

Reading the book “*A Boy Broken*” was truly heartbreaking while keeping me informed on the more medical side of things at the same time. I fought tears throughout my time reading and couldn’t help but absolutely feel for you as the author. I struggle now with my mental health and especially did when I was 9-13, this amplified as the pandemic hit. Your experiences with your son growing distant and changing physically resonated with me because I know that’s exactly what I put my mom through during those years.

The way you wrote this book truly showed how deeply you cared about your son while admitting your faults at the same time, even thinking about how you could’ve done better is beyond important. Reading what you felt when Doug was diagnosed is now ingrained into my head because that shame and denial is a step in this process that needs to be addressed so it can grow into understanding.

The journey of you and your son was both exciting and gut-wrenching, knowing you had to see the boy you thought you knew transform into a shell of who he used to be for 8 years. Growing up in a home with parents who dislike each other or are inexperienced can definitely take a toll on a child’s mind but with an illness like schizophrenia that’s so unpredictable, it’s impossible to find someone to “blame”. I have an increasingly worsening relationship with my father so reading about your guilt and shame really hit me because what if that’s how my dad feels about how I turned out? Or maybe how he was never there for my sister and I educationally? Dealing with a diagnosis like this is terrifying and you went above and beyond for your boy.

The steady decline of Doug was something I could relate to because I went down the same path without the access to drugs of course due to age. I was unaware of how my actions of starvation or isolation affected my family so seeing it from a parental perspective gave me that insight that maybe I needed when I was 13. I almost was admitted to a facility like Doug was because my mom thought I would never get better but that extra support started to slowly knock my brain out of its depressive episode.

I appreciated the explanations of stigma and grief that were in the book, it enlightened me on things I thought I understood. Being able to read how stigma affected your family was both relatable and also broke my heart slightly. Having to hide your son who couldn't be seen as 'normal' in society is an impossible task to complete without shame and guilt. I never once during my experience reading this book felt like you didn't love your son. I'll say it a lot but you did everything you could and should have for him. It's hard to keep track of an adult version of your child because they have that independence and anonymity among society now.

This was an especially hard read because before Doug's death there was that hope of 'things are going to get better' and they did before that was ripped away from him. He struggled with substance abuse and his disorder but his passing had nothing to do with that, he died suddenly and was becoming the man he was always meant to be. I don't want this to come across as me babying your son or putting him on a pedestal, I just want to highlight how he was truly getting better.

I'm glad you mentioned your own emotions that may be seen as harmful or controversial during such a tough time, anger is a common reaction and should be recognized. I would also be angry if I knew my son was ill but still went out seeking pot, it's a natural response. The constant emotional reminders humanized you for me more, I saw you as who you were as a father and not just a teacher. Acknowledging our faults during grief and loss is hard but you got through it and even wrote a book about it. Self reflection and searching for a new meaning in life is once again natural and even needed sometimes like it was with you.

You went through hell with your son and finally saw the light at the end of the tunnel with him getting better and I hate that fate decided to rob both you and your son of that lovely future. In the epilogue I was delighted to see that you were able to laugh with your life and reconnect over a tragedy such as this, I know that death can often drive families apart. This book was able to become both a tribute to your son and insight to how a frightening diagnosis like schizophrenia can change everyone's life forever.

I cried during this book because like I mentioned, I see a lot of myself in who Doug was during his toughest times. Understanding the grief of losing a child just a little bit makes me think back on the pain I would've put my mom through if I had ended my own life. It helped me realize how my actions affected way more than just me, it hurt my mom, my sister, my friends. This was also almost healing for me since my dad isn't in my life much mentally that being able to read how much you loved your son made me think that maybe I'm just not understanding how my dad feels during all of these things.

I don't want this to become about my struggle even though you said you wanted connections, it feels insensitive. This book is a message of love, anger, grief, and knowledge, it grows to resonate with its reader like it did with me. Even throughout the more research centric chapters I couldn't look away, I needed to understand why this was important and how it translated to your own personal life. It was informative and I liked the format of all of this information and then you pointing out how it showed in your son and/or yourself.

I know this is a reflection but I feel bad for how much that I'm repeating, I just really do believe you were the best dad you could be to a man as troubled as Doug. Nothing about schizophrenia is easy and I'm glad that near the end he was experiencing the life he missed out on for the past 8 years. He got to be a form of himself again and that's not possible to say about some of the other folks with the same diagnosis. Loss is never easy and I don't want my words to come across as if I know how either you or Doug felt because that's not true, I think I just want to be hopeful during such a heart breaking event. If I didn't say it enough, this book was insightful, meaningful, and an eye opener for me.

I went into this thinking that I would somehow be crazy different from your son because our diagnoses are different but that's not even close to true and I believe that's why this hit so hard for me. I'm not completely different from him and just like him I gained a support group that will help me no matter what through anything, no matter how much I push them away. Thank you for this experience and allowing me to see the amount of love you had for Douglas.