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A Boy Broken Reflection

“A Broken Boy” is a moving novel about Doug, a young man figuring out life with schizophrenia, and his father joining that journey. This journey highlights the daily struggles from choosing whether to shower that day or not, to believing you are seeing people who are not really there. This book resonated with me on a deeper level as I connected it to many of the struggles I have seen in my own brother, Taylor. Taylor is currently 23 years old, however, his own fight against ADHD, bipolar depression, and OCD started far before that.

Before covering Taylor, I want to highlight the genetic role in mental disorders. My mom also has ADHD, and was, funnily enough, diagnosed at the same time as Taylor. My mom grew up in a household where mental disorders were looked down upon or seen as foolish. My mom often struggled in school, finding it hard to pay attention, needing to go under desks just to find some sort of peace. When she would bring up the idea of being tested by a physician, her father would quickly shoot it down, stating that “there was nothing wrong with her”. My mom knew that something made her different from everyone else, heavily in comparison to her siblings, who seemed to do well in school. It was not until Taylor that she ever had the chance to understand what made her different.

Taylor never did entirely well in elementary school through middle school, simply doing enough each year to pass. When the thought of high school came around, my mother had always wanted Taylor to go to the early college in my town. It was “the place” to go to school. Taylor eventually applied, enrolled, and started his high school career at JP Knapp Early College. Not much later, at the beginning of his math class, his teacher contacted my

mom with her concerns regarding Taylor. His teacher stated that he was having a hard time focusing, completing assignments late, and not conversing with fellow classmates. My mom had not noticed as she worked early mornings and late hours, making dinner time practically the only time we spoke to her. Taylor's teacher refused to continue having him in her class until he got tested by a physician.

Shortly after this conversation, my mom decided to get both herself and Taylor tested for learning disabilities and mental disorders that may impair their cognitive motor skills. They ended up going to a psychiatrist named Nadine, whom they would end up seeing often to pick up medication. At the first meeting, Nadine helped diagnose Taylor and my mom. After doing lengthy assessments, Nadine came to the conclusion that they both had ADHD, with my mom scoring higher than Taylor. They would soon be prescribed adderall, which turned out to be an effective treatment for both of them.

After Taylor had been medicated, he found himself focusing better in his classes, coming up with schedules for himself, and starting to understand when he was falling into slumps. What we did not expect was that this would not be the last time Taylor would be diagnosed with a mental disorder. Just when we started to believe that Taylor was in a good place, everything took a grim turn.

Similar to Doug, Taylor started to care less about hygiene, resorted to smoking weed, and became distant from his family. Taylor was always a hilarious, light-hearted individual, so when his personality took this drastic turn, we knew something was wrong. My mom, dad, younger brothers, and I would all try to talk to him about any issues he is having. However, this always resulted in a cold shoulder. I cannot say this was entirely unexpected, as my siblings and I started to experience a life filled with domestic abuse, CPS visits, and my father continuously ending up in jail. This made Taylor's mental health problems seem small in comparison to my father's alcohol abuse.

While my mom was always busy trying to fix my father's alcohol abuse by taking him in and out of the police station and rehabilitation centers, Taylor found comfort in speaking to me. Taylor and I were always quite close since we were little, and we only got closer due to our troubled household. Time passed quickly, and he eventually graduated from high school and enrolled in an online community college. He seemed to be hopeful about obtaining a criminal justice degree. My family was never very well off financially, so having to pay for his education gave my mom an incentive to keep a close eye on his grades. He was living at home at the time, so this made daily check-ins simple.

The cycle started to repeat, and Taylor was found once again slipping in his classes, nearing failing his courses this time. Rightfully so, my mother would get upset with him anytime she found him falling behind in his courses. Eventually, I decided to pressure Taylor into telling me why he was struggling, and he finally cracked. I did not understand the magnitude of the trauma Taylor experienced from my father until he told me he was considering suicide. He expressed that he had dark thoughts of hurting himself and often struggled to push these thoughts away. These thoughts made the simplest tasks like brushing his teeth in the morning seem gigantic. He begged and pleaded with me not to tell my mom about his suicidal thoughts, but I could not imagine the thought of not having Taylor in my life. I told Taylor that there is help for these thoughts, portraying them similarly to the help he received for his ADHD. I also knew that anything I say or do is not nearly as supportive as what a therapist or psychiatrist could provide him. I promised to be by his side every step of the way. He deserved help and should not have to deal with this alone.

I soon told my mom the thoughts Taylor was having. I cannot begin to express the pure fear on my mother's face knowing that there was a chance of losing her first child, her baby boy. She could not help but embrace Taylor closely, making sure he knew that we were there for him. Once again, my mom took Taylor to the psychiatrist in the hopes that they

would be able to assess him and find a proper treatment for him. After much more testing, waiting in lobbies, and therapist visits, they came to the conclusion that Taylor had bipolar depression and OCD. The psychiatrist explained the seriousness behind the conglomerate of these mental disorders, but there are more prescriptions that they would be able to provide to Taylor. Soon enough, Taylor was taking three daily pills to help steady his head and attending therapy sessions.

While Taylor still struggled, he was able to finish his associate's degree in criminal justice promptly. My mom strongly believed that once Taylor obtained this degree and started in the police academy, the fight against his mental disorders would be over. He would finally have purpose. This was quickly disproven when he did not make it into the police academy. Taylor was completely distraught and frankly had no will to live the minute he found out that he did not pass the police academy tests. He had no other plans for himself and resorted to lying in bed all day, rotting. Getting him to find meaning in life turned from hills to mountains.

At this point, I was accepted into UNCW and was incredibly excited to start my own educational journey through sociology. I cannot say that I was not worried about Taylor, as he still did not have a strong pull to anything. However, I knew that I had my own education to worry about. Taylor never went to a four year institution due to not needing to, so I kept him updated on my journey, sharing the fun activities I was doing. He was always excited for the updates, phone calls, or visits as it was something so different than what he was used to. For the first time in a long time, I could see this sparkle in his eye, like he was plotting something.

After a few months into my freshman year, Taylor decided he would also attend UNCW in the hopes of finding himself just as I did. He hurried to apply, excited about what the future would hold. The day that Taylor got accepted was possibly one of the greatest

moments because, for once, he had hope. He would often say that hope was such a sad word since there is the chance of disappointment, so seeing this side of him brought genuine tears to my eyes. His pessimistic personality finally let off grasp of his head and let him see the light. He had decided to come in as a transfer the second semester of my freshman year.

Taylor's decision to attend UNCW was one of the best decisions he ever made. He found a great group of friends, a passion for education, the pursuit of a career as a teacher, and his version of happiness in the world. While he still lives at home due to his mental struggles, I could not be prouder of him. He is not letting his ADHD, bipolar depression, or OCD get the best of him. If you told me a few years ago that Taylor would be where he is today, I would say that you were crazy. However, I could not be happier to be the furthest thing from wrong.

Citation

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