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SOC 433

Dr. Engelman

10/16/25

Midterm Reflection

Before I begin this reflection I want to point out that the author of A Boy Broken, Dr Douglas J. Engelman is my Professor. To maintain a level of respect throughout this paper I will refer to him as Dr. Engelman or Doug's father.

Reading A Boy Broken by Douglas J. Engelman was one of the most emotional and powerful experiences I've ever had with a book. I was glued to this story, not just because of the story of mental illness or loss but about a fathers deep love and heartbreak. From the very first page I could feel the emotions within the book as if I was living his life. The honesty and vulnerability in the writing was unlike anything I had read before.

What was so powerful was how vividly every moment was being described. His words were so real I could see everything in my head like I was there. I could feel the worry, frustration, and exhaustion, even the excitement and most importantly the love he had for his son.

The scene that stayed with me the most was the drive to McDonalds. Doug's father noticed he had been quite distant, easily agitated, and often distracted. Especially after the incident of his sister Melissa having to call the cops because Doug was on the back porch yelling things such as "why do they have to die", they became very worried. Little did they know that the officer that showed up that day (officer Thomas) would soon help lead to the diagnosis as to what was going

on. What seemed like a normal car ride to go get some breakfast turned into the day that changed their lives forever. Dr. Engelman wanted to get to the bottom of what was going on. He had asked Doug what was going on and could tell that he had something to say but didn't know how. Doug began by telling his father that two people were always with him (Dave and Wendy). When I read that part I could feel the shock and worriness flood through my body. He then shifted toward the back seat to say that one of the individuals he saw, "Wendy" was sitting in the car with them and was asking his father if he could see her. At that moment I suddenly felt heavier. The amount of detail that was brought to this scene made me feel like I was in that car. As worried as Dr. Engelman must've felt, the amount of compassion and understanding he had in that moment is truly inspiring. He responded back by saying "I can't see her, but I believe you". Instead of pushing off and diminishing Doug's visions he decided to be there for him and not make him sound crazy. This is one of the many examples that show who Dr. Engelman was as a father during this journey in Doug's life. He might not have had all the answers or any information about what was happening nor could he fix what was going on but he could be there for his son and that is what mattered the most. I am not a parent nor have I dealt with serious mental illness in my life but it was such a raw moment that showed both the love and pain of being a parent to someone struggling with a mental disorder.

Another moment that stood out to me in his book was when Doug went missing from his treatment home, Madden. The fear that washed over Dr. Engelman after ending the phone call from Mary Ann telling him his son was gone and they haven't seen him in over a day. Just a few weeks prior Doug had suddenly come home for the evening and showed up on the family's doorstep. He was begging to come back home saying he didn't feel safe there and Dr. Engelman had to make the tough decision to do what seemed best for his son which was to keep him in

treatment. After receiving the news, Doug's father and stepmother Wendy, called place after place trying to get any hint as to where Doug was. Weeks had gone by and there was still no answer. Until one Friday afternoon on week three of his disappearance, Doug had called. The sigh of relief I had as if I had been looking for him for weeks myself. The whole rest of the chapter felt like I was watching a scene from a movie. I could picture bringing Doug back home and getting dinner ready and the family sitting around the table to eat the lasagna. I felt every emotion Dr. Engelman had felt. I was so connected to this book all because of Dr. Engelman's words.

One of the many lines that stood out to me from the book was when Dr. Engelman wrote "On one hand I was so happy Doug trusted me enough to share his experiences with me. It was great that I had that kind of relationship with him! On the other hand it was very clear to me that he was a long way from truly understanding what was happening to him". That quote not only captured the joy he felt but also the sadness of reality. It really showed what it was like to have a loved one who was struggling with something you can't fix.

Throughout the book there was many instances where Dr. Engelman was tested on how to acknowledge his personal feelings but also try to understand his sons. There was a fine line that he did not want to push him too hard but he also had to set boundaries. It is not easy to do and it is truly heartbreakingly but that is what he felt was best. For example when Doug had called his father to tell him he was robbed and 5 dollars of his weekly allowance was gone. It was not about the money, it was about the responsibility and accountability that was needed. He wanted to help without enabling this behavior. Real moments like this show what parents like Dr. Engelman faces every day. Now this does not only apply to this specific situation, any parent can go through this with their child.

What was so inspiring throughout Dr. Engelman's work was no matter how hard things got, he never gave up on his son. Even through the unknown, heartbreak, loss, and fear, his love never faded.

This book could truly change lives especially to those who may be going through some of the same circumstances. Whether it's a family member watching a loved one struggle with mental illness, someone navigating grief/loss, or anyone struggling with their own mental health, there are so many lessons to be taught within this book. This book portrays the message that you are not alone and there is help out there!

I really appreciated that Dr. Engelman let us get to know a piece of Doug that did not involve his personal struggles. He shared his love and how good he was at art, he shared the caring moments such as the presents under the Christmas tree for his siblings. It helped me see Doug for who he was as a person and not just a diagnosis.

When Dr. Engelman shared the loss of both of his children, it was heartbreaking to read. The pain and emptiness that was described felt so real. Even through the heartbreak Dr. Engelman had a great amount of strength. He found purpose after loss. By sharing this story with the world he turned his pain into something so powerful. I as well as Dr. Engelman was so moved by Pastor Dick Johnson's words. He told him "Don't be a victim, Doug died that night, not you". As hard as that may be to hear, he was right. Soon after that Dr. Engelman decided he would go to a support group for grieving parents. I had never thought of it this way but as I reflect I think he is so right when he says that the group was enabling parents to hold onto their grief to the point where it became unhealthy. It consumed them.

This book truly changed my life and it can change many others. It shifted my whole outlook on mental health. Not that I thought about it negatively but I have a new found respect for those

who are struggling. Reading this book made me realize what it means to love unconditionally. I have a new sense of compassion whether that be from my own family, a friend, or even a stranger. Everyone is fighting their own battles and most of the time we can't see them. The most important thing we can do is have compassion and be understanding because you never know what someone is going through. Kindness can go a long way especially when someone is suffering in silence. This book is one that I will keep close to my heart for a long time.