I wonder if this is a way of testing me. All of it. My entire life. Everything people tell me. All my impressions. What is this? Am I just a pawn in a game? Am I being tested? Is my world the entire world?"**

Ida Storm

**"Everyone has wounds and scars. It's just that mine are so visible. My pain becomes very visible. If it's what is on the outside that counts, there wouldn't be much hope for me."**

Ida Storm

## FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. What are your initial impressions of IDA'S DIARY? Did you miss the fact that there was very little information provided on Ida's background?
2. Have you ever suffered from a form of mental illness? If not, do you have any personal experience with mental illness?
3. How openly is mental illness discussed in your community? Do people treat it as a taboo subject?
4. Have you or anyone you've known engaged in self-harm? Discuss your thoughts on self-harm.
5. Were you left with more of a sense of hope or despair once the film was finished? By exposing her innermost life and emotions to the vast public, what does Ida offer the mental health community?
6. In what ways can society at large work more to improve the lives of people suffering from mental illness?
7. Have you ever suffered from depression, to any varying degree? If so, what have you done to alleviate your suffering?
8. What are your thoughts on the nature vs. nurture debate regarding mental illness?
9. What do you feel was the main message of IDA'S DIARY? How did it succeed in or fail from delivering this message?
10. Name five ways in which your community could actively work to normalize the dialogue on mental health. In which ways do you nurture the health of your mind and emotions, and how could those methods be brought into society at large?

## NOTES:

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## FILM FACTS:

- In 2010, Ida Storm mailed a package of unedited film material to Indie Film, a Norwegian documentary film company. She included a letter in which she expressed her desire to have her story told. Director August B. Hanssen utilized the footage shot by Ida herself, in addition to additional abstract footage he filmed himself, to create IDA'S DIARY, which premiered at the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam in November 2014.
- Ida Storm began self-harming at the age of 10, and was diagnosed with emotionally unstable personality disorder (borderline) in her early 20s. Through her video footage, she captures seven years of raw evidence of her sufferings.
- According to a WHO statistical review, 27% of the adult population in the E.U. nations, including Norway, Iceland, and Switzerland, suffers from at least one form of a mental disorder, the equivalent of 83 million people annually.
- Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is defined as a pattern of instability in interpersonal relationships, self-image, and emotions. Psychotherapy is the most common form of treatment. A 2010 study found that no medications show promise for core symptoms.
- Self-injury is very common in individuals with BPD, and can range from scratching, cutting, burning, hair pulling, punching oneself, and carving words or symbols into the skin.
- 18.6% of the adult U.S. population has some form of mental illness, with 1.6% suffering from BPD. Less than half of sufferers receive treatment.
- A Dual Diagnosis is the term granted to a person living with both a mental illness and a substance abuse disorder. Approximately 4 million Americans have a Dual Diagnosis, with over 50% of them receiving no sort of treatment, and only an estimated 12% receiving treatment for both disorders. 21% of Dual Diagnosis individuals are addicted to prescription painkillers.
- A study in the Netherlands on the causes of BPD concluded that 42% of influences could be attributed to genetics, and 58% to environmental factors.
- Onset symptoms of BPD generally occur in adolescence and young adulthood.
- To be diagnosed as suffering from BPD, an individual must display at least three of the following symptoms: tendency to act unexpectedly, tendency to engage in conflict with others, liability to outbursts of anger, difficulty in following a course of action that does not offer immediate reward, and unstable mood. In addition, the individual must display two of the following: uncertainty of self-image, liability to become involved in unstable relationships, excessive efforts to avoid abandonment, recurrent self-harm, chronic feelings of emptiness, and impulsive behavior.

## WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Share** this film. Give others the chance to be inspired and learn from Ida and her story.
2. **Learn** more about NAMI, the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#), that offers support to Americans suffering from mental illness and their family and friends. Support their cause. Most countries have a similar national association.
3. **Learn** more about [Befrienders Worldwide](#) - an organization offering emotional support worldwide for individuals suffering from depression and mental illness, and has volunteer help-lines across the globe.
4. **Find** a supportive group in your community to connect yourself with if you struggle with mental illness. [The Healing News Network](#) offers alternative approaches to healing mental illness through more holistic means.
5. **Consider** campaigning with [SANE](#), a leading UK mental health charity, that works to help those suffering from or affected by mental illness, or find other ways to help through an extensive website with many ways to get involved and feel connected.

## We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

**Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.**