

Matt (host): Welcome back to Nimble Youth, the podcast where we explore the emotional lives of children and teens and give parents and caregivers tools to support their mental health. I'm your host, Matt Butterman. Today's episode is about something deeply personal to me and to many of our listeners, writing. For some people, writing is just an academic task, but for others, it becomes something much more powerful, a way to process emotions, make sense of chaos, and even survive difficult chapters of life. Before we begin today's conversation, I want to share something personal.

I didn't start writing because I thought I had something important to say. I started writing because I didn't know what to do with what I was feeling. There are moments in life, especially when you're young, when things don't quite make sense. You feel something heavy or confusing or persistent and you don't have the language for it yet. You don't have the diagnosis.

You don't have the framework. And sometimes you don't even really have anyone to talk to, but you do have a page and there's something remarkable about that page. It doesn't interrupt you. It doesn't judge you. It doesn't try to fix you.

It just listens. For me, became a way of slowing things down, of taking thoughts that felt tangled and putting them into some kind of order, not perfect order, not polished, but enough to say that this is real and this is mine. And over time, I began to understand something. Writing isn't just about telling stories, it's about discovering them. Sometimes the story is who you are, sometimes it's what you're going through, and sometimes it's a way of finding your way back to yourself.

Today's guest, Benton Savage, has lived that in a much deeper and more difficult way using writing not as just expression, but as survival. And I think for many young people listening and for many parents trying to understand them, that idea matters because not every child is going to talk, but many of them will write. Again, my guest today is Benton Savage, a writer whose work spans fiction, poetry, and memoir. His recent book, *Madness Misdiagnosed* offers a raw and unfiltered look at his experience navigating years of untreated and misdiagnosed mental illness, including OCD and schizophrenia, and the long journey towards stability and self understanding. Benton's writing is deeply rooted in lived experience, capturing confusion, loss of control, and ultimately the slow process of reclaiming one's life.

Benton, welcome to Nimble Youth. Thank you, sir. So your work is incredibly honest and at times it's, it's unflinching, at how it portrays mental illness. Can you take us back to when writing first became part of your life and was it always something that you turned to or did it emerge during those sort of trials, those more difficult periods in your life?

Benton Savage: I'll tell you exactly when I started writing and it was right when I got diagnosed. Well, I was misdiagnosed, but I thought I was bipolar for twenty years. When I was originally diagnosed as bipolar, I had kind of a girl I was seeing and she said, you've written me nice letters, not love letters, just nice letters. She said, you know, you liked, I always liked to read. She knew that.

She said you might, a lot of people that are mentally ill write you know, you might be able to write something, get your thoughts on paper and be able to write something. And she introduced me, she showed me the book, *Unquiet Mind* by K. Redfield Jamison, which is a very famous book about mental health. I read that book and I thought, well, I'll just write a book like that. And then, twenty five years later, I'm still working at it.

But that's what I did. I started writing really just because of my mental illness that I, but I never had the intention of just writing mentally ill stuff. I wanted to write fiction, but that was my first go. That was all I knew right at the time. That's all I could write.

Was so distraught, so to speak.

Matt (host): Right. Right. And so it's a way of, of, of making sense of what's going on around you in many ways. And so you've described your writing as being inspired by real experiences, almost like you're documenting life as it unfolds. Did writing initially feel like your expression or was it merely a way for you to survive?

Benton Savage: In the beginning, it was more to survive just to kind of keep my mind dizzy because I was, when I first time I, when I was first diagnosed, I was really low, really almost catatonic in a way. I mean, not all over the place, really not catatonic and very exact opposite. I just really couldn't function. I couldn't think I couldn't do anything. So I just started writing my thoughts down and it was, it was painful, painful.

It was hard to put the words down. Cause I didn't really have that much to say. I was just about, I just did it, you know, on the inspiration of that girl saying, you know, you ought to do it. I mean, I was thinking career from the start. I mean, it didn't turn out to be my career, but I mean, I was just looking for anything at that point, just something to grasp.

Exactly. You give me some kind of inspiration, some reason to take on the next day. And it really does, you know, there were plenty of times where I was like, you know, when I really down, you know, don't do go too far because you know, you might make it as a writer and you're, you've got something to say about this illness. And it really kept me alive in a way, just the optimism of writing.

Matt (host): Yeah. Yeah, it does. Many, for many writers and many of our best writers, our most famous writers have had mental illness or very difficult lives and the act of writing has been sort of a, you know, a discipline that they engage in and it's a way, it's a period during their day where they can, they can sit down and focus on it where there might be chaos going on around them or, you know, Ernest Hemingway famously would, would spend his nights drinking and then he'd wake up at, you know, five in the morning and just boom. Yes. Work assiduously on his, on his writing.

So, you know, you've worked, you've spoken openly about living for years with, with untreated or undiagnosed mental illness. You know, it's an incredibly disorienting experience when you don't understand what's happening in your own mind. And so during that time, I think you've hinted at it already, but during that time, what role did writing play for you?

Benton Savage: It just really, I wasn't working for about a year when I first got diagnosed and that was really what I considered my occupation. I mean, I was writing some mental ill. What I originally started doing was writing a fictional account of somebody with mental illness. Just, I don't know. I didn't want to own up to all the kinds of crazy things I did.

I just, it was just easier for me to write, to pretend it was fiction, but it, you know, it'd be exaggerated a little bit, but it really was pretty much non fiction. I mean, it's pretty much autobiographical. When I first arrived, I started to write them kind of fictionalized it because I just, it was kind of embarrassing. And finally what really got me to finally get this book. This book was written in 2009, but was not published until 2025.

And, when I wrote the book, it wasn't really so much therapeutic. I wrote it more when I actually wrote this book, it was more out of anger because I just got out of middle hospital for like the seventh or eighth time in ten years. And I've got tired of people telling me you're being weak. You don't need to take medication. You know, just be strong.

I'm bipolar as well. And I don't take medication. Enough people tell you that you start thinking maybe I am being weak. Maybe I can do it. Cause if you take the medication, usually you feel pretty darn good.

I mean, pretty feel pretty darn normal and you start thinking it that you can do it. And I continually did it off and on again. And finally, I got out that one time. Was like, I've been writing. I was like, I'm going to write a tell all book exactly what went on in my life last ten years.

I don't care how embarrassing it is. And it was embarrassing. I mean, there's some terrible stuff in there. I mean, you just ridiculous behavior. And I tried to rationalize, but I said, I'm just going tell everything.

And my point was at the end this book, you tell me I don't need to be on middle, on mental health medication if you read this book, because there's no doubt this person has got some issues. I mean, middle right. It changed me. I wrote it out of a, I don't want call it an anor, but really I was like, okay, I'm going to show you. This is what it's all about.

I mean, is not the TV version. This is it.

Matt (host): Yeah. And and writing does that. I mean, it's a way for for the writers to make sense of what they can't necessarily understand, which which sounds a bit counterintuitive. I mean, why why would you write about something that you don't understand, but the process of writing about it makes you understand it. Right?

Benton Savage: Well, Flannery O'Connor said that she wrote to find out how much she knew.

Matt (host): Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

Benton Savage: You can get great writing too. That's a very, very interesting way of looking at it because you do discover things about yourself or about that you didn't think you knew or that you'd figure out when you're writing. It's very interesting.

Matt (host): Right. Yeah. Yeah. So again, one of the themes in your memoir is this idea of reclaiming yourself and making sense of these experiences that once felt completely chaotic or out of control. How does how does how does the writing itself or the the act of writing bring structure to to your internal chaos?

Again, I think you've hit it, but like, was there a was there a routine that you got into that that helped you control it?

Benton Savage: Well, you brought up Ernest Hemingway riding at five or six. I think he wrote, got up at five and wrote from six to ten was his rough schedule. I mean, that's what he tried to, at least in his early days. And that was kind of the schedule I tried to keep. I was even drinking too.

I'll tell you a little bit more about that in a minute. I really wanted to live the Ernest Hemingway lifestyle. When I first got started, I tried for a long time. He was supposedly bipolar or, you know, they speculate that he may have been, he probably had some issues given at the end of his life, given his life in general, but I've tried to follow his part and I still do follow. I've already written two or three hours this morning.

I try to write first thing in the morning, you know, as soon as I kind of get my bearings, I like to start off my day because at 09:00 in the morning, the phone's ringing and You know, to get it done in the morning, no distractions. I like to get up early as of at 04:00 this morning, writing by five and wrote till like 07:30. And I know that's kind of my schedule. I can't write four hours a day like Hemingway did. I don't have, I just get a little, I write two or three almost every day though, But four is a long time to write.

Matt (host): It really is. It is a long time to write. The only time I write and I'm writing in the process of writing my first novel right now, and same same deals with you. I, like, I get up in the morning and do it. I'm I'm not typically a morning person, but but because I, you know, have another profession and and it's just so it's the the freshest time of the morning for me.

And my thoughts are fresh and sometimes I, you know, I I think, you know, dream stuff at night or I think of stuff when I'm waking up and I have to go I have to go I do have a, you know, a pad by my, know, on my bedside table, but but I have to go, you know, sometimes put it put it work on my computer for a little bit and and get it down. I guess you don't call it on paper anymore,

but get it get it digitally recorded. So in our podcast, of course, is about teens and young adults. And so, so let's talk about young people. And I know there are many teens listening to this podcast, perhaps their parents who are struggling right now and they have anxiety, depression.

These intrusive thoughts are just, they're feeling overwhelmed by life. And some of them might not think of themselves as writers. But what would you say to a teenager about how writing might be able to help?

Benton Savage: I will tell you this. No English teacher ever told me you're going to be a writer someday dedicated to the first book. I was always a good student, but I was not an outstanding writer by any stretch. And I'm still not an outstanding writer in my opinion, but I do, I'm getting, you get better at it. You get better at putting your thoughts on paper.

You get better at organizing it. It's easy to talk about it, but to get it on paper is a whole different thing. And you organize your thoughts. I will tell you a project that I'm working on. I've got a couple of things to say right now.

Since we were talking about youth, first thing I will say is that I was diagnosed as mentally ill when I was eight years old. I wasn't told what I was, but I took this drug called Mellaril when I was eight years old, which was one of the first antipsychotics that came out in the sixties or seventies. I started taking it probably '80 or '81. And I took it for four or five years. Did pretty well, did well, did well in school and athletics, socially.

And then I went off to boarding school. Was in ninth grade. And I don't remember this, but my mom tells me, I told her I don't want to take the pills while go off to school. I just didn't want to do it. So I didn't take medicine for all through high school and college that I quit when I was about, we'll call it 14.

And then I got re diagnosed, but diagnosed bipolar when I was 25. So I went 10 and my life was good for at times, but my grades steadily went down from the time I went to quit taking medication until the, I was pretty much a straight A student when I was taking medication. Last time I graduated college, I was basically a C student, barely graduated. And I can attribute a little, I don't, I mean, I contribute that to a lot of things, but the medication was one thing that my grades steadily went down every year from that time on medication. You know, I mean, medication does help, but I'll just go throw it in about the youth.

I'll tell you another thing that has really been helpful for me lately. And this is my latest book that's coming out in a couple months. You're told about writing first thing in the morning. I'm also an alcoholic and I wrote this book called *The Stoic Alcoholic*, which is basically a daily journal. I brought it every three sixty five days.

I probably wrote one hundred and eighty days of it. And I wrote just that day. I never rewrote them. I hadn't, didn't really reread them. They're getting edited right now, but I wrote about my

thoughts on alcoholism or just addictive behavior, sugar, alcohol, cigarettes, whatever, just different stuff that, you know, what I'd substitute in place of alcohol.

And it was really helpful. It really helped me with my alcoholism. I mean, I'm still, I don't, I can't claim I'm completely reformed, but it gave me a new take on it. In fact, I changed the alcoholic. Stoic alcoholic.

It was going to be called the stoic alcoholic, the first three sixty six days of sobriety. And I made it about a 100 and then I started drinking again. Then I quit again. So the title is, and they really, I like this title and I think it's very different than anybody else preaches an AA or anything. It's called a stoic alcoholic.

It's not only about counting the days. It's more about a mindset because a lot of times if you I've quit several times and if you quit and you fall, you're like, oh, I failed. I can't do it. Might as well just give

Matt (host): up. Exactly.

Benton Savage: Don't get a day behind throw that day or two behind you and start over. It's not about counting days. It's about your life.

Matt (host): Exactly.

Benton Savage: Yeah. If you're having a bad day, just put it behind you and just, you know, sober up again. Don't let it, don't fall apart on it. And that's where the message of that book is. Don't fall apart.

The next day is still there. Exactly. You were not perfect.

Matt (host): Yeah. No, I think it's a it's a great message and, you know, having lived with people who are alcoholic, you know, it's it's absolutely like that, you know, and if you trip up, I know it's like the, you know, the myth of Sisyphus, can't say this word, Sisyphus, you know, where where the the boulder rolls down the the bottom of the hill again, and you have to start start again. But don't let the boulder, roll back all the way to the bottom of the hill. You have a if you have a trip up just, you know, you can you can keep it there and you can keep moving it up the hill.

Benton Savage: Very difficult to do. But you can. It's very

Matt (host): difficult to do. It really is. Sure. Yeah. Yeah.

And I on the point of just writing for for young people, but it doesn't it doesn't have to be polished. Right. And it doesn't even have to be shared. Sometimes just, you know, writing itself is is really important. I know just, you know, a few years ago when I was going through a divorce, the act of of writing was just extremely it it kept me alive, really.

It really kept me alive. So, it and I, you know, I haven't published anything from that that time period, but it was just, it was absolutely therapeutic for me. Know. So, our parents listening, I know sometimes it can be hard to know how to help a child who's struggling emotionally. So, how do you think parents can encourage writing or any kind of creative expression, whether it's painting or, you know, music making without making it feel like it's another assignment, something that they have to do.

Right.

Benton Savage: That's a tough one to try to get a kid to write. I mean, I tried to keep a diary long before when I was a little kid and I didn't last long on that either, but it wasn't anything. I mean, I was basically just in my day account to get them motivated. I just got really, it needed to find something that interests them. And I couldn't do art therapy.

I have done art therapy in middle hospitals. It's fine. I just can't paint worth a darn. And, you know, I don't find it that satisfying, but I can write. I've always been able to read and write.

It's whatever you go. Some people are good at, I mean, I love music more than anything in the world, but I can't play a musical instrument to save my life. I have tried it at in my life, but yeah, music would be great. Art would be great or writing. Writing's the only real art talent I have at all.

Matt (host): That's the way I went.

Benton Savage: But it's a good one because you get to, you got to actually express what's inside you with words rather than just expressing your feelings, so to speak.

Matt (host): Complete abstraction, right? Yeah. Yeah. So let's talk a little bit about writing versus ruminating. And there's a, it's an interesting distinction here because sometimes when people are struggling they can get stuck in these cycles of rumination where they replay thoughts over and over and over.

And I know you've, you've, had some, some, issues with OCD. And so how is, how is writing different from rumination and can it help you sort of break that, that cycle? Can it help you, you know, actually get out of those rumination loops?

Benton Savage: Yes, it does help. And you need to do it regularly though. I mean, you can't just do it sporadically. You'd really need to get in the habit of doing it. You know, it didn't have to be every day or just a regular habit.

Yes. Just get it down on paper. You start to realize if you write down your behavior on paper, it makes a lot, you start to realize sometimes you're just being kind of ridiculous, especially with OCD because you just repeat things go over. I've got a really bad case of OCD. I'm not like a cleaning type of OCD.

Get stuff stuck in my head. And I just repeat it over and over and over. I remember at one point I was, I was walking and I could, I was either wanting to go one direction or the other, and I could not make up my mind if I wanted to go backwards or forwards. I started playing the song, should I stay or should I go over, over my head? And I'll go about five yards that way, about five yards that way.

It was really, I mean, I was off on medication. I was completely locked in and I was so stuck. I didn't know if I cycle. I could not even make up my mind which way to walk, but eventually I just stuck. I don't remember what ended up happening.

I obviously got out of it, but I have several times often, even to this day, that's really my biggest problem is the OCD is the repeated thought behavior, repeated thoughts. You just can't, you get something in your head, you get an idea in your head. It's hard to get it out of there. Is. Even an opinion.

It's hard to get an opinion out of your head that's wrong because you're so set on it. I mean, everybody has that problem, but an OCD person can really, you know, he can mount some evidence that he's had in his head for about, you know, for a long time. Right. Really built up. It's going to take a lot to break that down.

Rideable down does help because, you know, you just realize, you know, you read it and be like, I don't think I want to share that with anybody actually. No, they don't need to hear that about me. That kind of thing. So yeah, it does help.

Matt (host): And just the discipline of it can help.

Benton Savage: Discipline of it is very important. Yeah. I mean, I think really for anybody with mental illness, anything I try to, the main thing I try to do is keep a routine, the best routine I can and exercise. Right. Yeah.

And exercise is part of a routine. Yep. And you know, you don't have to do it every day and the routines don't ever work. You can't have the perfect day. You can't just have a rough structure.

I really originally started with rituals. Like I would like, I had a friend that he said, you know, I've walked my dog. I've taken my dog to the dog park every day, except for two days and five years. Or I've flossed my teeth every day for twelve years. And he's like, you might want to try some of that stuff.

I live, I just, you know, there's certain things that, know, just do over and over. You do them enough. Then you pick another one. Next thing you know, you do have a routine going. Cause you've got so many things that you're ritualizing.

You don't have to be, and he was an extreme case and he's not mentally ill. He just told me that. I like, that's interesting. That's interesting way to look at it. And he seems like a pretty happy guy.

So I'll try it out. I like that philosophy. It worked me towards a routine. It's often broken, but I do have a real structure.

Matt (host): Right. Yeah. Yeah, for sure. So let's talk a little bit about, the difference between identity and a personal story. So when someone goes through a period of mental illness, if it's misdiagnosed or misunderstood, it can really shake their sense of identity.

So how did writing did, how did writing help you rebuild the sense of who you are? In other words, making, making a story out of what you thought your identity was previously, but seeing yourself in a new pattern perhaps. Is that, is that what happened for you?

Benton Savage: Well, writing, I don't know if I mean, was, I've written off and on for twenty years or twenty, yeah, twenty or twenty five years. I'll tell you what, as a person that gets manic often, I mean, I'm, as a person that gets manic, it's, it takes, and you get these unreal thoughts about yourself. You grandiose thoughts about yourself. Like at one point I thought I might be president of The United States. I've really thought that.

And you, you know, it takes a while, you know, to realize that you're not quite the person that you think you are when you're in these kinds of moods. Right. But you're also not the person that you are when you're really down. Right. Or you're somewhere in between, but that upsays when you really think you're something.

It's it's a humbling experience to admit that you were never going to be that person that you've dreamed of being. Nobody could be that person really. You know, it takes a lot to get out of that thinking. It's just like when you're really depressed, you're not that bad of a person. You think you're never going get out of this hole, but you get out of it, but it takes a little while and you know, you remember it.

You know, you remember those days. I'm sure writing did help, but I just remember the realization when I was like, oh, Benton, you're not all that, that you think you are sometimes. And these things, these dreams that you had are never going to happen. I even want to be president of The United States. I felt like I had to be president.

That was my duty

Matt (host): to be president

Benton Savage: of The United States. It's just ridiculous thoughts. It's a very humbling experience to realize, no, you're not going to be anything like anywhere near that. But yeah, did why do you help? Yes.

Because I, you know, I'd share some my thoughts with people and they're like, okay, yeah. But I think I do in my memoir talk about me thinking I could be president of The United States. At one point I thought I could run across The United States like sports gum. Was in California. I thought I could run across The United States like sports gum.

I really believed I took off and waited about a mile or two, and then I was stuck.

Matt (host): Right. Right.

Benton Savage: Yeah. Really, I mean, wrote about writing about that does help. I hope it helps other people really. I mean, it did help me. Really, I did write this book.

In the beginning. I was writing to help myself, but in the end, when I wrote that memoir, it was, want to prove to other people that yes, you are, if people tell you need to take medication, most likely you need to be on it. You know, they don't, most people don't throw that around that lightly. And I mean, there's definitely cases that you don't, I'm not saying everybody needs to be on medication as told. So if they're mentioning it to you, if they're strongly suggesting it, you ought to take it into strong consideration that they may be lying, that you may not be have a real realistic take on what your life's like.

Matt (host): Right. Yeah. And certainly as someone who has also struggled with some mental illness, ADHD in particular, you know, finding medication, finding the right medication is a journey, you know, whether it's the right medication or whether it's the right dosage. It takes a while and then sometimes your life will change and you'll need to change it again. But, I agree, it's important to seek it out and it might not be the only thing that helps you, right?

But it may be a good base from, from where to start.

Benton Savage: I'll never say enough about the medication. I could never, no matter what routine, no matter how much I exercise, no matter how much positive thinking I had about medication, it'd be all be y'all for

Matt (host): no.

Benton Savage: It wouldn't work. It just wouldn't. Believe me, I tried. I tried a few times and it just doesn't matter. Right thing is if you got, and I will say this, was, if you, if you're on medications, you you're not doing that well, consider changing.

There are so many medications out there. There's so many new medications coming out. I don't really follow the trends, but I know I've been on a lot of different medications over the last thirty years since I've been diagnosed. And, you know, they changed a lot. And now if I don't have good, I think I've found the right one, but it took a lot of time and you gotta be, you gotta be proactive.

Matt (host): Absolutely.

Benton Savage: Because psychiatry or psychology, whatever the field, you know, it's very, you know, it's very judgment, you know, not judgment. It's very, you know, they have, there's not a test to tell you, you can't take a blood test. They tell you you're schizophrenic. It is the doctor's opinion. Right.

You know, question the doctor. I mean, you go, I didn't question the doctor. I accepted my bipolar diagnosis. I didn't really accept it well, but I thought that was what I was. I thought that was my diagnosis.

And I think what happened was the doctors knew I was schizophrenic, but they were afraid to tell me, afraid to change my diagnosis from a previous doctor. Was on paper. That's what I really think. I've talked to a couple of doctors like, know, that's a good possibility, you know, they weren't involved. They're like, you know, it's possible they didn't want to either tell you that you're a schizophrenic or go against somebody other doctor who gave their opinion.

Matt (host): Exactly. It

Benton Savage: is such a wobbly issue

Matt (host): for lack of a Right. Yeah. No, for sure. For sure. So, you know, you're right.

Your work is, is striking because of how, how honest it is. And as you've alluded to earlier in the interview, kind of vulnerability can be very difficult to do. It can be especially when you're writing about mental health. Was there ever a moment where you said, you know, I I I you you hesitated to tell your story. And was it perhaps as you were just talking about, was it perhaps the, the notion that your story might help someone else that it, that made you push through and, and share?

Benton Savage: I'll tell you what I did. I finished the book around 2009, 2000, it's been so long. I'm not even sure what year, but it was 02/2010. I was living in New York City at the time and I actively, very actively tried to get this published. Probably almost every literary agent I could find.

I had a book, mailed them out. Only one person showed any interest and then in the end they didn't. So I sat on it for twelve years. Really didn't think of it. Really didn't even think of it.

And I had a webpage. I put it on my webpage just as a quim. Really wasn't even, nobody even really noticed it, but one of my friends who was bipolar at was my big brother in my fraternity. And he got in touch with me. He read it and he was like, oh my, nobody read twelve years.

I hadn't even read it in twelve years. I hadn't even really thought about it. He read, he said, Benton, you've got to get this published. This is best thing. Like I said, he was bipolar and he's like, but you know, you're not bipolar because it was originally titled the bi I was really titled wrong side out The Bipolar Experience.

And that was the title he read it under. And he, we hadn't talked enough before he knew my diagnosis. He's like, you know, you're not bipolar. Was like, know that's kind of weird, isn't it? And I wrote that whole book thinking I was bipolar because you gotta get it published.

I was dating a girl at the time she read it and she's like, you gotta get this published, try to get it published. This is really, really good stuff. Really will help some people. So that was really what inspired me about, I was still very hesitant because it's, I mean, I do have my own business. It's not a big business, but I mean, if my clients read this book, they're gonna look at me a little bit different for sure.

Because most people don't know that about me that I'm mentally ill. I mean, well, most people, most of my, all my friends do, but if you met me on the street, you're not going meet me and go, it's not like Parkinson's disease or something where you're shaking. Right. You know mean? It's obvious you have something wrong with your cancer patient and you're shrinking.

You know, I mean, I can pull it off pretty well. Most obvious thing is when I get manic, because I talk a lot like I am now, but you know, it's more obvious when you're up.

Matt (host): This is a place to do it though.

Benton Savage: I know I'm kidding. I'm kidding. I'm kidding. We're happy that you're talking. Most people don't know I'm bipolar and, you know, by me putting out this book.

And I think, I really think this will be a very popular book in the end. It's self published right now, but I think in the end, I think it would be a very, very popular book in the, in those certain circles. I'm about to say it's gonna be a Stephen King bestseller, but I think it's psychological. And I've read a lot of these books, a lot of memoirs. Nobody's written anything like this in all honesty.

It's not really even a memoir. It's, it's not so much a memoir. It's just the experience of being what it's like to be mentally ill, to be schizophrenic or bipolar or whatever, OCD, all three of those mixed in between. It's really all about that. It's not so much, it didn't talk that much about my good days.

And there were good years when I took my medication. Did well, fairly well. Right. Mostly. And I've detailed that a little bit, but mostly it's about, this is what was happening when I wasn't on my medication and how illogical I could get.

Matt (host): Right. Yeah. Yeah. Well, drama sells as they say, right?

Benton Savage: It's kind of a whole bunch things.

Matt (host): Yeah. It writes a book for you for sure. Yeah. So what do you hope that readers and I'm going to be a reader. I've read the book notes before the interview here, but I have not read the book in full and I will count myself among your future readers.

We will have links to your titles in the show notes and we'll link to your website as well, where they can find all about your reading or your writing as well. Correct? Great. Yes. Yeah.

So what do you hope that readers and in terms of this podcast, especially younger readers might take away from writing? Are these lessons, are these cautionary tales or is there inspiration or is there just a mix of everything in there?

Benton Savage: Hey, it's a mix of everything. Like I said, you know, I think this book is going to do very well, but I don't want to be that guy who goes around making speeches about mental health. My goal is to write this book and the stoic alcoholic, which is kind of go hand in hand. They're kind of hand in hand is to write is, and I got my little property management business. I'm writing fiction, short stories and novels, little bit of poetry here and there.

But I just hope to be a very productive citizen and be an example of people that have a severe mental illness And that I go on to have a fairly normal life and, you know, productive citizen. I could prob I mean, I don't know if I don't know what my options will be if this book does take off, but I don't want to be a, I don't want to be known as the mental health guy that goes around speaking about it. And, you know, I like talking about it, don't get me wrong. I still want to make a living doing that. Right.

And so that's really my goal. But I'd my biggest goal is to make sure people understand middle, severe mental health is real. These people that are, these people are not, this is not a joke. You know, this is not them being weak. They are, I mean, believe me, if you read that book, you're going go, I'm a strong guy.

I mean, to put up, to deal with that. I mean, it's just like, how did this guy go through all this? I mean, it's all, it was all self self imposed. I mean, I put it all in myself, but I mean, went through hell. That's really what I want people to understand.

Well, I really, my goal was mental illness is real and medication is necessary. That's really my goal through my, through that book was, that was really my whole goal. And then you got to realize I wrote that book in 2009. I went off on medication four or five more times after that. No, two or three more times after that.

So, I mean, when the book wasn't accepted, I was like, wow, I mean, maybe I'm, you know, I mean, I was surprised it wasn't accepted, but the first time around, but that was my goal is just to come to tell people that this is what it's like to be mentally ill. They, I mean, if you're severely mentally ill, this is what it's like, and it's not a pretty picture. Without the medication.

Matt (host): For sure. For sure. Well, and that's, that's a good place for us to, to begin to wrap up. I want to keep, I keep thinking about this idea, which is that writing doesn't solve everything. It doesn't eliminate the struggle, but it gives shape to what can feel shapeless.

It gives language to what feels unspeakable. And sometimes, you know, that's the first step towards healing ourselves. As both of us know as writers, that blank page can sometimes be intimidating, but it can also be an invitation and a canvas, if you will, for incredible freedom and just letting everything come out. And so before we close-up, is there one final thought you'd like to leave with our listeners, especially the the young people who may be struggling with their own mental illness right now?

Benton Savage: Well, I was gonna talk about the writing thing a little bit. One thing I do when I hit, like, a writer's block or when I just when I can't really think or can't write, I want I know kinda what I wanna write is I just start writing down words, like just one word, not even sequential or anything, just thought, thought, thought. And you do that for a couple of minutes and then all of sudden you'll have something to write. Your thoughts will kind of come together and then you'll be able to start organizing your ideas and your thoughts, and you'll probably be able to throw something down fairly coherent and then you work with it from there. But that's a good exercise, I think, for writing is just to write down something related to what you want to write about and just start writing the words, words, maybe a phrase here.

Eventually it'll start, it'll start coming together, you know, organize your thoughts.

Matt (host): Yeah, for sure. So my guest today has been Benton Savage, the author of *Wrong Side Out*, *Madness Misdiagnosed*, as well as multiple works of fiction and poetry that explore the complexities of mental health and the human experience. You can learn more about Benton and his work at his website, which is [Benton Savage Author](#), where we will have the link in our show notes for this episode. And if this episode resonated with you, please consider sharing it with a friend or even better encourage a young person in your life to pick up a pen and start writing or touch the keyboard as it will, as it were. And as always, please rate and review *Nimble Youth* on Apple Pod casts and Spotify because your support helps us continue these important conversations.

Until next time, please remember, sometimes the most important stories we tell are the ones we tell ourselves. I'm Matt Buttermann. This is *Nimble Youth*. We'll see you next time.