Clarion Review

Psychology

Is There Room for Me, Too? Twelve Steps & Twelve Strategies for Coping with Mental Illness

Deborah Fruchey
Robert Hamaker, photographer
CreateSpace
978-1-4505-9684-8
Four Stars (out of Five)

"I gave long thought to whether I'd use my own name for this book," writes Deborah Fruchey, who has bipolar disorder with psychotic features. She courageously decided to use her real name to fight stigma.

Fruchey effectively adapts the twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, applying them to the challenges of living with mental illness. She alternates the AA steps with strategies for coping with the outside world. For example, in discussing step four (on taking a moral inventory), Fruchey writes, "Symptoms are not moral failings." One of her tips for a strategy called "The Smart Patient" is to keep extra psychiatric medication in one's purse or pocket. Fruchey warns, "Would you rather carry a pill box, or explain things to the police?"

At age twenty-six, Fruchey received her diagnosis. Since 1993, her illness, which actually began in 1972 at age thirteen, has been stabilized. After leaving international banking due to increasing disability, her various part-time jobs included stints as a warehouse worker and file clerk. She authored six poetry chapbooks and publishes *Strictly East*, a poetry newsletter. The American Booksellers Association chose her novel, *The Unwilling Heiress*, as a best book for 1987.

Robert Hamaker's black-and-white photographs, mostly of nature themes, introduce sections and chapters. Hamaker, Fruchey's husband, is a musician with a bachelor's degree in music performance. Clinical psychologist David Kallinger contributed the introduction and served as a consultant. The book also includes an extensive list of resource organizations such as the Job Accommodation Network and Mental Health America.

Fruchey's sensitivity to differences in opinion and life situations will help make the book

pertinent to a wide range of people. Readers who find parts of the book to be too religious can quickly find other areas of interest. Fruchey writes that science and reason frequently serve as higher powers and cites an article in the appendix by philosopher Mel C. Thompson titled "Whose God?"

Various sentence fragments, which the author possibly uses for effect, are not distracting. Attentive readers will note a few typographical errors, including a page that ends with an incomplete, never-finished sentence. Also, several chapter titles in the table of contents differ from the beginning of the chapters.

Although it targets mentally ill readers, this book will also benefit relatives and friends and help mental health professionals better understand their patients. Overall, it provides practicable, well-presented information.

Self-help books for people with mental illness are scarce. As readers with mental illness follow Fruchey's suggestions, they make room for themselves in a society that is reluctant to accept them.

Norma D. Kellam