

Local author takes readers beyond depression

By T. Lee Brown
Correspondent

Feeling blue? Ever feel like the blues won't lift? You're not alone. Millions of Americans live with depression. What might come as a surprise: about half of those diagnosed with depression are eventually re-diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

That's according to local author and Episcopal priest Willa Goodfellow. Her book "Prozac Monologues: A Voice from the Edge" launches on August 28 with a virtual Paulina Springs Books event also featuring Marean Jordan.

"Half. A fifty percent grade? When I went to school that was way failing," she told *The Nugget*. "They just don't do a very good job of diagnosing bipolar until it is late-stage." She hopes her book will help change that.

With a bachelor's degree from Reed College, a masters from Yale, and over three decades working as a minister, Goodfellow is bright and personable. Yet depression made her "non-functional" on and off throughout her life.

When she was 52 years old, it came on strong. Her primary physician diagnosed her with depression; Goodfellow tried the herb St. John's Wort and made lifestyle changes. Eventually the doctor "brought out the big guns" and prescribed Prozac.

Usually easygoing, Goodfellow found herself highly irritable.

"I was really on edge," she said. "I couldn't concentrate, I had real trouble sleeping, and things kind of went

downhill from there."

Some imagine that people with bipolar disorder (also known as manic-depressive illness) experience blissfully happy moods and low, sad ones. Goodfellow characterized the up phase as being more about energy than mood.

"Depression is really about mood, low mood," she said. High energy "might be either a good mood or a bad mood. And that high energy is called either mania or hypomania."

"Mania gets you into trouble," Goodfellow elaborated. She cited spending sprees, blowing up at people, and risky behavior as typical examples. "Things that get you divorced, bankrupt, fired, arrested, and hospitalized."

She experiences the less intense version, called hypomania.

"It's just ratcheted down a little," she explained.

Both are accompanied by a feeling of pressure, "when you can't stop talking, you can't stop thinking, you just can't stop." Creativity is often associated with bipolar disorder; this may be related to a symptom called "flight of ideas." (See story, page 7.)

Goodfellow described her mental processes as "connecting all the dots that are out there." Her book's monologues, written during a trip to Costa Rica after Prozac sent her into hypomania, offer a sample of the style: associative, humorous, and all over the map.

"It's really important to me to use humor, so that we can tolerate looking at what otherwise would be intolerable," Goodfellow said. "It puts a

frame around an experience and allows you to distance yourself from it."

She finds humor in the Bible and uses it in sermons.

"Prozac Monologues" intersperses Goodfellow's hypomanic Costa Rica memoirs with useful information and measured thinking about mental health.

The book's dedication reads, "I wrote this for you." Goodfellow explained that this includes doctors, to encourage them to become better at diagnosing patients. "I wrote it for friends and family, to help them understand what's going on. And I wrote it for people who are suffering and can't figure out why."

"Some of it was really addressed specifically, like, 'Now I'm talking to you, the one in the pajamas' — people who have depression that is not getting better," she said.

Goodfellow grew up in Colorado. The state of Iowa was her home for 32 years, but it was time to move on. Visiting her wife's sister in Sisters, Goodfellow felt better here.

"The mountains were in the right space, the pine was just fabulous to smell, and this little town... it was just idyllic," Goodfellow said. "We live on this street called Songbird! It's like a scene out of *The Truman Show*."

Working life can be difficult for bipolar people.

"I can get overwhelmed," Goodfellow acknowledged.

She works with a small congregation in Prineville, but phased herself out of preaching to focus on the book.

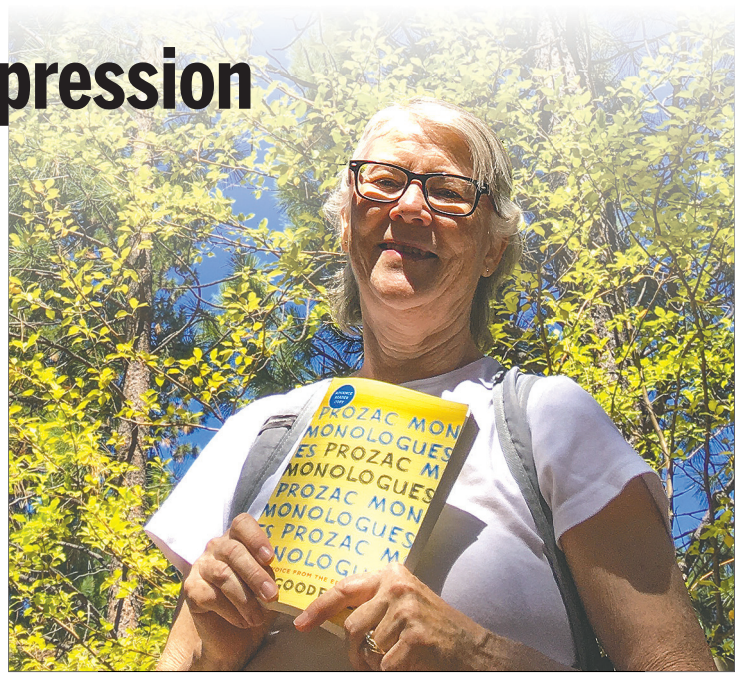


PHOTO BY TL BROWN

Sisters author Willa Goodfellow shows off an advanced reader's edition of her book *Prozac Monologues*, launching August 28 with a virtual event hosted by Paulina Springs Books.

As a minister, she has provided support and deep listening to others.

"People's needs are so immense, and they're in so many different kinds of pain," she said. "The whole COVID thing — taking a pill isn't going to fix how you feel about the fact that you can't make rent."

Sometimes people need medication, she said, but sometimes they need a pair of ears.

Dedication and passion are central to her mission.

"This diagnosis issue is a

matter of life and death," she said, citing two memoirs written by people whose loved ones were misdiagnosed.

Both patients ended up committing suicide, leaving parents and partners to tell the tale.

"That's real!" Goodfellow said. "And it could have been me. By the grace of God it was not."

Register for the Oregon book launch party at <https://tinyurl.com/willa-goodfellow-launch>. To join the author's mailing list, see www.willagoodfellow.com.