

## **Naked Facebook Friday**

by Nancy Deyo

Dr. Edsall peeks her head into the open doorway of the waiting room. “Nancy, Chris, great to see you both.”

I have been under a psychiatrist’s care before, but this time, the experience is not overshadowed by a physical health crisis. Fifteen years prior, a serious spine injury left me bedridden for a decade, recovering from failed surgeries, dependent on opioids, and taking an antipsychotic before finally weaning myself to a full recovery. For reasons I do not yet understand, my husband believes I am now in a crisis of a different sort.

This is my third session with Dr. Edsall. Chris is joining me for this visit. He is keenly aware of my ability to seem perfectly healthy when I am not, a situation we encountered more than once during my rocky recovery. We are here to discuss increasing the dosage of Abilify, which Dr. Edsall restarted after my first session. This increase is an adjustment that Chris desperately wants, and I do not. I feel fine. Also, I want to hang onto the exuberant feeling I am just discovering, that I am connected to the universe.

“Nancy,” Dr. Edsall begins, “how have you been feeling?”

My response is instantaneous and unfiltered. “*Great. I’m really great.*”

Chris gives me a penetrating look. It feels like he is policing me. His vigilance makes me edgy.

“Actually,” I say, making myself repeat the words that Chris and I negotiated together earlier, “it’s been a hard few weeks for Chris and me.”

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In retrospect, the first sign that something was amiss came in the form of an automated message from Facebook. The message popped up as I raced to “friend” hundreds of new people, literally as fast as my fingers could type.

*Slow down, you are going too fast. We think you may not be real.*

*Whatever*, I thought. I was obsessed with my goal: to get to 5,000 friends by the end of the day. A Friday, in fact. I had been a light Facebook user for years, and mostly, a voyeur. But during my decade-long convalescence, using social media had become one way to keep in touch with high school classmates, and after that, my younger grad school friends, who grew up with social media, sharing everything about their lives in a way that made me feel less lonely.

Something, however, had shifted inside me that morning as I had stayed logged on all day, compulsively “friending” people. I knew that this sort of thing happened—was even programmed into a social media business built on making connections and monetizing the data that followed—but the more friends I amassed, the more I felt I needed. I had started that morning with 350 friends and was now on the verge of a miraculous feat, 4,500 friends, which I knew had to be a world record.

The acceptances came fast and furious; friends of friends of friends of friends from around the world, all wanting to be my friend! Then an explosion of likes, and welcoming messages. A rush of well-being coursed through my body, a feeling of floating on a higher plane. Suddenly I understood: Facebook was about more than connecting people. It was about *global love*.

I, alone, had discovered the secret of social media.

I glanced down at my watch. It was 3:30pm. Yikes. I had promised Chris that I would be packed, showered and ready to go at 4:00pm. After a tumultuous week at work—my last I would later learn—and no sleep, Chris had made reservations for us to spend the weekend decompressing out of town. And yet, I was so close to my goal. I *had* to finish. And I could be ready in time if I really hustled.

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I had felt so inspired and so productive, and so at home in my push to *just fit it all in*, that I had been running late for weeks. The fact that lateness was my pet peeve somehow did not strike me as paradoxical.

Again, the automated warning:

*Slow down, you are going too fast. We think you may not be real. Your account is at risk of being shut down.*

Did Facebook somehow sense that I was in trouble? It seems uncanny to me now that Facebook's algorithm detected my "abnormal" behavior, much less tried to discourage it.

Either way, I needed to let Facebook know that I was not a bot, and besides, I had my new epiphany to share. So, I crafted an enthusiastic email to a colleague who ran Communications, offering a testimonial about what I saw as Facebook's compassionate mission: *enabling global love* in a hate-filled world. I proposed posting my testimonial and suggested that Mark Zuckerberg (my "friend" request to him pending) could then share my revelation with his millions of friends. It was a brilliant marketing move, sure to rocket Facebook into the stratosphere. Best of all, I would be along for the ride. I pressed send. As I did so, Chris walked through the bedroom door and stopped dead in

his tracks. I was stark naked on our bed, furiously typing on my laptop.

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At age nineteen, I was a camp counselor in northern Michigan, madly in love with the tennis pro. What started out innocently enough became extreme: not needing food or sleep (I became anorexic), possessing boundless energy (I began long distance running), singing in a rock band (I cannot now, nor could I ever, sing), wearing skintight leather pants (I did look good in skintight leather pants), and insatiable lust (we were caught having sex in his cabin with kids running in and out). I can still remember that intense feeling of euphoria, a high that started in my brain and went down to my toes. I was fired from the gig, but I was never diagnosed. Instead, the anorexia consumed me, and I crashed by summer's end.

In short, my behavior had been off the charts before.

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“Nancy,” Dr. Edsall asks after we settle into her black leather chairs, “why was Chris surprised to find you naked in your own bedroom?”

Part of me is relieved that this is her question, rather than digging into my admittedly peculiar Facebook activity, which I do not yet see as connected.

Chris jumps in before I can respond.

“Nancy,” he says with some exasperation, “is uncomfortable being naked, even in her own presence, much less in mine.”

This much is true; I have always been modest, even self-conscious, to the core. I put on a towel before I step out of the shower. I get dressed without looking in the mirror. As Chris talks, I can feel my face getting hot. So, I stretch the truth to defend myself.

“I had just gotten out of the shower,” I say quietly, “and was sending a quick email before I got dressed.”

Do Chris and Dr. Edsall need to know that I had been naked all day?

The last thing I want is more Abilify. I am already lamenting the start of its dampening effect on my mind and body, not to mention the weight gain, a side effect that the recovering anorexic in me hates almost as much as the brain fog.

“Come on, Girl,” Chris says emphatically, using his most heartfelt nickname for me, which feels like a trick. “In thirty-three years of marriage I’ve never seen you work naked.”

I squirm in my chair, not sure it is wise to let him have the last word.

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Chris has never used social media. He thinks it is a waste of time at best and addicting at worst. I did not think then that my attachment to social media was unhealthy, but after I boasted to him about both my thousands of new friends and my Facebook epiphany, he had made me promise to stay off the platform. He even took my laptop and cell phone with him the following week on a business trip to New Jersey. I was off the grid and none too happy about it. Chris was treating me like a child, and I didn’t need another father, much less a policeman holding my technology hostage. How was I going to connect with the outside world? How would I reach my people?

In retrospect, Chris was acting in my best interests. He couldn’t dispense the additional drugs I may have needed, but he could remove the technology temptation, and in so

doing, limit my own vulnerability to suspect feel-good epiphanies, but also, to the web of third-party apps, pornographic images and random marriage proposals from new Facebook friends, not to mention the message-hidden identity thefts, into which I had fallen prey. I liken his action now to a sponsor taking liquor bottles out of an alcoholic's home, and maybe also, hiding the keys to keep the addict from getting behind the wheel. Still, at the time, I felt like he was trying to control me, I did not like it, and I did not want him to win.

I was frantic much of the day until I realized we had an old iPad down in the basement. Convinced that Chris would access my email and social media accounts to keep me on the straight and narrow, I changed all of my passwords before I got down to work. Eyes glued to my iPad, I breathed a sigh of relief, certain that the blue light and scrolling activity would calm my frazzled nerves. As the sun dropped below the Golden Gate Bridge, unnoticed, I selected an unread LinkedIn email.

*Send LinkedIn invitations to your entire Facebook contact list with the press of a button.*

My curiosity was piqued. My LinkedIn network was roughly the size of my original Facebook friend base prior to the big acquisition drive. What harm could come from merging these worlds? The mere thought of thousands of new contacts triggered a burst of soothing dopamine. I was online again and making progress. And I wasn't breaking my promise to Chris. This was LinkedIn, not Facebook: professional networking, fully justifiable for someone in between jobs.

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*Mark, the text to my personal trainer read at 6:45am the next morning, I'm going to be 5-10 mins late for our 7am session. Late night.*

*No problem, Mark replied, see you when you get here.*

Strung out from pulling my all-nighter on LinkedIn, I was ever more fixated on expanding my network. I had upgraded to LinkedIn Premium, which enabled a ten-fold increase in my professional contacts. All puffed up, I made my way into higher and higher echelons of power. This was even better than making new Facebook friends. I was building social capital by the minute.

As I readied to finally head to the gym, my hands flew across the keys.

*Thx for acceptnig my invitationn n n. Youand i needa a a conversation.*

?? was the reply from a Silicon Valley venture capitalist I had wanted to meet for years.

I slowed myself down and typed with more intention.

*Sorry, typing too fast. My iPad couldn't keep up.*

My new LinkedIn contact went radio silent. My stomach rolled. I didn't like feeling this way: loose, out of control, and anyway, why wouldn't he write back?

I had to try to salvage the situation.

But now I was seriously late.

*Mark, I texted, I'll be there at 7:30am. Not feeling great.*

*Okay, but you better not blow me off.*

I sent five more messages in rapid succession to the venture capitalist, who “unlinked” me later that morning. For the first time in six years of weekly sessions, I missed my

workout with Mark.

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“Nancy has been keeping things from me,” Chris tells Dr. Edsall near the end of the session. “It feels like she’s lying.”

“That is *not* true,” I blurted, my blood pressure rising. “I did not lie to you. I promised to stay off of Facebook.”

“*Come on*, Nanc,” Chris says, clearly frustrated but still on top of the facts, “you’re off Facebook, but you go on a LinkedIn rampage. Not to mention setting up accounts on Twitter and Instagram. But you don’t share this with me. I have to find out from your best friend.”

Chris and I never used to fight, not even in private. Now we are arguing in front of Dr. Edsall, and Chris is on the offensive. I counterattack.

“Yeah,” I strike back at him, “because you asked Kathleen to rat me out.”

He is unfazed. “Kathleen and I are worried about you.”

I try to keep a poker face, but the grimace, like my speech, is uncontrollable.

Dr. Edsall looks calmly at us both. I pray she is on my side, but I know how convincing Chris can be when he makes an argument.

“I understand that things have been strained between you two,” she begins. “Chris, is there anything else you wanted to share?”

Chris always comes to a meeting prepared, as do I. But I am unprepared for the barrage that follows. I cringe as he describes the additional shifts in my behavior: the weird food combinations I now eat (peanut butter and sriracha on crackers was my “go to” snack), the fact that I have changed all of the car radio stations from soft rock to technopop (goodbye KFOG, hello the now-defunct WiLD), the use of hair conditioner on my body instead of soap (I was convinced the conditioner would moisturize my dehydrated body), the Amazon charges for downloading hundreds of eBooks (including *Love the One You’re With* and *Good in Bed*) onto my Kindle, and the lack of filter between my brain and mouth (I told a black cashier that I could “tame” her wiry hair). In a final psychiatric clincher, the words “grandiose,” “pressured speech,” “oversharing,” and “argumentative” shoot out of him in rapid fire.

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Writing upside down and back to front, in a script only I could decipher, was the best way to keep the book I was writing private. While Chris had never read my journal without permission, I did feel exposed to his increasing scrutiny of my everyday behaviors and took what felt like justifiably evasive actions. His various confiscations were not going to slow me down, and he certainly didn’t get to edit my freaking book. So, I filled up one journal and then another, consumed by the need to *get my story out*. It calmed me to write, in much the same way that iPad scrolling reduced my anxiety.

My famous cousin, the renowned economist and adviser to the U.N. Secretary General, would write the forward, a brilliant move, I thought, linking my star to his. I would pitch a well-known literary agent in New York who exclusively represented women authors and send the first chapter to a former colleague who was now a Random House executive. The writing flowed out of me like a river that had risen well past its banks, and I saw that I clearly had the connections to get it published. I didn’t understand why writers had such a hard time getting their work out into the world. But, then again, publishing, like anything else, was all about who one knew.

I was feeling fabulous—sharp, exhilarated, productive, creative—and no longer spinning out of control. My brain and my body balanced, I was in sync with the universe. Dr. Edsall would later describe this energized, in-between state as “hypomanic,” which from my layman’s point-of-view meant I could experience the good parts of mania without the bad. If Chris still thought I was in trouble, I had, or would have fairly soon, a best-selling book, with thousands (upon thousands) of social media contacts to make a virtuous circle of sales, promotion, and validation.

I told Chris that I was *going* to write my book, advise a venture philanthropy firm, teach at an Ivy league school, and speak at TEDWomen. All in the coming year. I had set up a range of meetings with powerbrokers in each segment of my new “portfolio life.” It was all part of my grand plan, which I now called my “Grand Plan,” and I was fixated on making it happen.

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It is curious, looking back, that for all the speed and acuity with which my analytic brain was making connections and blazing a path forward, I could not see how my behavior was out-of-the-norm, and even, plainly outlandish.

“This isn’t who you are,” Chris told me in one of his plaintive attempts to yoke me to some sense of reality. “Yes, the girl I married is smart and ambitious. But she is humble and vulnerable, too.” He paused. “And right now, you are neither of those things.”

“I take that as an insult,” I shot back. “Why would I want to be either of those things?”

“Well,” he said, picking his words carefully, “because they make you...you.”

“Fuck you,” I snapped, and stormed out of the room.

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Chris started sleeping in the guest bedroom: his choice, not mine. He said he no longer knew who I was. For the first time in thirty-three years of marriage, we argued long and hard. We said hateful things that we regretted. I told him that he was controlling. He said that I needed to be managed. As our relationship faltered, I figured the less he knew about any of my activities the better. I was determined to live a bigger life. I was executing the Grand Plan. Shortly before my third visit to Dr. Edsall, I was certain that Chris was going to leave me, and to be honest, I could see a path without him. If Chris could not understand what I now understood, about how the world worked and my place at the top of it, why let him slow me down?

Chris slammed the bedroom door one night after a particularly nasty exchange. It stung, but I was resolute. The silence that hung in the air loomed as large as the distance between us. For the first time, I understood how once-happy couples ended up divorced.

After a few minutes, I heard a light knock on the door.

“I’d like to try this again,” Chris said quietly, and climbed into bed next to me.

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Is there really an unmedicated version of me that is the “real Nancy,” and if so, is it Chris’s version of me—belligerent, grandiose, and unfiltered—or is it the version I experienced in my head during those weeks leading up to my third session with Dr. Edsall—confident, connected, and fearless?

I tell myself that the “real” me is all of those things, wrapped up in a complicated package. I have since learned from Dr. Edsall that I am bipolar, a condition which typically manifests in much younger people. Unmedicated, my condition rapidly escalates into mania, and I act in ways that more closely resemble the person Chris

described. I take risks that endanger myself and others: befriending online strangers, falling asleep at the wheel, crashing my car, and exchanging personal information with random Uber drivers because we liked the same books and music.

My medicated present is filled with shame and embarrassment for my manic behavior. I replay the scenes over and over in my head, hoping the endings of each moment will change. I will not send the second, fourth, or sixth LinkedIn clarification to the venture capitalist. I will not stop random strangers on the street in a moment of déjà vu, claiming I knew them in a past life. I will not lie to the police officer, accusing the other driver of veering into my lane after I fall asleep and sideswipe his car. Like any person recovering from herself, I know that there are no do-overs in life. I can only look toward the future and try to be a better person, an understanding I can only come to, ironically enough, looking back.

I did not live that bigger life and I still haven't written my book.

At the end of my third session, Dr. Edsall prescribed a higher dose of Abilify, and my brain began the slow process of regulating to the drug increase, which meant experiencing a slowdown that, in retrospect, saved my life. Chris and I found our way back to each other, at roughly the same pace. I ate well, started sleeping and exercising again, stopped wasting so much money and time on passing fancies, and for the first time since my spine injury, I felt fully in control of my mind and body, for better and for worse.

Dr. Edsall and I spoke recently about my diagnosis. I was surprised to learn that after my third visit she was neither convinced I was bipolar, nor that I was in the middle of a manic episode. She told me that I presented as energetic, enthusiastic, and generally stable. My Grand Plan seemed big but was within the bounds of reason. It was Chris's longitudinal perspective that convinced her my behavior was off of the charts, despite being within the normal bell curve for many people. And that range of acceptable behaviors continues to puzzle me. I wonder what would have happened if Chris had not

joined me for that fateful session. In my heart of hearts, I know Chris was right, but part of me would have loved to have experienced that unbridled joy for just a while longer, though I know it goes hand-in-hand with the crash that was racing toward me.

For two years, I have been off social media entirely. I now realize how it enables vulnerable people to engage in risky, even dangerous behavior. I do not experience FOMO. It turns out that Facebook friends are not the secret to global love, nor are LinkedIn contacts the key to social capital, book publishing, or the apex of any pyramid, at least not for me. I have an abundance of love and connection in my life. I communicate with most of my friends in person.

Dr. Edsall still oversees my care with a compassionate clinician's eye. While I am long past the acute phase and we chat like old friends, she asks about sleep, stress, life changes, and always, how the medication is working. Chris no longer participates in our sessions, but my care requires constant vigilance, and reminds me that wellness is a process.

Often, I wrestle with the decision of whether to taper the Abilify or to stop taking it entirely. But as tantalizing as mania is for its highs, when I can think clearly about the tradeoffs, I choose a stable, medicated, albeit less thrilling life, with all of its benefits. If I wanted to live drug-free, I would be living a life that does not include Chris, and that is a trade-off I am unwilling to consider. At least some part of love requires compromise, a road that I know runs in two directions. I am forever grateful that Chris did not leave me. In return, every morning and again every night, I recommit to love, and reach for my meds.



**Nancy Deyo** began writing memoir in 2020 as a Fellow at Stanford’s Distinguished Careers Institute, following a first career in technology and a second in women’s rights. Her work has also appeared in *The Vault*. In addition to writing, Nancy is an active board member of a women’s empowerment and social justice organization in Santa Fe, NM, where she lives with her husband.