



The Musician

A MENTAL HEALTH JOURNEY



INSTRUCTIONS

Read the page on the right about the Musician. Then pause. As you move throughout the Mental Health Journey exhibit, you'll see her **"piano"** icon. This will show you her unique experience with each barrier in the exhibit. When instructed, flip to a tab in your booklet to read more.

This narrative is based on the real stories of Wisconsin residents with mental illness.

All names have been changed to protect privacy.

My name is Liz.

My full name is Elizabeth Marie, after my great-grandmother. Like her, I've always been passionate about music and the arts. Ever since I was a little kid, whether it was the piano or guitar, you could find me singing and playing music around the house. I started using my hobby to make extra money on the side during high school and college. I would play at coffee shops and small shows around town.

My favorite song to perform is *Dear Prudence*, by The Beatles.

I've always thought that music and art can be very healing. It's a medium where people can express themselves and say what's on their mind. Art allows you to feel and experience what someone else is going through, and in that moment, see what life would be like for them. I love playing music to a crowd and having the chance to share my thoughts and feelings with the audience.



At Work

When I was young, I was diagnosed with obsessive compulsive disorder, anxiety and depression.

At first my teachers and parents thought I was just a bad kid, making poor decisions and acting out to get attention. My high school said they couldn't handle my "troubled nature," and I was forced to change schools.

Now in my 30s, I can look back and see a misunderstood child who needed a support system.

After college, I wanted to pursue a career in music. Art and music were always a healing and calming aspect of my life. I wanted to bring that to others who might need the same thing.

I played music on weekends at local clubs and music festivals. I loved performing for a crowd and sharing my passion for music. I also landed various jobs to pay the bills, including an event coordinator for a local non-profit and graphic designer for a music-based startup.

At times, I felt like my mental illness allowed me to excel at some aspects of my job. When I was working on a new project, I would get so focused and connected to my work. I would be doing so well and the excitement of finally succeeding was exhilarating.

I would exert all my energy and effort into the project and ultimately fall short in other aspects of my job like being on time and meeting deadlines.

Because of this, I was fired from multiple jobs, which left me bouncing around from one gig to another. I was unable to explain my condition to others, and I definitely didn't feel like I could talk about it with my employers.

Stigma

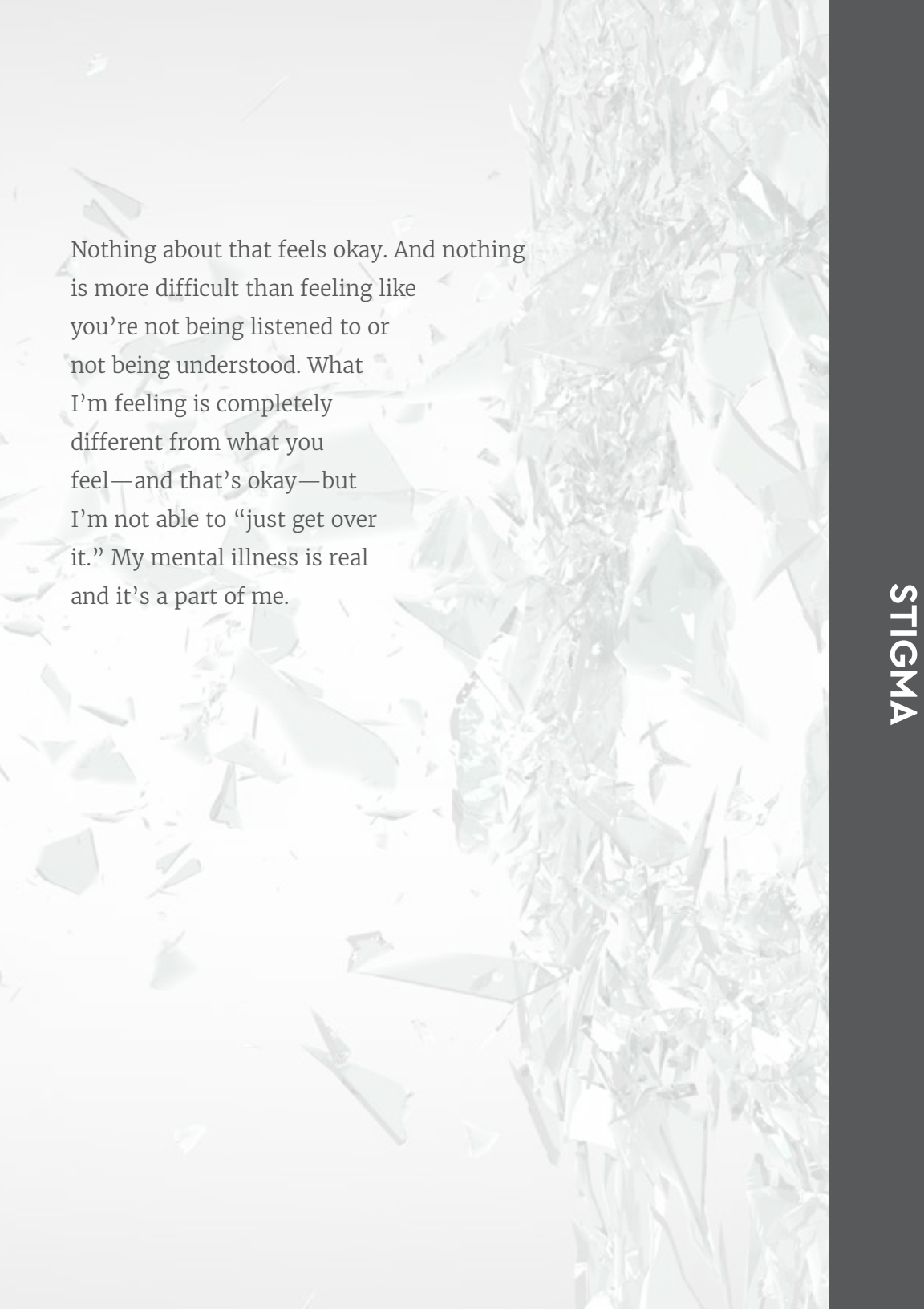
The stigma I face now is nothing compared to what I went through when I was a kid. As you age with a mental illness, you try to block yourself off and live in isolation. Since you've experienced so much ridicule over the course of your life, you don't want that to happen anymore and you make sure it doesn't happen.

Because of that, the stigma I face is mostly perpetuated by myself. There's a voice inside my head, repeating the phrases I've heard my whole life— "You're faking it" ... "Why can't you just be happy" ... "Other people have it a lot worse than you."

And sometimes it's hard to silence those voices.

Because of those feelings of shame, I constantly cut ties and start over. Whether it's a relationship, friendship or a job, the struggles I face with mental health become so intense that I can't handle it anymore. I just needed to stop and start over.

The worst thing to hear when I go through an episode or breakdown is, "Everything is okay." In that moment, it feels like with every move I make I'm slowly suffocating and I can't do anything to make it stop.



Nothing about that feels okay. And nothing is more difficult than feeling like you're not being listened to or not being understood. What I'm feeling is completely different from what you feel—and that's okay—but I'm not able to "just get over it." My mental illness is real and it's a part of me.

Access

As a kid and into my adult years, I have spent a lot of time and effort to receive good mental health care. I know many people who were not as lucky. I think part of it is living in a bigger city with more options for doctors.

I've had excellent psychiatrists and therapists help me manage and cope with my mental health conditions. Talk therapy has allowed me to live with my conditions in a healthy way.

But since I've spent so much time focusing on my care, attending therapy sessions, and going to other doctors' appointments, I think it has set me back professionally.

For me, the price I paid for taking care of my mental health was my career. It's hard to hold a steady job when you have to take off work a couple of times a month.

It's difficult when appointments are only offered during business hours or on certain days of the week. I'm thankful that I've gotten the care that I need. I know most people's stories don't end up like mine.

I wonder if I'll ever make it in life, playing music and doing the things that I love. I want to give back in the music world in the same way that others did for me. But the barriers I face living with a mental health condition make me fearful that I'll never be able to do that.

Today

I've lived with my mental health conditions as long as I can remember. And I know I'll continue to face the hardships they bring for the rest of my life. I will forever be dependent on my medication and therapy sessions.

It's taken me a while to accept that as part of my daily life.

Just because I have a mental health condition doesn't make me any less of a person. Stigma is fed by silence and shame. It takes bravery and strength to wake up and fight it every day.

I will continue to work on myself as a person, fighting the internalized stigma I've built up around mental health. Even though I'm still working odd jobs, I'm glad I made the decision to make my healthcare a priority in my life. I'm still hopeful I'll continue a career in music, but for now, because of my decisions, I'm not sure if I'll be able to achieve that goal.







WEAtrust