

Living with Mr. Fahrenheit: A First Responder Family's Fight for a Future after a Mental Health Crisis

Lisa Beecher

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Lisa Beecher's moving memoir Living with Mr. Fahrenheit concerns the twenty years she spent as a caregiver for her husband.

Police officer Lisa Beecher's heartbreaking memoir *Living with Mr. Fahrenheit* is about how her marriage was turned upside down by bipolar disorder.

The book opens with a detailed, minute-by-minute account of Beecher bringing her husband, Jamie, to a psychiatric hospital. The inciting incident isn't named until much later in the book, which then covers his overzealous religious interest, sermons to his family members, and fears about his pastor knowing that he'd read anti-Catholic books; he became paranoid about the presence of demons in his house and even shot at one. But before covering this ultimate psychotic break, the book diverts to flashbacks of Beecher's early days on the police force, where she met and fell in love with her husband.

There are dramatic tales of situations on duty that came to haunt them both, including bank robberies and drug heists. The early years of their marriage featured ups and downs, though the book focuses most on the downs, as with Jamie's PTSD, drinking problems, nightmares, and a two-month separation when his irritability grew to be too much to bear. The many complications of being a police officer in civilian situations are conveyed; for example, at one hospital, Jamie requested to be moved because his roommate turned out to be someone he'd arrested in the past. He also feared that other patients would find out that he was a police officer, since "people don't like cops." And while an internal investigation over his misuse of a firearm ended in his favor, it stands out in the text as a stark reminder of the precariousness of mental illness for people in positions of power.

Still, while the majority of the book is an accessible, moving tale about a marriage ravaged by mental illness, some portions of it are insular, even superfluous, for outside audiences. Its sections divulge intimate memories that don't pertain to the main focus of the couple's story, as when it traces the trajectories of the Beechers' children's lives. And the prose is hyperdetailed at times, as when it describes the exterior of a hospital. These moments impede absorption in the book's more involving scenes—as does the wide variation in its pacing, with some chapters covering a few hours and others covering a few months.

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