

FROM THE SHADOWS

A Journey of Self-Discovery and Renewal



Elizabeth Onyeabor

FROM THE SHADOWS

A Journey of Self-Discovery and Renewal

Elizabeth Onyeabor

From the Shadows: A Journey of Self-Discovery and Renewal
Copyright © 2016 Elizabeth Onyeabor
All rights reserved.

Cover design by Debbie O’Byrne, Denise Cassino,
and Elizabeth Onyeabor

Editing by Eye Comb Editors (www.eyecombeditors.com),
RMJ Manuscript Service LLC (www.rogenamitchell.com), and
Sojourn Publishing, LLC

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without the author’s prior written permission. The only exception is by a reviewer, who may quote short excerpts in a review with appropriate citations.

Achara Bambus Creative Works, LLC

Elizabeth Onyeabor books are available for order through
Amazon.com

Visit my website: www.elizabethonyeabor.com

Follow me on Twitter: [EFOnyeabor](https://twitter.com/EFOnyeabor)

Connect with me on Facebook: [ElizabethOnyeaborAuthor](https://www.facebook.com/ElizabethOnyeaborAuthor)

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing: October 2016

Publisher: Sojourn Publishing, LLC

ISBN-10: 1627472320

ISBN-13: 978-1627472326

DEDICATION

To my beloved friends and family.

You loved me when I did not love myself.

Thank you for your compassionate companionship.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	VII
DESCENT INTO DESPAIR	1
1 Prologue	3
2 Hopeless Hole	7
3 Angry Acknowledgment	23
4 Roots of Rumination	31
INSPIRATIONAL INCEPTION	37
5 Passionate Pursuits	39
6 Poetic Parturition	45
VACATING THE VOID	55
7 Chawing Chatter	57
8 Flipping Failure Focus	65
9 Parasitic Problem	75
SHADOWED SELF	83
10 Beth's Betrayal	85
11 Dancing With Darkness	91
12 Beginning to Blend	106
CAREENING CAREER	113
13 Meaningful Mentor	115
14 Unemployment Unease	119
15 Rejection Connection	127

ROAD TO RENEWAL	133
16 Addiction Awareness	135
17 Deltoid Dysfunction	147
18 Gratitude with Attitude	154
19 Compassionate Companion	162
20 Divine Devotion	172
LEANING LEFT	178
21 Nefarious Neighbor	180
22 Elizabeth Emerges	188
23 Epilogue	196
REFLECT AND RESPOND	199
INDEX OF POEMS	206

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to my tale of transformation. Unwinding depression is not a neat process, but I guide you along my path as I walked it. Most of all, I offer you hope. As tormented and hopeless as I was, I am now healed.

You can heal, too.

You will discover what I uncovered about myself in the way it progressed for me. My journey was not chronologically linear. Neither is this book. I describe my struggle from 2012 to 2015, weaving intensity with insight.

To paraphrase a sentiment, if all the world's a stage and our lives are plays, we compare our rough rehearsals to others' polished performances. Through vignettes and verse, I draw back my curtain to spotlight backstage feelings, thoughts, and perspectives. I reenact adulthood and childhood sketches from memory and notes.

I share journal excerpts. Although condensed and corrected for clarity, these private thoughts are otherwise unedited, never imagining future publication. In the depths of my anguish, I use a few expletives. Thank you for understanding.

Discretion directs me to keep confidential certain actions from behind-the-scenes. However, I show you how I processed them so they no longer shroud me in guilt and shame. I also change a few names and other details to maintain privacy or anonymity.

After the epilogue, I include a section summarizing key points, offering suggestions, and posing questions for you to contemplate on your own journey of self-discovery. Also, consider writing down how you feel whenever a part of my story triggers deep emotion. Answer any questions I posed to myself that also resonate with you. Most importantly, write how you feel, however you feel. Writing about emotions is a cathartic, healing release.

As you expose wounds so they finally begin to heal, don't try to mend everything by yourself. You will need other people's resources and support. Go to the people you feel safe with. There may be different people for different issues. There are also support groups and crisis centers in many countries (worldwide listings are available at sites such as www.iasp.info). Perhaps there are resources where you live. Maybe you will start a support group yourself.

If you feel overwhelmed or suicidal, reach out to a prevention hotline, crisis center, coach, counselor, therapist, or someone you love for help.

You are already enough. One day, you will know this, too.

DESCENT INTO DESPAIR

I feel like I can't keep happiness down.

I keep vomiting it back up...

Elizabeth Onyeabor

1

PROLOGUE

The story of how my soul nearly died...

When I Am Gone

When I am gone
only those who loved
will remember
and cherish the memory
when I am gone

No more will I be
ruminating about past failures
No more will I be
fearing a disappointing future

And no more will I be
at all
except in remembrance

Some would say
I will be
in perfectness too
but no one
can say for sure
that there will be
anything at all

It is belief disguised as certainty
in some sort of life hereafter
I am under no such illusion
And no more will I be
when I am gone

∞ 2015 ∞

I rest in the circle of light in the crimson sandstone cavern of my thoughts. The warm, radiant beams are invigorating to my body and soul. I want them to wash over me and give me the inspiration that I know brims within. In this brilliant cave of my thought, I feel the sparkling rays twirl over me, giving my soul the opportunity to dance in the radiance after my long, gloomy period of darkness—one from which I believed I never wanted to leave alive. This light-and-dark dance entwining within me is what I tell you about now.

Maybe it resonates with the light and dark reverberating in your own soul. For me, it just is, and I can't contain it in only my mind any longer. My heart guides me to share this painful journey. My eyes well with the tears I weep in joy and sorrow as I tell you the story of how my soul nearly died.



I had many nicknames in my childhood, from Betsy Wetsy to Betsy Boo, but most especially, Beth. That was the name of my older sisters' favorite character in *Little Women*. Shortly after I arrived home from the hospital, a candy contest settled my name.

Dad was nearly forty-nine, with a thick, white shock of slightly wavy hair slicked back to reveal his age-deepened hairline. His white hair was a handsome complement to his ruddy, freckled face, a result of decades of outdoor construction work. With two or three strikes of the hammer, Dad's large and heavily freckled hands could expertly set and pound a nail into a two-by-four.

Dad offered my brother Quintin a choice. Quintin, with his wavy, dark brown hair and the same blue-green eyes I inherited, was nearly three years old, but my name's fate rested in his and Dad's hands. A piece of candy crinkled in each of Dad's outstretched palms, its citrus tang mixing with his sweet sawdust scent. One candy represented Carol, a name Dad liked. It was also the name of his teen crush. Mom was not enthusiastic about that association. With her Greta Garbo eyes and tall, trim model stature, Mom was a brunette beauty. She had nothing to fear from Carol's vestiges. The other hand represented Elizabeth, my paternal grandmother's name. Luckily, for Mom and my sisters, Quintin plucked the palm for Elizabeth. My family usually called me Beth.

In my mind's eye, Beth was a sweet soul with dark brown hair and a slightly pudgy tummy in an otherwise trim body. She also felt picked on. Quintin, always adventurous and active, loved her so much, he would play with her all the time, but his antics would eventually end in Beth's crying.

As a teenager, Beth shifted her persona. She refused to answer to her childhood nickname and insisted on another. She cut short her nearly waist-length brown hair. She shifted to pragmatic. Liz was born.

Elizabeth Onyebor

That is the backdrop, but there's much more to this story. Let's fast forward to almost the present day. Liz wrestles with the feelings she doesn't want to feel, the anger she hasn't been acknowledging, and a fixated desperation about how she wants her husband and adult children to change. She seeks solace in her journal.

Excerpt One

I don't know why this incredible sadness envelops me. I know that it happens when I feel powerless, events around me seem so out of whack with my desires, and I'm emotionally exhausted. I compare it to when I had food poisoning. I feel like I can't keep happiness down. I keep vomiting it back up.

She had disconnected two parts of herself. Her feelings side was stuck in her discarded Beth identity, while Liz was logical, like *Star Trek's* fictional Spock from the planet Vulcan. This is the story of her awakening. When she connected the heart of Beth with the head of Liz, she became whole again and healed as Elizabeth.

I'll tell you about the worst pain first.

2

HOPELESS HOLE

*The hopelessness is an immeasurable burden
burrowing a black hole through me, swallowing all my light...*

∞ 2012 ∞

I collapse and curl into a ball on the cold, hard, stained concrete floor. Howling, I release all hope.

The brown, cream, and tan stippled floor is the work of my labor to stain and lacquer every bit of it. I'm proud of my effort. It's meaningless in this moment. It's simply the place for me to wail in the kitchen where my family is not getting along. I cannot see how anything, after all these years, is going to change.

I can only feel the depth of hope evaporating from my body like a lake vanishing into the desert of hopelessness. I am riddled with guilt and shame, and I can't shake it no matter how much my family tells me they love me.

I am in the deepest part of my depression. An incident is triggering me: a family argument. The topics change, yet now the

emotion hits harder. My Liz armor of so many decades isn't there anymore. I don't know how to be Beth. How to feel is overwhelming.

The molten fire raging within erupts, and I explode. My screeches pierce the atmosphere like a blonde banshee. I can't contain the anguish. I sob as my chest heaves in spastic bellows, and I really don't care that they hear. Okay, actually I do. I *want* them to see the agony, in a physical manifestation, that I'm going through. I can't articulate it because there are no words, and I'm feeling so helpless and can't utter anything. I'm not yelling—just shrieking and sobbing.

I don't remember how I got into the bedroom. I do remember thinking, "I can't take this anymore—the torment is too much. I want to sleep forever."

I search the internet and land on a page describing many ways to end the misery. It also tells me how many people are unsuccessful at how they try, and the aftereffects.

See, Liz, logical Liz, is a Vulcan. She wants it to be clean and unfeeling. Really, isn't that the point? To not feel? So why would she want to die while suffering? Sleep. Numb. Painless. No feeling. Yeah, that's what Liz wants.

The website describes the author's own struggles. I feel a kindred spirit of a sort and read each trial, thinking I couldn't attempt suicide those ways. I'm too chicken. I marvel at his efforts to end his agony.

I want to end *my* agony. I don't have any easy, ready mechanisms available. I want to be sure. I keep reading. I'm a little bit frightened about the list of aftereffects. If I'm going to fail, then I don't want to be disabled for the rest of my life, however long that might be. I'm not sure what to do.

My daughter Victoria, mortified, musters all the wisdom offered by her twenty-eight years and pries me away from the website. Now listless, I am prostrate on the bed, wrapped in red and black coverings. I hear comforting words and encouragement, but it

doesn't stick. How can I take any action when I feel so incapable and in such a quagmire? Volunteer? Help other people? I don't have any energy for that. Might as well tell me to train to be an astronaut and fly to the moon. It feels just that impossible at the moment. I don't tell Victoria that. I don't have that defined thought then. I see the concern in her beautiful, dark-brown eyes. Her long, black ringlets air bounce as she leans forward, perched at the bed's edge, trying to console and cheer me. I know whatever she's encouraging me to do right now, it is not going to work. I can't do it.

I can only lie here. The salty tears wet my red and black pillow. It's as if the weeping has turned on a leaky faucet, because anytime I blink, and even when I don't, they well up and begin to roll down the side of my face. I see no point in wiping them away. More will come.

I hear words of love, but it only intensifies unworthiness. More tears well. My chest constricts, my breathing shallows, and my jaw clenches, grinding my teeth together. I don't consciously realize any of this. I'm only wondering if the hurt will ever go away on this horrible roller-coaster ride of emotions. It's crushing.

I want comatose oblivion. If my mind wills it, will my body follow? It is a secret, desperate wish. If I can do it by myself, there won't be medical complications like with drugs. I lie there until, somehow, sleep comes, and I have some respite.

I awake to hear something in the hallway. Is that the sound of pleasant voices? The family members so recently feuding are hugging. Can this be? A feeble ray of hope flickers through the ashy atmosphere. Is there, really, hope?

My family seems to reconcile. I sense the soft click as my imaginary cart engages and ascends the track. My spirits lift. I suspend the internet search for my end.

This is my roller coaster. Other people are controlling my feelings. I react. I don't choose my response. It's automatic, not conscious. No wonder I feel so horrible. I have no control, and I'm riding in emotion land. I have no steering wheel.



We begin a road trip to the neighboring state for a family reunion with my siblings and their families. I take my turn driving. Or, am I driving? I'm not there most of the time. Logical Liz is an experienced driver so she can do it well.

Beth, however, feels mired in the muck as her grip tightens around the wheel. Her knuckles whiten, eyes glaze, and face distorts, provoking her adult children into a panic. She's veering into a bottomless whirlpool. It draws her in as she paints a putrid past of what a terrible mother she is. She knows it. She knows this because all the stories replaying in her head are like a horror movie, starring her. They show failure after failure. The family helps steer her clear and then unseats her. From the passenger seat, she perceives their gentle coaxing. Her riptide ebbs as she drifts back to their protection for the remainder of the six-hour drive.

My three older sisters, Kathleen, Kristine, and Yvonne, are already there. Kathleen is the oldest, followed by Kristine, then Yvonne. Kathleen's wavy, light-blonde hair is just shy of shoulder length. Kris is the only brunette now. Kris keeps her brown tufts cut short and sassy. Yvonne has always been blonde, and she keeps her straight, golden locks in a shoulder-length bob. I have a headache and need to buy some pain reliever. Kristine drives me to the grocery store. I am pretending everything is fine, but I cannot keep up this façade much longer.

In aisle number nine, I finally blurt out, "I'm suicidal."

Kristine gives me a big hug, telling me how much she loves me, and she knows how I feel. I know she cares. Then she tells me part of her own struggle with depression and remedies. At our shared height, my blue-green eyes look into her ocean-blue eyes. We see past our physical windows and gaze into each other's spirits. We connect our core essences at that moment. We are two souls who don't feel good enough.

From The Shadows: A Journey of Self-Discovery and Renewal

My torment is still there although I feel a little less crazy than the instant before.

I recall some family members have struggled with depression; it had never sunk in before. It wasn't my problem. Well, that's what I thought at the time. I didn't recognize my problem. I had never been suicidal before.

Kristine and I finish our shopping and talk some more. She gathers Kathleen and Yvonne together, and I share my anguish. They reveal theirs. They share other stories about close and extended family members and their struggles. I talk to another relative who shares his battle with depression and his remedies, including prescription medication.

I am finding solace knowing I'm not the only one. My distress is so great that I divulge many details I would not typically unveil.

My husband Gillis and my children join us. Gillis takes my lightly freckled hand in his own strong, dark hands to comfort me. We brainstorm possible actions. I hope they will work for me. I'm tired of feeling this way. It's painful for Gillis and my kids. They all want me to feel better.

They aren't used to seeing me vulnerable. They aren't used to seeing me so incredibly sad. Hmm, that's not the right word. I admit, when I hear people describe depression, they talk about sadness. There is sadness, but it's so much more. It's *hopelessness*.

The hopelessness is an immeasurable burden burrowing a black hole through me, swallowing all my light. Hope itself taunts me and spits in my face as it evaporates, leaving me isolated in darkness.

I know my emotions are dependent on others. External events trigger me. A feeling of powerlessness makes me believe there is nothing I can do about it. There will be no miracle to take the torture away, ever.

That's the thing. It is beyond sadness. At least that's how it was for me. You or someone you love may feel it differently. Depression is a powerful feeling of dis-ease.

Elizabeth Onyebor

It has also not been easy to open up about this. It's kind of taboo. Like saying, "Hey, I have a secret shame. I'm really an alien. You should think I'm weird." That's a bit how it feels.

Also, there's the labeling. I have relatives who may not want to be associated with someone coming out of the closet of depression. Actually, it's not a closet. It's a whirlpool. It's a quagmire. It's like slogging through sinking sand while the black hole saps the hope.

Not So Secretly Sad

"Are you secretly sad?"

The website queried.

Not so secretly,

Not so publicly,

Yes, so sad.

It was a secret

I kept to myself.

Thinking somehow crazed

I must be.

Knowing it was not
a normal thing to feel.

Not managing to
embrace or savor
joy for any length—
evaporated like spirits.

Couldn't describe
what I was hiding.
Sobbing alone
even when my sweetie
was in the very next room.

From The Shadows: A Journey of Self-Discovery and Renewal

Revealing my burden
felt less heavy
but didn't release it.
Sorrow persisted as
heart and head arrhythmia.

Failure. Ruminating. Speculation.
Compliments like arrows
pierced my mask and
lodged deep inside.
Didn't deserve them,
didn't they know?

Loved ones empathetic,
bear their own distress.
Yes, they have secretly
also been sad.
Not so secretly.
Not so publicly.
No, not so sad now.

Takes effort and desire
sometimes just to
leave the bed
let alone get ahead.
Shift my thoughts
then my feelings.

Not so secret.
Not so public.
Still at times sad.
Yet at times happy too.
Express and don't suppress
to feel more at balance.

Sharing with my siblings was a release. We talked at length about my depression. They encouraged my kids and Gillis in ways to support me.

Because another family member had received relief through antidepressant medication, I was hoping for the same result. I talked to a doctor and filled a prescription to take with me to Lagos. I had returned to the US on vacation to visit family and friends. This was my first trip back since moving to Nigeria two years earlier.

I read research about antidepressants; they are not always successful and carry significant risks. Studies also stated they take a while before kicking in their magic when they do work.

I thought about alternatives. For example, I could exercise for endorphins, but that also felt like going to the moon most of the time; it seemed impossible to get regular motivation for exercise. I'd already tried that. I needed something easier.

I investigated natural approaches as an alternative. I found an herb some studies had reported as helpful. On my return to Lagos, I carried both the prescription antidepressant drugs and herbal tablets with me.

I took the natural medicine first. I was keeping the prescription antidepressants on hand in case I didn't feel the desired results from the herbal tablets. After a few weeks, I decided the herbal medicine was helping, even if it might have been a placebo effect. I never took any prescription medication, but I continued the natural remedy for a year.

Silicon sea
Sucks me
Inwardly

Struggle
Sink
Stress

Feel so dire
In quagmire

Anxiety



Before I vacationed in the US, I had spent a few months replaying scathing scenes from my past. I sobbed in solitary, randomly wrote in my journal, and sought sympathy from my best friends, Katharina and Layla, before I admitted to Gillis and my kids that I felt crazy—crazy like I had never felt before.

I had felt sad, even depressed before. This feeling was far beyond those. As a teenager, I had said many times that I never understood why someone would want to commit suicide. Now, I totally understood. And everyone could judge me for feeling that way, too. Admitting that weakness and vulnerability felt like I had flaws not acceptable to society.

When I first told Gillis how I was feeling, he didn't know how to react. He was driving in Lagos's commuter traffic. Exhaust fume stench filled the air. Impatient taxi drivers hollered with their honks as they crammed and cut queues. His dark-brown eyes stared intently ahead, concentrating on maneuvering through ten merging lanes approaching the Lekki tollbooth. I looked at the soft curves of his silhouette and the kinky black-and-gray curls shorn so close they seemed straight. It wasn't good timing, but I couldn't stop myself.

I said, "I think I'm going crazy."

Then I went into details about my depressing thoughts. He wanted to take action, tell me what to do, tell me how to snap out of it. He was full of good intentions, but it made me feel like he didn't understand. It was a relief to tell him, though.

I couldn't snap out of it. I was still dependent on others. I was unconsciously reactive, not consciously responding. These did not feel like my own choices. I kept waiting for circumstances to shift so they could alter the way I was feeling. It was other people's fault—and I was responsible for everything—simultaneously.

It sounds odd when I write it, yet the feeling was just that. I was responsible for failing to maintain family harmony among Gillis, Victoria, Kenneth, Christopher, and myself. The ideal in my head superimposed itself over all the actions and interactions. Yes, they should conform to my image of the happy, functional family. I wanted it so much, and I shouldered the bulk of the blame.

I thought, "If only I had done this or that..." Really, I got to the point where I concluded that because I didn't do X, Y, or Z, then I was a failure as a mother. Everything was solely and squarely in my camp. It was not in my mind that it was not realistic. Emotions have nothing to do with logic.

As Liz, I had disconnected from Beth. I shut off Beth along with damming the emotions she embodied. I'd closeted her in a cave since I was a teenager—well, except now and then in moments of extreme feeling that I couldn't contain. So, there I was, hoping my family members would change and interact with each other differently, and at the same time shouldering the blame for why it wasn't working in the way I wanted it to—my own maternal failure.

Shift from the Middle

Shift from the middle,
between polarities,
well, really, personalities—
from mutual unease.

Perhaps it sounds like my family was a mess. In your eyes, we might be. In others' eyes, we might look great. Most don't know what we don't tell, and this isn't an exposé about Gillis, Victoria,

Kenneth, or Christopher. This is only my perspective. I had unmet expectations.

I believed I had not acted as I should have. It didn't matter that my views were not realistic. It didn't matter that many families had problems the same as or worse than ours. I can only tell you the way I felt. I looked back on nearly three decades of our history together, and I painted all of it as a Rembrandt, not a Monet.

Monet-like images with flowers and light splotches of vibrant colors existed, of course, but my mind had dark grays, dull browns, and depressing blacks of a Rembrandt self-portrait. There wasn't joy in my imagery. Just as oil colors can paint over each other, my mind had camouflaged my history with these frightening feelings of darkness and despair.

Why did I select the Rembrandt reference? Two unique oil paintings hung in my childhood home—one of each grandmother I never knew. One died before my birth, and the other died when I was still toddling around unsteadily.

My maternal grandmother, Mary, has a beautiful pink, large-brimmed hat. A large ostrich feather adorns it. She is wearing a white blouse and has twinkling, sky-blue eyes, with a faint smile, exuding kindness. Mary's portrait always made me feel good to look at her.

Elizabeth, my paternal grandmother, is wearing a black blouse. Her tanned face shows the wrinkles of her age. Elizabeth's hair has faint streaks of gray but is otherwise jet black, fading into the darkness of the canvas's background. Her eyes are as dark as her blouse, projecting harshness. I was afraid of Elizabeth's rendering when I was young.

I asked the portrait artist why the paintings were so contrasting. She had attempted a Rembrandt-like theme for Elizabeth. Later, she realized some of her suppressed emotion about the challenges she faced with Elizabeth, as her mother-in-law, found expression in her depiction. The artist was my mother.

Apparently, suppressing emotions is not a new thing in our family. Open expression was only encouraged when acting as other characters in community theater. Expression of emotion finds various ways to come out eventually, though. Like water, it always finds a way. When my emotions surfaced, they burst a dam. The gushing lake flooded me.

When engulfed, I didn't feel like going out. Going to work was enough. Besides, I couldn't easily navigate the bustling Lagos metropolis with millions of crazy drivers. Strike that. Let's call them erratic drivers. Remember, I was the crazy one.

What were some helpful activities? I wrote. I read. I downloaded books on my computer and read the e-versions. I didn't finish some books. In other books, I highlighted key points. I read books about meaning, ancient philosophy, emotional intelligence, and boundaries. I read a lot.

One of the books I read, *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron (Tarcher Books, 1992), instructed me to write every morning. I tried for a while, but I like the evenings better. Mornings have never been my thing unless they're the wee hours of the morning.

In any event, I followed the exercises each morning, scrawling my prescribed number of pages longhand. I obediently wrote each morning as soon as I woke up. Gillis would beckon me to come back to our cozy bed. Instead, I would write until the page quotas were completed. One day, feeling particularly rejected, Gillis challenged my writing.

"You're not going to change on me, quit your job, and become a writer, are you?"

I laughed and snorted, "Don't be ridiculous. That would be crazy. I'm just doing this to see if it helps."

I described feelings and random thoughts entering my head. I also wrote some intuitive blurts in those exercises. They only made sense to me a few years later when I re-read them. After a few months, I stopped. I was prefacing them "to my wonderful self," and I didn't feel wonderful. I was a fraud.

From The Shadows: A Journey of Self-Discovery and Renewal

I wanted to know if depression had been following me for a long time, unnamed. I was on a quest to investigate the past. I began reading my teenage journals.

My journals described many activities with friends, then feelings of emptiness when I was alone. I had spent my teenage years keeping busy doing school work, acting in plays with family members, doing activities with friends, longing for a boyfriend to complete me, and feeling empty when I was alone. See a pattern? Busyness. Emptiness. Sadness. Depression. My teenage depression was not deep yet. It was not at a crisis point. It was already present, though.

I had been sad and depressed, and I didn't know it. I didn't access or allow myself to feel pain. I didn't acknowledge emotions were there unless they spawned overpowering torment. I usually successfully distracted myself with activities or busyness. I took seven classes per semester instead of the usual six. I didn't stay in the dam of Beth's emotions long. Logical Liz rescued me with other activities.

Now, I had identified there was a history. A part of the equation I had solved. Some siblings suffered depression. A part of the mystery I had unraveled. I hadn't cured my quandary, though. I still needed to go further.

I was keeping busy at times while trying to solve my own depressing problems, but it was like fixing a broken wheel on a moving car. I didn't want to stop the momentum, though my car was tilting to the side, listing in one direction, and getting stuck in pothole after pothole. I was pushing and not driving. It was exhausting.

During my major depressive episodes, I still went to work. I know some people are so affected that they can barely function, but my professional mask was so secure, it enabled me to go to work. Work was easy if it kept me busy. Solving problems there was less emotional. Busyness was a great escape. Busyness or business didn't require me to feel my own horrible thoughts. I could distract myself.

On most weekends, I would sleep thirteen hours or more. Some days, I would come home from work, quickly eat, and then crawl into bed, hoping the emptiness would go away.

That's the other thing about my depression. The hopeless hole was insatiable. Sometimes it would be stronger than at other times, like a hungry animal devouring the joy of the last few hours until the misery is all that's left.

Reading my story, you might have intense emotions—whether you want to acknowledge them or not. The quagmire may be sucking you in. It's okay. I'll lighten up for a little while. It used to pull me in mercilessly, too. I get it.



There were a few bright spots among my dark periods. I journaled I wanted to feel bliss and be present in the moment. Sometimes, my wish came true.

Excerpt Two

It was about forty-five minutes to one hour by boat. On the way back, I felt so in the moment—perfectly peaceful and happy. Wishing I could feel like that always.

The area we traveled through is a natural lake that extends between the strip of land bordering the sea and the mainland. So much unspoiled beauty in coconut and palm trees. The wind raced against my face, cooling my touch of sunburn.

I felt like a dog peering over the boat's windshield as the sun set behind us. Maybe it was the nature. Maybe it was the few glasses of wine. Maybe it was both. I want to fully embrace and capture that moment of pure, lasting pleasure.

Bliss

The sun hangs low in the sky,
Faint spray of water mists the bow,
Wind rushing past me and my guy.

I don't know why or how,
In this moment,
I embrace the present;
I feel bliss.

The past is not haunting,
Nor the future daunting.
In this moment,
Is only the present.

I drink the air deeply and hold
Onto this standstill in time.
Rays kiss from the orb of gold,
Nature's gift so sublime.

In this moment,
I have a present.
I feel bliss.

I wanted to hold the feeling. Throughout this period, I searched for articles online in addition to the books I read. I diligently took my herbal medicine and exercised when I could. The exercise and the self-help were both sporadic.

I thought of sessions with a US-based therapist, but unless I had been an established patient, the practitioners I contacted would not treat me as a long-distance patient. Perhaps I didn't search hard enough. I didn't find anyone. My energy levels were low, so when I met obstacles, I didn't vigorously pursue.

Elizabeth Onyebor

I also didn't have a social network of friends in Lagos. I had moved there several months before I hit rock bottom and occasionally socialized with work acquaintances. I attended a couple of women's groups composed of Americans and other foreigners.

However, in my despair, I didn't feel like socializing as I normally would. The effort required in establishing friendships felt crushing. I was often in an unenjoyable state. Attending women's group meetings was a nice distraction, but afterward, the emptiness would come gnawing back.

Though I felt sad, hopeless, and empty, one of the first emotions I explored was anger.