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Crazy: A Father's Search Through America's Mental Health Madness



Synopsis

Former Washington Post reporter Pete Earley had written extensively about the criminal justice system. But it was only when his own son-in the throes of a manic episode-broke into a neighbor's house that he learned what happens to mentally ill people who break a law. This is the Earley family's compelling story, a troubling look at bureaucratic apathy and the countless thousands who suffer confinement instead of care, brutal conditions instead of treatment, in the "revolving doors" between hospital and jail. With mass deinstitutionalization, large numbers of state mental patients are homeless or in jail-an experience little better than the horrors of a century ago. Earley takes us directly into that experience-and into that of a father and award-winning journalist trying to fight for a better way.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For anyone who has either "been there" himself or has watched a loved one descend into madness, this book will seem heartbreakingly familiar. But I fear that only the people who know and understand what Pete Earley and his son, Mike, have been through will buy and read this book. And it's not those people who need to understand just how "crazy" the treatment of the mentally ill in our country is in the 21st century. Until you've seen it from the inside, most people will have no idea that a parent has no power to help a sick child who happens to be 19 years old. That the person who is "crazy" is given the responsibility of making decisions about his care when he is as divorced from reality as he has ever been. That the only way of getting any sort of treatment is to first assault

someone or try to kill oneself or another person. The average person has no idea of the hopeless, helpless position someone with a mental illness and their family are put in by the very people who we hope will HELP. As Mr. Earley points out in the book, who among us, particularly those in the medical profession, would walk by a person in pain, dying of cancer, without attempting to help? Who would send that person to jail to be locked up with murderers and rapists instead of to a hospital, where he would be given the medical treatment he needed? Who would suggest that no help could be given to him until he tried to kill himself or someone else? This is what happens to someone's son, daughter, mother, husband every day in this country. Mr. Earley has come to understand mental illness and the horrible state of care and treatment in the United States in a very personal and tragic way, as many, many of us have.

In the book, "Crazy: A Father's Search through America's Mental Health Madness," Pete Earley tells a story that is all too familiar to NAMI members. As an award-winning journalist for over thirty years, Mr. Earley has effectively captured the absurdities of the mental health system in our country through his investigative journalism and his personal understanding of mental illness. Mr. Earley's son, Mike, has a psychotic episode while in college and breaks into a stranger's home, takes a bubble bath and causes significant damage. Thus begins their long journey into the broken mental health system that so many of us confront everyday in this country. Mr. Earley learns all too quickly just how difficult it is to receive necessary treatment for his son's mental illness. He uses his frustration to launch a personal and professional inquiry into a confusing mental health system coupled with an irrational criminal justice system. Mr. Earley is granted full access to the Miami-Dade County Jail's "forgotten floor"--the jail's primary psychiatric unit where prisoners are housed without treatment. He can see firsthand that, indeed, our jails and prisons have become the repository for persons with serious mental illness. The prisoners have committed both felonies and petty misdemeanors, all because of their untreated brain disorder. Yet there is no chance at rehabilitation in jails. The prisoners linger in their psychoses for months at a time, only to await a bus ride to a psychiatric facility where they receive minimal treatment in order to have a competency hearing and then are brought back to the jail to await a hearing that will probably never happen. "Crazy" is a book that NAMI members can use as an advocacy tool to improve mental health care in their communities.

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