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VENDOR PROFILE

Saoirse-Seersha Bell

BY LEONORA KO
STAFF WRITER

Saoirse-Seersha Bell is turning 60 and getting her life back, as an author, as a social activist and as a recent subject of a bikini photo shoot.

"We're all late bloomers in my family," Saoirse said with a laugh.

Her mother, who self-published 32 books after the age of 60, has inspired Saoirse to self-publish her own life story. Saoirse has nearly finished her book, which describes how she used diet and supplements to lose 175 pounds and treat her bipolar disorder.

"I'm completely open about my diagnosis," Saoirse said.

Bipolar disorder is a mental illness that can come on suddenly and causes dramatic swings in mood, energy and the ability to think clearly. Almost 6 million Americans are affected.

For Saoirse, the effect of the disorder was dramatic.

During the 1990s, Saoirse was active in local politics in Boulder, Colo. She was elected to two American Civil Liberties Union boards, volunteered for two city council campaigns and ran for city council in 1997.

In 1998, her husband died unexpectedly, and she went over an edge she didn't know was there.

"I had a manic episode (at my job)," she said. "They didn't know what to do with me,

and I didn't know what to do with me. I couldn't stop talking."

After losing her job, she couldn't pay the rent, and things went down from there

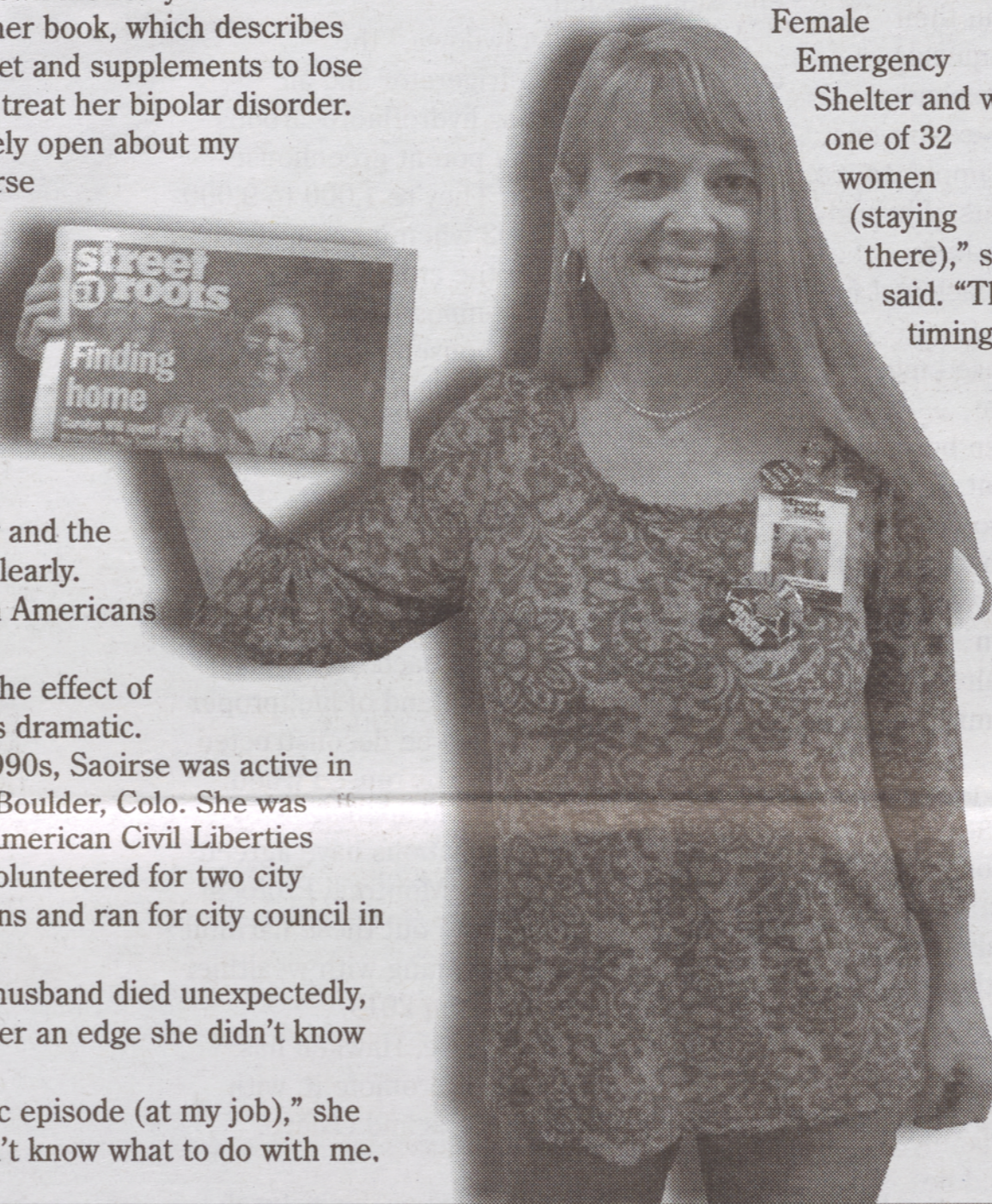
"To go from the middle class and directly into joblessness, homelessness, poverty – it wasn't a gradual decline; it was a sudden fall," she said.

She and her young son moved through the Boulder homeless shelter system.

When some inheritance money came through, Saoirse and her son moved to Portland. With this boost, she thought she could recover her life. But she was unable to work, the money ran out, and they were back on the street.

"In 2005, I went to the Salvation Army

Female
Emergency
Shelter and was
one of 32
women
(staying
there)," she
said. "The
timing



couldn't have been better. It was the first time that SAFES partnered with the city of Portland for a program to place all of the women into transitional housing."

Things fell into place after that. Saoirse got medical help and was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. After seven years of homelessness, she qualified for disability housing, where she has lived for 11 years.

But Saoirse said that for her, the side effects of the bipolar disorder medications were severe. She ballooned to 300 pounds and had to use a walker. By this time, her son was an adult and, worried about her, started helping her out at home.

When her therapist suggested seeking medical alternatives, Saoirse found a naturopathic physician and hit the library to research healthy solutions.

"I worked using discipline and knowledge," she said. "I threw everything I had at it."

Saoirse lost 175 pounds and is building up her strength on her Street Roots job. She sells papers at People's Food Coop on Southeast 21st Avenue and the Alberta Food Coop on Northeast Alberta Street.

"I love being a Street Roots vendor, and I'm proud of the organization," she said. "This is a job! This is a real job."

Saoirse also believes she has regained her voice.

"I know who I am," she said. "I know what I want to do. I know who I want to help."

To that end, she has resumed her social activism and has already traveled to Salem four times this year, lobbying for issues such as the Right to Rest Act.

And her most recent bikini photos were taken as "after pictures" to show her weight loss for her upcoming book.

"My son shows those pictures to everyone," Saoirse said. "He is so proud of me, and I can't say how much that means. He said this proves to him that anyone can come back from the edge. Anyone."

Answers to Page 15 Puzzles

6	2	9	7	5	4	1	3	8
8	7	3	2	9	1	4	5	6
1	4	5	6	8	3	7	2	9
7	3	4	9	1	5	8	6	2
5	8	6	3	2	7	9	1	4
9	1	2	4	6	8	5	7	3
4	5	1	8	3	6	2	9	7
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3	9	8	1	7	2	6	4	5

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Sheeptoast

by Elizabeth Considine

