



Acquainted with the Night: A Parent's Quest to Understand Depression and Bipolar Disorder in His Children

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In the tradition of Kay Redfield Jamison's *An Unquiet Mind*, *Acquainted with the Night* is a powerful memoir of one man's struggle to deal with the adolescent depression and bipolar disorder of his son and his daughter.

Seven years ago Paul Raeburn's son, Alex, eleven, was admitted to a psychiatric hospital after leaving his fifth-grade classroom in an inexplicable rage. He was hospitalized three times over the next three years until he was finally diagnosed by a psychiatrist as someone exhibiting a clear-cut case of bipolar disorder. This ended a painful period of misdiagnosis and inappropriate drug therapy. Then Raeburn's younger daughter, Alicia, twelve, was diagnosed as suffering from depression after episodes of self-mutilation and suicidal thoughts. She too was repeatedly admitted to psychiatric hospitals. All during this terrible, painful time, Raeburn's marriage was disintegrating, and he had to ask what he and his wife might have done, unwittingly, to contribute to their children's mental illness. And so, literally to save his children's lives, he used all the resources available to him as a science reporter and writer to educate himself on their diseases and the various drugs and therapies available to help them return from a land of inner torment.

In Paul Raeburn's skilled hands, this memoir of a family stricken with the pain of depression and mania becomes a cathartic story that any reader can share, even as parents unlucky enough to be in a similar position will find it of immeasurable practical value in their own struggles with the child psychiatry establishment.

Acquainted with the Night: A Parent's Quest to Understand Depression and Bipolar Disorder in His Children Details

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From Reader Review Acquainted with the Night: A Parent's Quest to Understand Depression and Bipolar Disorder in His Children for online ebook

Heidi says

Wow. I will be pondering this man's story for a long time. Raeburn, a science writer, tells the story of two of his children developing symptoms of mental illness (rapid-cycle bipolar and severe depression) in their early teens, and the roller coaster journey it turned out to be for the entire family. I appreciated his candor about the guilt and confusion he felt as a parent, the constant second-guessing, mostly due to a lack of understanding (but also, initially, a denial) of their mental illness. Not at all surprising, given that most mentally ill people- and children in particular - are misdiagnosed for years, and when they are finally properly diagnosed, the confusion continues regarding what medications, parenting strategies and therapies will work. So much is nothing more than educated guessing, experimenting until you find what works - and often, that combo only works for a short season.

I learned much from Raeburn's research for this book; I already knew that it is not understood even WHY or HOW psychiatric medications even work. But I hadn't known that clinical trials for psych meds rarely if ever are done for children, so the impact of these medications - short-term and long-term truly isn't known. The resources that are available for children with mental illness (outpatient and inpatient treatment, psychiatrists, therapists etc) don't seem to work in tandem with each other, which is why mentally ill children and teens will often land in juvenile detention instead of mental health treatment. The funding for mental illness research is abysmally low, but even more difficult are insurance policies which cover very little in the way of mental health care - even when the child is actively suicidal. Not to mention the stigma that the whole family can experience from family, friends, teachers.

I cannot imagine how difficult it was for Raeburn and his children to relive their stories in order to write this book. Kudos to them all for sharing their wisdom and experience for the benefit of those who want to better understand mental illness in children, and have compassion on those who live with it daily.

Melody Joy says

A journalist's memoir about trying to decipher parenting his mentally ill children. Tough read, but insightful. Definitely has a journalist's tone of voice throughout.

Rebecca says

Very honest and introspective with well done research on the state of mental health systems in the US

Emilia says

Raeburn is a skilled writer and his memoir of a family stricken with the pain of depression and bipolar

disorder was hard to put down. His story hit very close to home, as my eldest daughter was also diagnosed bipolar while still quite young (10 yrs old) and I faced the same struggles he recounts. Reading his account infuriated me (the fights w/ insurance companies, the dearth of mental health services, esp. for kids, etc) but it was also somewhat cathartic. I wept for him and his family but also felt less alone knowing our family was not unique in our struggles. This is a story that has value for any reader, not just for parents unlucky enough to be in a similar position. In fact, I hope that its audience will include the general public with the hope that *Acquainted With the Night* can help spark the revolution needed to overhaul our dismal mental health system.

Frederick Bingham says

This is a book about the author's children who became mentally ill. His son with biopolar disorder and their daughter from severe depression. It follows the children through stays in mental hospitals, medications, suicide attempts, etc. I stopped about halfway through because it was too depressing. The book also contains a subplot about the author's failing marriage. He and his wife were headed for a nasty divorce and this was obviously exacerbating the kids' problems.

Carrie says

Did not finish, but liked what I read. It was too hard for me to read at the time as my own daughter had just been diagnosed. I plan to go back and finish it some time.

Vanessa says

fascinating story.
terribly parenting.

Margaret says

I am grateful that Raeburn was willing to write the story of his family's struggle, but it is a difficult read. Not just because of the many sad things that happen, but because it is not told exactly chronologically or thematically, and includes memoir as well as information about mental healthcare for children. It's incredibly wrenching to read of his struggles in his marriage and in parenting. He doesn't pretty things up for the reader.

Martha Phillips says

To sum up: How to irretrievably f*ck-up your kids through your appalling parenting.

the end.

Donna says

This one is hard for me to read with becoming overwhelmed with anxiety about raising my own children. He really brings you into his struggles.

Kasey Rewolinski says

Ended up choosing this book from a list on childhood disorders to read for a class. I can't say it was an enjoyable experience, but it also wasn't a terrible book. Reading the personal accounts with his son's bipolar disorder and his daughter's depression was definitely interesting though.

Emily says

A few months ago, I read an advance copy of science writer Paul Raeburn's new memoir, *Acquainted with the Night*. In it, he chronicles how first his son, then his daughter, fell into the grip of violent and frightening manic depression. It's the print equivalent of Weezer's infamous *Pinkerton* album: something so raw and personal that you want to look away.

Raeburn and his wife Liz had three children: Matt, Alex, and Alicia. When the children were about 15, 11, and 9, Alex began to have behavior problems at school. Although he had previously been a model student, his bad temper led his teacher to write him off as a 'bad kid.' One day Alex falls apart--yells at his teacher, breaks things, and runs off into the forest, where the police eventually find him and take him to the ER. Paul and Liz begin the terrible process of finding a bed for a child in a psychiatric hospital and getting their insurance to pay for it. Over the next few months, Alex sees numerous psychiatrists--none are child psychiatrists, because there are none on the insurance plan--who give him numerous hypothetical diagnoses; he tries numerous medications, taking none long enough for them to have any effect. Raeburn identifies the psychiatrists as "psychiatrist #4, psychiatrist #7" and so forth, revealing a deep resignation and fatigue.

Just as Alex begins to stabilize, his younger sister Alicia (now a sixth-grader) attempts suicide and reveals that she has been cutting. The girls at her school call her a slut, a rumor cruelly reinforced when she is raped by an older student. Unlike Alex, who was sullen and frustrated, Alicia is flamboyantly disobedient. Then, during the most serious period of her illness, Paul and Liz begin divorce proceedings.

It is here that the book begins to derail. Neither Liz nor the eldest child, Matt, participated in the writing of this memoir, and their voices are sorely needed for balance as Paul's voice changes from that of a sympathetically desperate father to that of a defensive ex-husband. Paul feels that Liz didn't believe enough in the value of discipline, and that she took advantage of his working far away in Manhattan to make important decisions about the children's upbringing and care without including him. Despite what seems to be an attempt at impartiality, Paul's anger at Liz comes through in the book, vibrantly and violently. For example, he clearly blames her unwillingness to enforce the hospitals' behavior "contracts" for most of Alicia's problems. There may be justice in this, but it is hard to know what really went on when the characters have become blustery caricatures of themselves. You can see why Raeburn's eldest son--happily, he was at college during the divorce--was opposed to his father dragging this sordid period into the open in a

memoir.

The ending of the book is a disappointment. Alex is now in college and Alicia is still in the middle of high school. To my mind, that means that the story isn't yet over; the reader longs to know whether they will remain healthy, or whether the stresses of young adulthood will cause new problems. I also wish that Raeburn had waited until the wounds from his divorce had healed. I suspect this would have been a much better book in 2009 than it is in 2004.
