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FEATURED

## Local author addresses stress issues with children's book

Dale Edwards/News of Orange  
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***A book release party is set for Aug. 27 at Volume Beer & Records for Mikkel Elbech's book "The Story of Izzy the Busy Bee."***

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Exactly 10 years ago, Mikkel Elbech was in the middle of a sick leave brought on by a stress attack. Actually, several stress attacks. It was a condition he had, for some time, ignored until he couldn't anymore.

"I remember talking to my sister and I brushed it off and said, 'No, that's not it,'" Elbech said. "At that point, I had already had one specific episode with black dots in front of my eyes. I was at this big, pretty important meeting far away from both my home and the office. I had all these dots in front of my eyes. I had a massive headache or migraine and I had to lay down."

At the time of that episode, Elbech was doing public relations work for a company in Denmark where he lived. A month later, he was talking with his sister after he had returned from a trip to California, and telling her about what happened at that meeting and how he had been feeling. She told him it sounded like he was suffering from stress.

He shrugged off her comment, which is a common response when people are told they're physically in a bad place because of stress.

"People think that they just have to do better work," Elbech said. "They just got to get more organized or whatever. They think it's about them, not the external factors."

Despite his resistance, he followed his sister's advice and went to see a doctor. After his check up, the doctor said Elbech was displaying symptoms of someone suffering from stress. He was told to take time away from work.

The process for his recovery was different and difficult to gauge, but Elbech said he learned a lot from it, specifically the importance of the work/life balance.

"I'm sure I've annoyed some people over the past 10 years with my insistency and talking about it and warning other people," he said. "And no one really wants to hear that. I have had colleagues where I could see it coming and they refused to listen and address it, and then they hit headfirst into a stress sick leave shortly after."

In 2016, Elbech left his home of Denmark to be with his fiancé who lived in Durham. He became founded Toro Town Storyworks, with which he does copy writing and continues to work for the employer back in Denmark.

The couple, now married, frequently visited Hillsborough and decided to make the more walkable town their home. Elbech is involved with a documentary being made by Durham filmmaker Rex Miller. He's found his knack for storytelling applied to different areas of his interests, including press releases, opinion pieces and children's books. It also provided him a vehicle with which to share his experience with stress attacks.

On August 27, at Volume Beer & Records in downtown Hillsborough, a release party is being held for the book "The Story of Izzy the Busy Bee," written by Elbech.

The children's book is highly personal and focuses on mental health and the power of self-employment.

"The Story of Izzy the Busy Bee' is a brand-new children's book aimed at 10-12-year-olds," the press release stated. "It is a fun and heartwarming story about friendship, resilience, and the courage to seek out happiness on your own terms."

"I had just finished working on a biography for a big time theater person in Denmark, and I was like, 'I wonder what it's like to write something that's just for me,'" Elbech said. "I had toyed with this idea of writing about bees and I just like the the sound of Izzy The Busy Bee."

Elbech consulted with several friends and his father-in-law, who used to be a beekeeper. As he learned about the lives of different kinds of bees — and their roles within the hive — he began to draw parallels and find ways to creatively tell of his own challenges and the value of setting yourself apart.

"I first had the idea for the book to show the differences between male and female bees," Elbech said. "Female bees are the worker bees and the male bees are the drones that don't really contribute at all. And I thought it was interesting, too, to want to work and do something else, rather than just be a slob basically, which is what the male bees are. To be a worker bee shouldn't be the default for the character. There should be an urge to want to prove yourself and accomplish something. And so that's why I chose the main character to be a male bee who wanted to be a worker bee."

Ultimately, Izzy shows himself to be good at what he does, but the only reward for his efforts are more work and other tasks. Eventually, he becomes overwhelmed and suffers a stress attack. In mid-air.

"I didn't know that much about bees, but I felt like I could describe somewhat authentically what it's like to get deeper and deeper into a life of stress," he said. "I could go into the thoughts that go through your mind when you're in the middle of that and then to also relate the state of bliss. The immense relief once you are definitively out on the other side. I think that for me, it definitely happened when I moved over here to North Carolina."

Throughout the book are references — some obvious, some less so — to bands and songs to which the author wanted to pay homage. Elbech considers himself a "huge music fan," and has made extensive travels to see his favorite performers.

"The Story of Izzy the Busy Bee" is available as a traditional book, as an e-book, and as an immersive audiobook – complete with a full cast of voice actors and original music. It is narrated by Gary Middleton.

The book release is Aug. 27 at 4 p.m. at Volume Beer and Records at 226 S. Churton St. in downtown Hillsborough.