

YESHIE'S MENTAL HEALTH SAFARI

A Tale of De-stigmatation by : Rev. Ryan Althaus

"A Safari! Oh Joy!" shouted Yeshie the Sheep,
After lying awake all night — too excited to sleep.
With monkeys on his mind, he grabbed a banana mid-leap,
As he dashed out the door, towards a big green jeep.

A hippo? A flamingo? A giraffe, zebra, or lion?
Would the first animal he saw be walking, galloping, or flying?
Just no slithering because snakes made him run crying,
or any of the buzzing bugs that kept multiplying!

The jeep bounced up and down as it rolled over rough rocks,
And splashed through a muddy puddle, soaking Yeshie's sheep-wool socks.
"What's that?" Yeshie yelled as he pulled a pair of binoculars from the glove box.
Before climbing from the jeep—sly like a fox.

Yeshie cheered when a grand grey creature stepped out from the trees,
whose wrinkly skin stretched from his ears to his knees.
"Who are you?" Yeshie's question caused the creature to freeze.
"Why, I'm Eli the elephant...I think. Now would you help me get home, pretty please?"

"Of course I will help you," the sheep shouted up towards the sky,
At the trunk of the elephant, as it swatted a fly.
"I cannot remember my way home, no matter how hard I try.
In fact, I forget a lot of things these days," Eli admitted, then started to cry.

"That's okay, Mr. Elephant," Yeshie said in a soothing tone.
"It would be my pleasure to help you find your way home."
"I'm not crying because I'm lost," Eli replied with a groan.
"I'm crying because elephants aren't supposed to forget things—so I feel sad and alone."

But Eli was not a failure, and there was no need to feel fitful.
He simply had something called Alzheimers that made him forgetful.
So Yeshie passed Eli a tissue and gave a gentle pull,
on the ear of an absent-minded elephant who seemed super cool.

The Jeep was a little small for Eli's elephant sized rear-end,
But that didn't stop Yeshie from helping his new found friend.
"We can walk together beside it!" The sheep's lips started to bend,
into the shape of a smile that he was happy to lend.

Together the sheep and the elephant trotted across the savannah,
until they ran into a stripped horse, wearing a red bandanna!
"What's your naaaammmmmme," Yeshie yelped, as he slipped on the peel of a banana.
The horse poked Eli with her hoof, then answered: "My name is Ana."

"Hey, why'd you poke me?" asked the elephant of the stripped horse,
"Why? To make sure that you were real, of course."
"Real?" Eli feared his confusion must be getting worse.
"Yeah, sometimes I see things that aren't there and hear voices that have no source."

Ana looked sad as she pulled the bandana down over her eyes.
"I'm a zebra, not a horse," she said, then she started to cry.
"I have something called schizophrenia—and much like these stripes of mine,

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It makes it hard to know what's real or fake," she said in reply.

Ana galloped in a circle, and much like she'd claimed,
Her stripes swirled into spirals while the wind blew through her mane.
Yeshie hated to see such a pretty zebra feeling such pain;
Just because other animals labeled her imagination 'insane.'

"There is nothing wrong with hearing or seeing things that others do not,
After all, whose to say what I call a stripe isn't a poke-a-dot!
However, whenever you get sad or confused, it sure helps a lot,
To have fun friends at your side when through the savanna we trot!!"

So together the absent-minded elephant and sheep smiled and said:
"Ana, we would love to have a schizophrenic zebra join us as we tread!
With those welcoming words that the trio was led,
Across African planes — under skies of pink, orange and red.

The day had grown hot, and their mouths were getting dry,
So the three new-found-friends wandered to a watering hole nearby.
It was there that a great big white bear greeted them with a sigh:
"I am Bill the Bi-polar bear," he declared. "Hello and Goodbye!"

"A polar bear in Africa? I must be seeing things again,"
said the schizophrenic zebra of this 'bi-polar' bear she thought was pretend.
But bi-polarity isn't a bad thing, it just meant Bill's feelings bounced between two ends;
North or south, he couldn't decide, so in Africa he tends.

"Sometimes I'm extra happy, but happy can quickly turn sad.
But being here at the watering hole always makes me glad!"
"Everyone's feelings change, so don't let your's get you mad,
Because no matter what emotion you are feeling, this sheep thinks you're super-duper rad!"

Then Bill told the trio about two friends that traveled together:
Maurice the manic monkey, whose energy was better;
Than Dave the depressive dingo, whom always seemed to be under the weather.
Combined they called themselves manic-depressive, and they were best buddies forever!

Although they had not seen Maurice the Monkey, Yeshie thought he knew,
That it was off of his banana peel that, earlier, he flew.
Meanwhile, while the others chatted, Eli sucked up the water blue —
And with his mighty trunk, a sprinkler he did construe!

The shower was refreshing, and the gang danced and cheered;
But their merrymaking ended abruptly when Yeshie saw the snake that he had feared!
He watched as it slithered along the shoreline, dragging a scraggly green beard,
And decided that the snake wasn't scary after all—just a little weird!

Ecccccussse me for interrrrrrrrupting," the snake said to the stunned bunch.
"But it just so happens that I ppppacked ssssome extra ssssandwiches for lunch.
Yeshie was still nervous, but the group had a hunch,
That this snake was pretty special, so with him they did munch!

"Thank you for sharing, that sure was very nice!

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What is your name," Ana asked, before grabbing another slice.
"Ssssssssome call me Sssssstuttering Ssssstuey." The snake seemed to say things twice.
"And I love to ssssshare with others at thissssss oasissssss paradissssssssse."

"Say Stuey, you should join us," said the snake-fearing sheep.
"We are on a journey to find Eli's home and there is an extra seat in the jeep."
"Gosh, that ssssssure is awful kind, but after lunch I like to ssssssleep."
And after waving goodbye, Stuey slithered toward a sunny-stone without a peep.

The group sure was grateful for the sandwich-sharing snake,
It had been a long morning and their bellies had been begging for a lunch break!
And despite his stuttering and slithering, Stuey sure knew how to make,
The perfect peanut butter sandwich for a picnic at the lake.

So with happy tummies the team traipsed onward towards Eli's home,
Through green jungles they did trek and across golden savannas they did roam.
Ana paused to kick a coconut, but the bi-polar bear grumpily moaned;
"We don't have time to play soccer today, Ana" he insisted, in a serious tone.

"No time to play?" The schizophrenic zebra seemed confused.
The voice in her head had told her to kick the coconut — but Bill was obviously not amused.
"Its okay Ana," Eli the Elephant said after taking a second to muse.
"There is a field by my den where you can play soccer all evening long if you choose!"

The Elephant sure was exhausted; after all, he was pretty old,
But his enormous ears perked up when he saw an armadillo crossing the road.
He had never met one of these armored animals in person, but he had always been told,
That their wisdom was more valuable than 27 bars of gold!

"Excuse me Mr. Armadillo, do you think you would be so kind,
As to direct us towards my elephant den? You see, we are in a bit of a bind.
I got lost while walking this morning, and now I can't seem to find,
The way back to my home. Lately it feels like I'm losing my mind."

"Of course I will help you, but just so you know,
My name is Ernie, and I am not your everyday armadillo.
I have something called autism, and much like a rainbow,
Under this hard skin of mine, a bright spectrum of colors is a glow.

As sure as he spoke, Ernie's boring beige skin began to shine,
Red, orange, and yellow...oh, he looked so divine!
Then a bow of green, blue, indigo, and violet painted a line,
That lit the way towards Eli's den— and in just the nick of time!

"Wow, Ernie the Armadillo! Autism sure is a beautiful gift,"
Said Yeshie the Sheep, before offering Ernie a lift.
"Indeed, it can be, but autism can also create quite a rift,
Between me and the world—you see, I'm very sensitive to things that others miss."

"Loud sounds and bright lights often cause me to stay hidden,
Under this shell-like skin that dulls the colorful gifts I've been given."
"While, I think that you are a hero and deserve a blue ribbon,
For shining so brightly," exclaimed Eli. "Despite being anxiety-ridden."

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Ernie thanked his new friends, and sent the group on their way,
So they could get Eli home before the sun set on the day.
"Oh, one more thing," Ernie started to say.
"You might pass my friend Paul, a Chimpanzee with Cerebral Palsy, who loves to play!"

"Oh joy!" shouted the soccer-loving schizophrenic zebra named Ana.
"I need a buddy to kick a coconut with—and I could use a banana!"
With those words the gang strutted off, staring upward at the rainforest panorama,
But instead of Cerebral Paul, they met a mask-wearing panda!

He was there...then he wasn't...then he came into view again.
"Do you need a watch or a wallet?" he asked. "They are free for you my friends.
My name is Patrick, and I have a problem that you might help me mend...
You see, I am a kleptomaniac with a conscience—thus I'm pulled between two ends."

A klepto-what?" Yeshie repeated the word in the form of a question.
"Kleptomaniac—it means I can't stop taking things, like the watch that I mentioned.
However, I don't like to steal, so there lies the tension,
In fact, I always give back each and every stolen possession.

"Hey! That's my watch," Bill the bi-polar bear shouted with a bare wrist.
"And that's my wallet," Ana announced, never knowing it had gone amiss.
"How did you do that you do that," Eli asked. "Please, give us the gist."
"I'll show you instead," Patrick replied, before disappearing into the mist.

When he reappeared he was wearing Ana's red bandanna and the wool socks
that Yeshie had received as a gift from his flock.
Then the pick-pocketing panda returned it all—even Bill's watch that went tictok,
Because it didn't feel good to steal, and Patrick feared that in prison, he'd might get locked.

"I sure do apologize," Patrick pleaded for forgiveness,
"It's just...I cannot seem to stop stealing things, despite all of my resistance.
So I fled from the rainforest to the jungle—and now I keep my distance,
from anyone that might be hurt by my criminal existence."

The group of wandering friends listened to the Panda's sad confession.
They liked Patrick a lot, and didn't blame him for his burglary obsession.
After all, stealing was not this masked-bear's true intention,
He just struggled to find a better means of self-expression.

"We all do things that we know we shouldn't do every now and again,
But that isn't a reason to run away from your family and friends.
When you feel like fleeing from those who love you, why not share your struggles instead...
You may just find, they have support of which to lend."

With those words Yeshie invited the Panda a ride in the big green jeep,
And Patrick happily accepted because the hill up ahead looked pretty steep!
Yeshie knew that Patrick meant well, and that a promise he would keep,
To ask before he takes things, and share any gifts that he might reap.

When they finally reached the hilltop they saw Eli's Elephant den a little ways ahead,
However there was a raging river running through valley that they feared they couldn't tread.

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The jeep did not float, so they would have to swim across instead,
.But the river looked scary, and the water was deeper than their head!

Just then a flash of feathers went sprinting by,
And, although it looked like a bird, this creature couldn't fly!
"Hey, wait for us," Yeshie yelled out to the speed-demon in reply,
But the long-legged bird just kept running—he refused to comply.

"Sorry but I cannot pause—I have to count my steps and wash my hands.
You see, their are germs in the jungle, all over the ground upon which you stand!"
"Germs?!" Eli the elephant said, as he looked downward at the sand."
"Yes. Germs!" the bobbing-headed bird shouted, before he turned away and ran.

They followed in his footsteps, hoping he might show them the way,
To get across the river, before they lost the light of day.
When the group finally caught the creature, it was as true as he did say,
He was washing his winged-hands with a bar of soap made out of clay.

"Excuse us Mr. Bird — we do not mean to seem rude,
But we need to find a way across the river, and you look like a pretty savvy dude!"
The tall and tidy feathered figure looked up and seemed amused,
"My name is Oscar—the Obsessive Compulsive Ostrich—and a solution I'll give you."

"Obsessive compulsive?" Eli repeated the strange words in the form of a question.
"Yes, it means that I fixate on certain routines, and, as for your query, I have a suggestion!
Just watch my feet—toenails tidy and neat—and I will teach you an important lesson."
Then Oscar's legs started spinning, and with a flash the obsessive ostrich made quite the impression!

Although he could not fly, Oscar fast spinning legs skimmed across the water's surface,
Causing Eli and Anna to cheer; however, poor Yeshie got a little nervous.
Yeshie's short-sheep legs didn't move very fast and he feared sinking like a soggy clown in a circus.
The sheep had never learned to swim and, to that end, he spent his life away from the water on purpose.

The sun had almost set and the friends were oh so close,
To Eli's den, but the rapids of the river were a bit too scary and verbose.
But to the surprise of the armadillo, elephant, zebra, panda, bear and Yeshie, their host,
A big round rock rose up from the rushing river, like a ghost!

At first there was just one, but one turned into five,
And the stones formed a path across the river on which the great green jeep could drive!
The animals cheered as their journey had been revived,
But "Wait!" Eli exclaimed: "Those rocks look to be alive!"

As sure as the elephant spoke, one of the rocks grew a head and four feet,
And crawled out from the blue water that flowed so wide and deep.
The safariing squad stood in shock without a peep,
Until the rock yawned and said: "I'm Trevor, the traumatized tortoise, and you awoke me from my sleep.

"Sorry Mr. Tortoise, we didn't mean to wake you from your dream,
But we need your help crossing the river," said the elephant as the turtle studied the safariing team."
"Its okay," said the turtle, "these days I have more nightmares it'd seems,
So I am happy to be awake and glad to help you all cross the stream!"

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"Nightmares?" Ana asked of the traumatized-tortoise,
"Unfortunately so, Mrs. Zebra—and they make me quite nervous.
You see, a long time ago my turtle friends and I served in the military service,
And the violence we saw gave us Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders."

"We sure hate to hear that, no one likes to see fighting."
But Ana's words of support was interrupted by a flash of lightening.
Trevor's head disappeared into his shell at the sighting,
Loud sounds and bright lights were far too frightening.

"Its okay," said the zebra, "that was only the flash,
Of a camera that Patrick the Panda had stashed."
Since there was no lightening, there'd be no thunderous crash,
Just a portrait of the posse so the memory of the moment would last.

Trevor sure was relieved and willing to lend a shell,
The group of new friends who seemed super swell!
So he called together his Tortoise team with the sound of a bell,
And they formed a bridge to the den which Eli did dwell.

And with that the elephant, sheep, and bi-polar bear...
And Panda and zebra, with black and white hair,
All cheered and held hands as they skipped through the air,
Across tortoise shell-stepping stones, over the river in pairs.

They finally had made it to the elephant's enormous size home,
And Eli thanked them all with a mighty elephant-sized groan.
From savanna to jungle the diverse bunch had roamed,
Because together they could do what none of them could do alone!

The End.