

# [Mental Illness is a Family Affair](#)

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*We tend to think that mental illnesses affect individuals - with diagnoses and treatments focused on the person who is symptomatic. Necessary - but not sufficient. I dare say, the burden of mental illness always extends beyond the individual with the diagnosis.*



[Photo Credit](#)

*The authors of the books below speak this truth with moving accounts of their personal journeys that take them to places they never imagined when a family member is diagnosed with a mental illness.*

**1. [No One Cares About Crazy People](#) by Ron Powers.** With disarming courage and searing candor, Powers weaves together the history of a failed mental health system with the pain and frustration he experiences in his “struggle to save” his two sons with schizophrenia. Powers’ younger son, Kevin, a talented musician diagnosed with schizophrenia at age 17, died by suicide at age 21. His older son, Dean, also diagnosed with schizophrenia, has found more health and quality of life. This book is one man’s voice, one family’s struggle. It is unique but also representative of one country’s history with a broken mental healthcare system.

**2. [My Lovely Wife in the Psych Ward](#) by Mark Lukach.** To be young and in love is to feel invincible. College sweethearts, Lukach and his wife Giulia certainly felt this way. The future they imagined as new parents dramatically changed when Giulia descended into a state fraught with delusions, suicidal ideation, and

hospitalizations. This heartfelt, heart-wrenching and heartwarming memoir lays bare how serious mental illness is a family affair. Mark and Giulia learn to embrace their new reality. Lukach recounts the deep, suicidal depression Giulia suffered, his fears for her safety, and the powerful role that family plays in the recovery process.

**3. [My First Cousin Once Removed: Money, Madness and the Family of Robert Lowell](#) by Sarah Payne Stuart.** Mental illness doesn't discriminate based on privilege. Just ask Sarah Payne Stuart, whose extended family is a veritable who's who of Boston aristocrats - including the Winslows, Thorndikes, Lowells, Cottings and Paynes. Most famously, her first cousin once removed was Pulitzer prize winning poet Robert Lowell. No less than half a dozen of Stuart's family members have been afflicted with mental illness, including Robert Lowell who lived with bipolar disorder. With honest observation, equal doses of hilarity and compassion, and true affection for her clan, Stuart reminds us that mental illness is part of all family stories in one way or another.

**4. [Henry's Demons: A Father and Son's Journey out of Madness](#) by Patrick Cockburn and Henry Cockburn.** Describing tragedy and human suffering might seem to be old hat for Patrick Cockburn, a veteran war correspondent who reported extensively from Iraq. But perhaps his most challenging writing assignment is this very personal story co-authored with his son. Patrick and Henry alternate views as they candidly tell the story of mental illness, medications, and numerous hospitalizations. Their book conveys a deeply loving relationship between a father and a son. Each in his own voice, Patrick and Henry capture the pain and challenges of living with mental illness and the pain and challenge of loving someone living with mental illness. It is a story in high relief of an incredibly challenging and unanticipated path and the acceptance, accommodation, and personal growth required to keep moving forward.

**5. [A Common Struggle](#) by Patrick J. Kennedy and Stephen Fried.** No family in modern American history has been more chronicled than the Kennedys - they have occupied an unparalleled place in the limelight of US business, politics, and civic life. With a massive corpus of books, libraries, photographs, and news reports documenting their every move, you might think nothing more could be said. Not true. In *A Common Struggle*, Patrick J. Kennedy - former Congressman (D-RI) and now our nation's leading spokesperson for mental health parity - for the first time courageously shares his family's exquisitely personal experience with mental illness and substance use. As the title implies, he simultaneously provides an astute insider's perspective on the larger American story. Mental illness is clearly a family affair for the Kennedys as it is for all of us.

Founder of the [Kennedy Forum](#), Patrick J. Kennedy is driving change in our healthcare system - partnering with mental health and addiction advocates, policymakers, and business leaders - to create a roadmap for mental health parity to improve quality of life and care for individuals and families who have personal experience with mental illness. That would be all of us.

*Mental illness is exquisitely personal. It is also a family affair. Ironically, we can feel painfully isolated making our way when a family member suffers with mental illness. I can assure you that an antidote to the illusion of being alone in this struggle can be found by reading and sharing the published stories highlighted here.*