

Kara Penland

Mid-Term Reflection

“A Boy Broken” is more than a story about one family's trauma. It's a story that reflects the raw depiction of pain, neglect, and resilience, that challenges us to reconsider what it means to truly be broken. Before reading the book, I came into this not expecting to gain an understanding of what trauma means, but after reading this book, it opened my eyes and gave me a new perspective, not just for trauma in general, but my trauma specifically. I am hoping that through reading my reflection, it will inspire you not just to read the book, but to learn and broaden your perspective of what a mental illness is and what trauma comes with it. So that we can learn and grow together as a society. A Boy Broken is a story about a family's struggle with trauma as their son, Douglas Engleman Jr is diagnosed with schizophrenia, and how they deal with the grief of losing him after trying to help him get his life back on track after his diagnosis. I think this book was written into three parts as the story of how he and his family dealt with the diagnosis. What does it mean to have a mental illness, the story of a family's challenges through a mental illness and how do you deal with the grief of losing someone to a mental illness? I know this sounds broad, but for me this was more than a book, it was a man's strength through the challenging time of finding out his son has a mental illness and how he and his family makes the best of it even after he dies.

When reading the book, I took it as an emotional guide as a story that we can read and learn from. I started with what is a mental illness, because I felt like this book truly started when Douglas Engleman was diagnosed with schizophrenia. That diagnosis did not change his life, but also the people he loved. After being diagnosed it led to a gate being open of what did it mean to

have the mental illness? How can we help someone that is diagnosed with it? And how is it going to affect us? I know this last question is like how can we think about us during a time like this but it is human nature to be selfish when it comes to finding out something like this. As a friend or family it can be hard for them to help when they are going through their own issues. As I am coming to terms with my diagnosis of my illness. I have seen how these come into play, when I was around the age 7, my parents were concerned with my focus and lack of attention to anything. I know you're thinking that's normal for a kid, It was with everything I did and that was when they took me to the doctor out of concern for it. At the doctor I was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). I would say that that definitely was the start of my journey, because I was put on my first medicine as a result of that but it was the first time that I truly felt valid as it proved that I was not trying to be disruptive and that I had a reason for being so hyperactive.

The medicine was a game changer. It did help with me focusing but there were challenges that did arise. In the book we learned that when Douglas Engleman Jr was diagnosed with his disorder, it was not just a change but brought changes for the family with it. As his mom couldn't help with taking care of him as she was going through her own challenges. And his dad and wife took on the duty of helping to care for him, but it was hard, as they were starting their family and had one young child and another on the way. I remember that part that hit really hard was when I was reading, when the author asked if it was wrong to be worried, as the son was living with them, and the violent interaction that happened at Melissa's house would happen at his house, and would the interaction happen to his wife? It was because of the lack of knowledge at the time of the illness, but also due to the fear of the unknown and unpredictability of someone that he loved. I think it was one of the biggest challenges that were faced in the book. When looking

back at this part, I started to think of some of the challenges that I faced. I think my biggest challenge was that the ADHD medicine started really well, but it only lasted for a few months before my body became immune to it, and we started a new medicine. But I had to find the right doses as I needed something strong enough to last for a school day, but not too long, as I had really bad insomnia and had to take melatonin for it.

I would say that, honestly, that was the end of my mental health story, but as I entered college and attempted to do new things. I started to get bad anxiety at the thought of going and trying new things, but at that time, I thought it was normal, as we all get anxious. It wasn't until early 2025, I started to get anxious about everything, from what I was wearing, to what I ate, to even going to a place with friends. It didn't just affect the way I lived, but the way I interacted as a student, as I was unable to function and had a hard time going to class, interacting with teachers, and even turning stuff in. That's when I went to the doctor, and I was diagnosed with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD). I would say that is pretty life-changing, as I had never thought that I could have another mental illness. As I am starting to come to terms with it, I would say that having the amazing support system of friends and family has helped with it. I would also say that therapy and talking about how it's okay to make a decision and that I should not feel bad or feel like I made the wrong decision helped.

I would say that before I conclude this amazing paper, I would say that the biggest part and this sums up the book entirely. How do you grieve when losing someone you love, especially one you have helped and worked hard with their mental illness? I think this was the case for the book, as his family had worked hard and helped him get to a point where he could have achieved a normal. As I remember that in the book, they mentioned how he was starting to turn his life back around. He was going to go back to college, he was starting his treatment and he even

started talking to someone. He was making amazing progress, when he was injured in a car accident. At this moment changed not just his life, but his family as by the time he made it to the hospital he was declared dead. I think it was important as even though it put a hole in his heart, it allowed him the opportunity to mend the relationship with his daughter, Melissa. It was also the turning point that led to the book that we read but it left me the question what do you do when you lose someone that you love. How do you go on knowing that someone that you cared for will not be there. I one cannot say that I had to deal with it, but one of my favorite influences has lost someone they loved through suicide to mental illness, and everyday she post something that she loves about him and how they were supposed to grow old together. I can't imagine the pain. I think this book also did a really good job of showing it. I am going to give a spoiler but when I was reading the intro, something really hit me. It was the second edition because some people asked how Melissa felt and how she handled it. This really stuck out to me that I think this was the chapter I was most excited for. This was a really well written memoir of a family's journey of grief after losing their son. I didn't just think of it as a book, but something that I can take back into the real world and apply. I think this helped me learn how we can work to educate us on mental illness as a whole so that we can not just use them to help as family members and friends but stand up for injustice and help with making decisions that are good for the community as a whole.