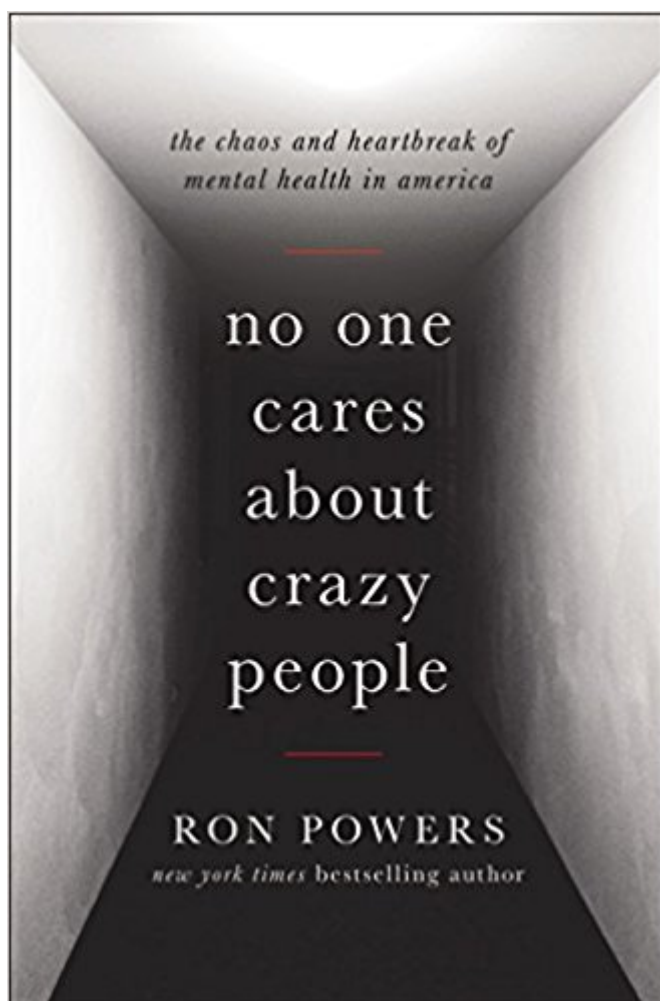


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No One Cares About Crazy People: The Chaos And Heartbreak Of Mental Health In America



Synopsis

[*Read by the author - Ron Powers]A moving and thorough examination of mental illness in the United States through the centuries, told by a bestselling author whose life has been deeply affected by schizophrenia. New York Times bestselling author Ron Powers offers a searching, richly researched narrative of the social history of mental illness in America paired with the deeply personal story of his two sons' battles with schizophrenia. From the centuries of torture of "lunatics" at Bedlam Asylum to the infamous eugenics era to the follies of the anti-psychiatry movement to the current landscape in which too many families struggle alone to manage afflicted loved ones, Powers limns our fears and myths about mental illness and the fractured public policies that have resulted. Braided with that history is the moving story of Powers' beloved son Kevin -- spirited, endearing, and gifted -- who triumphed even while suffering from schizophrenia until finally he did not, and the story of his courageous surviving son Dean, who is also schizophrenic. A blend of history, biography, memoir, and current affairs ending with a consideration of where we might go from here, this is a thought-provoking look at a dreaded illness that has long been misunderstood.

Book Information

Audio CD: 1 pages

Publisher: Hachette Audio and Blackstone Audio; Unabridged AUDIO edition (March 21, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1478946385

ISBN-13: 978-1478946380

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 1 x 5.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 114 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #545,774 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #127 in Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Mental Health > Schizophrenia #221 in Books > Books on CD > Health, Mind & Body > General #329 in Books > Books on CD > Biographies & Memoirs

Customer Reviews

"Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Powers (Mark Twain: A Life, 2005, etc.) presents two searing sagas: an indictment of mental health care in the United States and the story of his two schizophrenic sons.... This hybrid narrative, enhanced by the author's considerable skills as a literary stylist, succeeds on every level." --Kirkus Reviews (starred review)"Very emotional.... [Powers] reminds us how apathetic and cruel society can be when it comes to mental illness."

--Booklist (starred review)"No One Cares About Crazy People is a woefully necessary kick in the teeth to society's understanding and treatment of mental illness. Reading Ron Powers is always an event--you can expect expert research and rich reporting in an engrossing style -- but what makes this book soar is the passion of Powers' conviction based off his own intimate experiences with schizophrenia. I put this book down days ago and I'm still reeling. It's the rare book that breaks your life into a before and an after." --Susannah Cahalan, New York Times bestselling author of Brain on Fire

"Ron Powers writes eloquently, passionately, and persuasively about the failure to properly treat mental illness in America. What makes this book really powerful is Powers's personal story--the harrowing, wrenching tale of his two sons wrestling with the unholy demon of schizophrenia." --Evan Thomas, New York Times bestselling author of Being Nixon

"Whether Ron Powers is writing about Mark Twain, small-town life in the Midwest, the state of television, or crime, his books resonate. Now he has written the book he never wanted to tackle--about the schizophrenia of his sons and the cruel failures of the American mental health establishment." --Steve Weinberg, author of Taking on the Trust

"In telling this gripping and deeply personal story, Ron Powers puts chronic mental illness in the broad context of history, society, and public policy. His compelling account helps shake us out of the embarrassment and apathy that have tethered public discourse and lasting action to treat mental illness. Despite fitful progress, real and lasting progress and empathy are still so easily tripped up by ignorance, fear, and unease. Ron Powers explains why we need to move beyond the stigma that still makes progress difficult, and sometimes impossible. The story he tells is not a comfortable one, but it's an important one." --U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.)

"Ron Powers and his wife never expected to visit the exotic lands of schizophrenia until their two sons became affected. A gifted professional writer, Powers takes the reader along on his explorations as he tries to understand why it happened and what to do. What he finds is 'the most dreaded of all human mental disorders.' Very readable and highly recommended." --E. Fuller Torrey, MD, author of Surviving Schizophrenia

"This is the book that Ron Powers, one of America's most elegant chroniclers, vowed he would never write. Too disturbing, too painful, too intimate. We are fortunate that he changed his mind. Powers has tackled his most challenging subject yet with erudition, humanity, and courage. By allowing readers into the sanctity of his home, he makes real the toll of mental illness on those who suffer, their families, and the community. No One Cares About Crazy People is an unforgettable, insistent call for a nationwide conversation and action, for embracing our most vulnerable benefits us all." --Pamela Rotner Sakamoto, author of Midnight in Broad Daylight: A Japanese American Family Caught Between Two Worlds

"Educating general readers about mental illness and its troubled history in America, Pulitzer Prize winner Powers (Mark Twain: A Life) shares

his searingly personal, heart-wrenching account of the schizophrenia that overtook his two talented, promising sons. In loving detail, Powers describes the joys and unfathomable challenges inherent in parenting two such blessed and simultaneously cursed young men.” --Library Journal

Ron Powers, an Emmy Award winner and the first television critic to win a Pulitzer Prize, has studied and written about Mark Twain for many years. He is the author of numerous books, including *Dangerous Water: A Biography of the Boy Who Became Mark Twain*, and the coauthor of the #1 New York Times bestseller *Flags of Our Fathers*. He lives in Middlebury, Vermont.

Early in this powerful book. Ron Powers writes that he doesn't want readers to "enjoy" it: mission accomplished. It's frustrating, depressing and mostly infuriating what a bad job the US has done with mental health care. On the other hand, while Powers is clearly biased to his viewpoint, he does a good job providing the historical context to explain why (wrong) decisions made sense at the time. Powers has a strongly personal connection to all this - both his sons suffered from various degrees of schizophrenia, which ultimately killed his youngest. As he describes, 'schizophrenia' is not multiple personalities as much a breakdown in how the brain processes information (I'm vastly simplifying) and worse, the brain is telling itself that it's fine - it must be terrifying to suffer. It makes sense that creative people would be predisposed to this, because their brain is working in ways most people's don't (again, vast simplification). The book does a strong job of switching between historical and current research and then back to Powers' own stories - it never goes through a "boring" stretch, and Powers is able to make the ins-and-outs of mental illness understandable to a layman's audience. As a reporter who went to Iraq several times, I'm obviously familiar with the causes/symptoms of PTSD, and so I had some context for Powers research - but any reader is going to have no problems understanding what's going on. Now.... Powers is in full self-justification mode and he does not try to see all sides all the time. His oldest son injured a passenger in a near-fatal car accident, and Powers (unsurprisingly) defends his son a lot. The other parents wanted a sentence that was probably a little harsh for a non-drunk-driving accident, but I'd be angry too, I'm sure. So the excuses, etc. on Powers part were understandable, but a bit much. However, the story is important, because his son's first descent into mental illness probably began there. His other son sadly has ups and downs, and finally downs. He refuses to take his medicine and ultimately can't win the battle against his injured brain. And that's the tragedy - that Powers and his wife had to deal with this in the first place - he shouldn't have been at home, he should have been in a place where he could get full-time care. But those places don't exist anymore - whether it's budget cuts, or

"personal rights," our society views mental health care as somebody else's problem. In our current 2017 society, we even have less interest in science or medical care, or anything that doesn't supposedly save us two nickel's in our precious taxes. Just like the anti-vaccination people are living in a world of magical thinking - that they know best in the face of science - so we've created a world where a brain disease makes the victim the bad guy, and that allows us to wash our hands of doing anything about it. Powers sort of glosses over many of the problems with institutionalized care. He's right that states shut down their state-run hospitals, and created the problem of homeless, insane people. But those hospitals were badly run and often abusive. So in a perfect world, they'd be a good solution, but they aren't a perfect solution. But they're certainly better than the head-in-the-sand approach we seem to be using now. Ultimately, the book made me angry in an impotent way. I don't see any changes on the horizon. I see the problems Powers describes getting worse not better. I see cops killing mentally ill people and continuing to cover it up - as Powers gives many examples of - or simply justifying it for likely fair reasons. But cops shouldn't be the front line to deal with deranged people - you don't call a cop when somebody has cancer. So it's a five star book for scope and effort, certainly, but it's not five stars for the reading experience, and I don't think Powers wanted it to be.

Ron Powers and his wife, Honoree Fleming, were intellectuals with two growing sons when their idyllic life in a Vermont college town began to fray. Both of them taught at Middlebury, she as a scientist and he as a writing teacher. Their sons, auburn-haired Dean and blond Kevin, three years younger, were bright, sensitive and well-liked. But not very far into the wide-reaching examination of the treatment of mental illness, we learn that Kevin has died after being diagnosed with schizophrenia, and that Dean is being treated for the same disease. The very moving story of these young men's problems runs in tandem with Powers discussion of society's shameful treatment of mentally ill people throughout history. He recounts how when it appeared that some progress was being made in the United States after World War II, two individuals - Thomas Szasz, a physician, and L. Ron Hubbard, a science fiction writer and founder of Scientology - played a powerful role in running reform off the tracks, as it is still today. Our mentally ill population was pushed out of the asylum into the streets and prisons. Out of respect for family privacy, Ron Powers first undertook a study not only of psychiatry as a social policy but of various treatments, many of them deadly, and how they came into use. An editor convinced him to relate the family's experience with mental illness, and these passages give the book a kind of vibrancy and tenderness that pulled this reader through the forest of doctors

and "experts" (almost all male) and their conceptions of and treatment for illnesses such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, Alzheimer's, and schizo-affective disorder. Scans have demonstrated that severe mental illness is a disease that distorts the brain, something that Freud and his followers had no way of knowing without access to magnetic scanning. Powers is particularly instructive about the vulnerability of the teen brain, which is pruning tissue and reorganizing as the youth becomes an adult. A compelling theory is that stress and drugs, such as marijuana, can have a detrimental effect on a developing mind genetically predisposed to mental illness. This is not an easy read, but it's a vital one that goes beyond a single family that was willing to share its suffering and point the way toward healing.

I came to this as the daughter of a mentally ill mother; her parents supported her (and me) as long as they could, and I managed her care for the last seven years of her life. Which were an utter hell: in and out of psychosis, in and out of mostly very grim institutions, no stability, little kindness. In one of the highest-income counties in one of the bluest states in the U.S. Ron Powers is angry. I learned some new history, but saw some overinterpretations and/or inaccuracies in the parts I knew better. I don't care. The emotional truth? Of his own family's story? It killed me. I cry for your kids, Ron, and for you and your wife; I cry for my mother still, and for her parents. Reading this book helped me cry some more about things I needed to acknowledge. Thank you for writing it.

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