

**HEALTH**

# Manic-Depressive Friend A Blast While Manic

BUFFALO, NY—Manic-depressive Tom Ruzek, 24, may be a "total drag for months on end," but he is "a blast" while in his manic state, friends of the troubled Buffalo State graduate student said Monday.

Ruzek, diagnosed with manic depression three years ago by psychiatrists at Mount Zion Mental Health Center, has suffered from the disorder since high school. His condition causes him to experience cyclical bouts of prolonged depression followed by spells of mania, characterized by irrational feelings of elation, delusions of grandeur, and boundless energy. It is in this heightened state, friends say, that Ruzek is awesome.

"Sometimes, Tom can be a real downer," said roommate Eric Callas, 23. "He'll hole up in his room, and if you try to talk to him, all he does is bitch, bitch, bitch. But once you get to know him better, you see that he's got this totally wild-and-crazy, life-of-the-party side, too. When that comes out, everybody's all like, 'All right! The ol' Tomster we know and love is back!'"



Above: Ruzek (left) entertains friends during a recent manic spell.

According to friends, the manic version of Ruzek possesses many fun, attractive qualities. These include his propensity for outrageous, elaborately choreographed table-top dance numbers at bars and restaurants, his ability to go without sleep for up to 72 hours at a time during spur-of-the-moment road trips, and his wildly generous spending sprees, during which he lavishes friends with expensive gifts in spite of his massive debt.

"Once, we were hanging out at the mall when, out of nowhere, Tom bought me this remote-controlled, gas-powered miniature helicopter for my birthday, even though my birthday wasn't for another five months," Ruzek friend Cris Harbaugh said. "We had a ton of fun flying it around the parking lot, buzzing cars and freaking people out until the mall-security guy told us to leave. Tom got so worked up about getting busted, he filled the toy with M-80s and blew it up in midair—right there in the outdoor food court. Man, what a great day that was."

Friends also enjoy watching Ruzek cut loose on one of his wild, stream-of-consciousness rants.

"Tom's got this web page he keeps, and sometimes a month or more will go by where he doesn't do any updates, except for really short entries like 'Peed in a jar today rather than leave bed,'" friend Alicia Reynolds said. "But then, sometimes he'll get on these jags where he'll write, like, 20 pages in a single day—hilarious, over-the-top stuff about how every one of us is a white-hot energy source extending to every corner of the universe."

Compounding his manic episodes, Ruzek will often neglect to take his daily dose of mood-stabilizing medication, believing he doesn't need it.

"Tom got so down last winter, he started taking heavy doses of antidepressants," Reynolds said. "I was really worried about him, but he recently told me he's gotten so much better, he no longer needs artificial substances to be happy. He says he's off the pills and high on life. What a great

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new attitude. It's hard to believe there was a time when he was so bummed out, he didn't eat any solid food other than Doritos for a month."

Added Reynolds: "Check out these photos he took of himself in the mirror. He just got a new digital camera, and he e-mailed me the test pictures he took of himself, just to see if it worked. He must have taken, like, 250 of them."

Though Ruzek's friends describe him as "moody," "excitable," and "a little psycho," most are unaware of the seriousness of his condition. According to his therapist, Dr. Howard Wenger, this is due to a combination of the shame manic-depressives like Ruzek feel about revealing their illness and the public's lack of knowledge about the condition.

"What these people don't realize is that Tom has a deadly serious mental illness that, left untreated, will wreak untold havoc on his life," Wenger said. "He is trapped in a self-destructive cycle that could one day prove fatal. There is nothing 'fun' about his disorder, no matter how it appears to outsiders. Tom is a very sick man."

Told of Wenger's appraisal, Ruzek strenuously disagreed.

"Me? I'm fine," Ruzek said. "In fact, I'm so far beyond fine as to be essentially perfect. I would go so far as to say that I am the most perfect being ever to walk God's green earth. Hey, who wants pizza? I'm buying. No, wait—Chinese. No, wait—sushi. No, wait—where are my car keys? I feel like driving 100 miles an hour around the parking lot of that abandoned screen-door factory at the edge of town. Let's blast some Andrew W.K. and scream at the top of our lungs until dawn."

"Hey, world, look at me, I'm the King of Siam!" added Ruzek, before collapsing to the floor in a state of physical and emotional exhaustion.

