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MARGOT KIDDER'S SEARCH for SANITY by Karen Dustman, *Natural Health Magazine*, March 2000 (EXCERPT)

Margot Kidder starred as Lois Lane *in the 1979 movie "Superman." In 1996, she was discovered ragged and hungry in the backyard of a Glendale, California home. Convinced her former husband and the CIA were out to kill her., Kidder roamed the streets of Los Angeles, sharing food and a cardboard shack with a homeless man. Kidder had lost the caps on her front teeth, chopped off her hair, and swapped her Armani suit for a homeless man's dirty T-shirt and pants.

Kidder has bipolar disorder. Born in 1948, she spent almost 20 years seeking treatment. After her 1996 incident, Kidder realized the conventional therapies she was receiving weren't working.

Now in her 4th year of good mental health, Kidder speaks for mental health organizations about how she found natural ways to treat her disorder.

Natural Health: When did the first signs of your illness emerge?

Margot Kidder: In my teens I started having mood swings and suicidal thoughts. I also had periods of mania, though I just thought it was great fun.

I saw my first shrink when I was about 20. He told me I had schizopremia and insisted I take valium. For years doctors insisted it wasn't addictive — it took me more than 10 years to get off of it.

Over the years I got just about every diagnosis in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). What I've learned is that those labels are just names for collections of symptoms. For example, a page in the DSM might list 9 symptoms. If you have 4 or 5 of those symptoms, you get the label on the top of the page. But the symptoms can change, depending on what kind of day you're having, and which doctor is diagnosing you.

In the 80s I was diagnosed with manic-depression and my doctor gave me lithium. In those days, doctors were giving higher doses than the 900-1200 mgs a day they prescribe now. My hands shook, my jaw shook, I couldn't think. I felt kind of dead. I said to myself, if I'm going to feel dead, let me just be a little crazy.

Natural Health: But you managed to keep acting.

Margot Kidder: My career went up and down. I went through millions of dollars. I'd buy things for friends, take people to Paris. Once I stayed up for 3 weeks because I felt I was called on to write a new religion for women.

Natural Health: What brought these episodes on?

Margot Kidder: Stress was a big factor. And hormones definitely had an effect. I think every one of my bad episodes started the week before my period. But the problem was also not eating properly, smoking cigarettes, and living on caffeine and occasionally tequila. Prescription drugs would make me feel like hell, so I threw them away and then I would flip out. Nobody told me you just can't stop taking those drugs.

After my public flip-out in 1996 I went to a 5-element acupuncturist. She treated me 4 times a week which stabilized me in about 3 weeks. Since then psychiatrists have told me that acupuncture can't do that, but it did for me.

I did a lot of homework. Conventional books would say that a deficiency of niacin and protein can cause mental disturbances. But then it would say to take a synthetic drug to deal with the symptoms. In another book I read that a deficiency of GABA (an amino acid that controls dopamine level) causes nervousness and agitation. So I thought, instead of taking Depakote, an drug that produces GABA, why not take GABA? Depakote damages your liver and can cause depression.

Natural Health: But you knew you couldn't just stop taking your medications.

Margot Kidder: Yes. But I started taking megadoses of B vitamins and amino acids such as GABA and Taurine. A year later I had cut down on my medications and was feeling much better.

Natural Health: People with bi-polar often have food sensitivities, was that true for you?

Margot Kidder: At first I dismissed the idea. But then my doctor tested me and told me I was allergic to some of my favorite foods — eggs, dairy products and wheat. It's been difficult giving up my favorite foods, but aside from feeling better, I've lost a lot of weight.

My doctor also confirmed I have extremely low blood sugar which can cause mood swings. So I eat regular meals — which I didn't do before. I'm supposed to eat a lot of high protein foods, stay away from sugar and caffeine.

I do stress-reduction techniques. Stress pumps cortisol, adrenaline into your nervous system — which is damaging. So I exercise a lot and get 5-point acupuncture, deep tissue massage, and craniosacral manipulation twice a week. This helped reduce my stress and my need for medications.

In the past I didn't realize that diet could affect my mental health, or that I would feel crazy if I went a day or two without sleep or food. I did what most of society does — cut off my mind from my body.

Natural Health: Do you have any advice for people with bipolar disorder?

Margot Kidder: Whatever you do, don't stop taking your medicine. Find an Orthomolecular doctor, get a hair analysis, and find out which nutrients (vitamins, minerals, amino acids) you're lacking. Get blood tests for food and environmental allergies, and get a sugar-glucose test to find out if you're hypoglycemic (low blood sugar). Find ways to relieve stress. Work on your problems and talk to your doctor about gradually reducing your medication.