

Our Little Family "Trouble"

Barbara L. Davis Preslock

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Our Little Family "Trouble" is a heartrending story of a son's mental illness and a mother's hope, love, and pain for him.

Barbara L. Davis Preslock's memoir *Our Little Family "Trouble"* is a mother's account of the pain caused by watching mental illness rob her son of a full life.

Preslock's son Billy was a perfect child, despite his father's drug use and his parents' divorce. But in his adulthood, "all hell broke loose." Billy, then a practicing physician, began to wrestle with depression. A psychotic episode landed him in Rikers Island Prison—referred to throughout as "the 'R' word," highlighting the level of suffering and dissociation that followed for Preslock.

Preslock relates the harrowing helplessness of watching her son deal with legal and medical havoc. Chilling portions of the text convey the author's gripping fear as she awaited word after Billy's arrest. Their story is open-ended, concluding before Billy is able return to his normal life.

The short narrative begins in the midst of the action, then unloads a heavy dose of backstory, working back up to the climatic opening event. It is roughly chronological, though it weaves in remembrances and information from earlier times, and keeps a steady forward pace, with no chapter breaks. When the story doesn't adhere to natural pauses, it feels breathless, making for a draining reading experience.

Preslock's voice is at the heart of the book. Her pain, confusion, and regret are palpable, as is her unwavering love for her son. The resulting tone is moving and inspirational. These accounts are open and honest about Billy, her family, and especially herself: "I was queen, princess, mother, grandmother, and two bags of chips, as they say, in denial," she writes.

This raw truthfulness will read as a gift to other parents struggling with similar experiences; it is both relatable and inspiring, urging others to open their eyes and act at the first warning signs of mental illness. While this motherly perspective is key, Preslock's laser focus in the book's moment of action makes the memoir feel at times too confined to one perspective, without greater consideration of how the events impacted others.

The book may end with an uncertain future, but Preslock imparts cautious hope in the last pages, which ably convey her longing for reunion with her son.

Our Little Family "Trouble" is a heartrending story of a mother's hope, love, and pain.

MELISSA WUSKE (November 21, 2017)

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