



Dr. Delaney Ruston rides with her father in this picture from her youth. Her father's battle with schizophrenia is documented in her film "Unlisted: A Story of Schizophrenia."

PHOTO COURTESY OF DELANY RUSTON

Out of hiding

Seattle physician and filmmaker Delaney Ruston spotlights the human cost of our mental health crisis

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Delaney Ruston

About 450 million people live with mental illness worldwide and nearly one million a year die of suicide.

Portland's suicide rate is higher than the national average, according to the the Portland Police Bureau, and last year the city's attention was drawn to Vista Bridge for that reason. The Southwest Portland span is also known as the "suicide bridge" for the high rate of suicides committed there each year.

In 2013, the city constructed temporary fences running along the bridge to prevent suicide. While the numbers have dropped they have not been fully averted.

No city or culture is immune to this problem.

Dr. Delaney Ruston of Seattle has traveled the world working on "Hidden Pictures," her chronicle of how different cultures deal with mental illness.

Seattle has emerged as an epicenter for global health research as the home of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; the University of Washington Department of Global Health; PATH, an international health organization; the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center; the Seattle Biomedical Research Institute; and the Washington Global Health Alliance.

Until recently, most global health initiatives have devoted resources to physical health and illnesses while mental health issues have been largely ignored. Yet, according to the World Health Organization, about 450 million people live with mental illness worldwide and almost one million a year die of suicide — mostly in low, and middle-income nations where as many as 85 percent of people with severe mental

disorders receive no treatment.

Ruston has devoted her professional life to caring for underserved populations, and now she's working to break the silence on global mental health. To spark an international discussion, the award-winning filmmaker produced the first full-length documentary on this overlooked issue, "Hidden Pictures."

Over the course of five years, Ruston traveled from Seattle to India, China, South Africa and France, exploring the plight of the mentally ill: the heartrending lack of services, human rights violations and pernicious stigma in nations rich and poor.

More than 140 international organizations screened "Hidden Pictures" on Oct. 10, Mental Health Day, and reviewers, including actress and mental health advocate Glenn Close, have praised it. Among them are public radio health reporter Joanne Silberner who wrote: "It's a deeply compelling documentary that exposes us to the harm caused by ignorance of these diseases, at the same time pointing out that the currently available approaches to care can make a real difference."

Ruston has worked as a primary care physician at various clinics for the underserved in Seattle. She is a graduate of Stanford Medical School and has taught on the faculty in the Department of Medicine at the University of Washington. She studied filmmaking in San Francisco during her internal medicine residency, and she earned a Fellowship in Ethics and Communication at the University of California, San Francisco.

In one documentary, "Unlisted: A Story of Schizophrenia," Ruston recounted her father's struggle with mental illness, how

she reconnected with him after hiding from him for 10 years, and his eventual suicide.

"Unlisted" was featured on PBS and honored with the Media Voice Award for Best Documentary by Mental Health America in 2011. Ruston's other films include "Crisis in Control," about psychiatric advance directives, and "Go Away Evil," on mental illness in South Africa.

Ruston recently spent two years in Delhi, India, as a Fulbright Scholar making films about community mental health workers in India, which will be used to promote mental health services.

We talked recently and spoke at length about filmmaking and her mental health advocacy.

Robin Lindley: You're a physician and a prize-winning filmmaker. How did you decide to become a doctor?

Dr. Delaney Ruston: My experience growing up with my dad and his schizophrenia influenced my wanting to go into the health profession. I planned to work in clinics for the underserved when I went into medicine.

After my training, when I started working in such clinics of course, I discovered that many people were facing mental health problems. Fortunately, my residency in primary care internal medicine taught us how to help treat many mental health conditions.

Even though my dad's schizophrenia motivated me to go into medicine, I didn't want to go into psychiatry. I think it just felt too close to home, but now I love helping

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