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Many Forms of Madness: A Family's Struggle with Mental Illness and the Mental Health System

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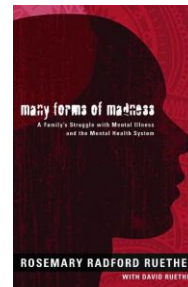
Book Review

Many Forms of Madness: A Family's Struggle with Mental Illness and the Mental Health System

Rosemary Radford Ruether

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010

When mental health issues emerge in a young person, the whole family is affected. Rosemary Radford Ruether writes autobiographically as a mother of David who is diagnosed with schizophrenia as a young man. Her son David Ruether has read, discussed and edited this book. One slogan in addictions and mental health is “Nothing about us without us.” Reuther has honoured this commitment.



Parents try to understand how this mental health issue developed. One chapter describes David's childhood and youth; it seems to be a search to see if alcohol, drugs, sexual abuse, or other issues could have caused schizophrenia. There is no answer. It's David's life and experiences, but there is no clear cause.

One of the best chapters is Ruether's chapter "Treating Persons with Mental Illness – Why such Poor Treatment?" Historically, many solutions have been tried with limited success and often very serious consequences or side effects. They point to the role of the pharmaceutical industry as it promotes various drugs. I remember one person who was told by the psychiatrist that he would try one drug at a time to see which is the best one; each trial would be approximately three to six months. The person has been unwilling to go through that process and then has been referred to a different psychiatrist who talked through the issues as well as prescribing drugs. David Ruether has struggles with drugs and their side effects. He also tries to live without drugs but this results in violence and fear in the home and family. His visits are limited. This is difficult for both parents, especially Rosemary.

She briefly but well describes a mother's guilt of not being able to provide the best for her child. Consumer – Survivors are also described in the last chapter as part of the spirituality tasks for individuals and their families.

David and the family also struggle with different diagnoses and professional assessments. They also struggle with the stigma which prohibits David from participating in society. He is a creative person, but has few opportunities to develop his writing and other gifts. During some time periods he is very isolated.

The Ruethers seek supportive housing for David. This chapter is the most dated, or it is very American; there are more alternatives in Canada. The reality in both countries is waiting lists for good facilities. In Canada, these services are not expensive because of

government support. In the USA, the families must pay for board and room in many programs.

The book ends by asking how we can “keep hope alive.” Neither Canada nor the USA has adequate answers and programs for individuals and families. Some individuals, but not all, learn to live well in the midst of mental health issues. Dissatisfaction is important until we find better ways of supporting and de-stigmatizing people with mental health issues.

Churches have individuals and families where mental health issues have arisen. This book would be excellent for a small group or adult education class. Elders and ministers see the ramifications for the whole family as well as the individual who struggles. There is not a simple way to provide spiritual care, but accompaniment and acknowledgement throughout the process is very important.

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