

From Trauma to Sanity: Perseverance is Key

Valorita Salaam

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From Trauma to Sanity is a memoir about a woman's struggles with mental illness following traumatic events.

Valorita Salaam's memoir *From Trauma to Sanity* covers her courageous battle with mental illness.

The memoir opens with the engaging scene of a phone conversation about Salaam's continuous battles with mental disorders, in which she whispers into the phone, explaining that she has been seeing a man seated on the roof outside of her kitchen window. Following the conversation, she was approved for social security disability. Later, the book flashes back to her childhood, revealing that Salaam endured mental and physical violence when she was growing up; it recurred in her adulthood.

Salaam was eight when her parents separated, after which she helped to take care of her younger siblings. She experienced privations, abandonment, and feelings of loneliness. Her stepfathers were emotionally and physically violent. Later, as a young single parent, she learned to navigate career challenges; she married and dealt with blended family parenting issues. All the while, she struggled with mental illness.

The book is full of devastating memories, as of domestic violence, learning to street fight with her siblings, and being abandoned by her mother. Salaam recalls encountering criminals while working, as well as being shot at. She endured severe physical injuries and ended up experiencing PTSD. However, such experiences are covered in a factual manner; coverage of their emotional impacts is limited. The book is better at conveying the joy of cheerful moments, as when Salaam's stepfather taught her the basics of playing the piano. A job promotion and a period of stability at home also factor in, while accounts of Salaam's happy marriage have a lightening effect.

Phone conversations are used as a recurrent form of preserving dialogue: a call with a naval recruitment officer about a training opportunity is included, as is a call that derailed Salaam's plans to serve in the Navy. Salaam's conversation with her doctor after she woke up in hospital following the armed robbery incident stands out. Others are made distinctive through accounts of their personalities and flaws, including Salaam's siblings and her stepdaughter, who is seen grappling with her changing family dynamics. But Salaam's determination to rise above her struggles—she cared for her daughter on her own; she stood up to a partner; she pursued advances in her work and education—stand out most.

Salaam's resolve to move past each challenge is a constant theme in *From Trauma to Sanity*, a memoir about struggling with mental illness following traumatic events.

EDITH WAIRIMU (September 21, 2021)

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