Media Award Nomination

Lisa Eley once had thoughts of killing her supervisor, thoughts that required her to have an emergency hospitalization. Consequently, she was admitted to an asylum. Lisa was eventually diagnosed with major depressive disorder, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and PTSD--mental disorders that had accumulated over time from an extremely hostile work environment. Lisa’s mental health collapsed as a result of her manager’s unabated bullying behavior towards her, which proved to be nearly fatal.

With no prior history of mental illness, Lisa spent nearly a year in behavioral health treatment. During her recovery, she started a memoir to document her journey into mental illness and the challenges that came with her illness. The book is called Thirteen Geese in Flight: One Black Woman’s Ascent into Mental Illness.

While initially leery about being admitted to a psychiatric facility, Lisa now admits that getting help for her mental illness was one of the best decisions she’s ever made. She credits caring and dedicated mental health professionals with saving her life.

Lisa’s mental illness could have been prevented had her agency taken her bullying allegations seriously. For whatever reasons, they did not; this motivated Lisa to go on a fact-finding mission in search of data for adult-on-adult bullying, specifically workplace bullying.

Because she had been injured on the job by the actions of a fellow employee, Lisa filed an injury claim with the Office of Workers’ Compensation Programs. This is when she discovered the belly of the beast: the systemic bully known as an injury compensation system that’s inept at giving fair assessments to mental illness cases; they access mental injuries like physical injuries, with the latter having a fixed rate of recovery.

Thirteen Geese in Flight describes Lisa’s ascent into work-related depression. Her memoir contains over thirty resources that Lisa referenced in writing her courageous story. What started as journey therapy, turned into a five-part documentary of how workers are falling to depression and how America—compared to other countries--does little to protect the mental wellness of its workers. Lisa exposes the many flaws of succumbing to mental illness from her job:

* The lack of empathy from her employer when she first reported the early stages of her depression
* The suspicion of her employer when she was deemed temporarily-disabled following her psychiatric hospitalization
* The judgment of workers’ compensation examiners who suggested that Lisa simply had an emotional reaction to a manager’s rightful style of managing (which was not a reason for accepting her injury claim)
* The poor service she received from the many delays and errors that workers’ compensation staff committed
* The ignorance of workers’ compensation examiners who suggested that Lisa’s mental illness wasn’t disabling enough for her to receive the wages she’d lost while she was in mental health treatment for months

Lisa completely recovered thanks to medication, therapy, a phenomenal psychiatrist, and a large network of supportive family and friends. With a new lease on life, she hopes that her message in Thirteen Geese in Flight will raise awareness about the devastating effects of workplace bullying and the mental illness that follows. She wants her story to soften the stigma that is often associated with mental illness and to stress the importance of access to good mental health care.